

**S266854**

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IN THE SUPREME COURT OF CALIFORNIA

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PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF  
CALIFORNIA,

Plaintiff and  
Respondent,

vs.

CRISTAN RENTERIA,

Defendant and  
Appellant.

S \_\_\_\_\_  
No. F076973  
Tulare No. VCF3044654

APPEAL FROM THE SUPERIOR COURT OF TULARE COUNTY

THE HONORABLE KATHRYN T. MONTEJANO  
JUDGE PRESIDING

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**PETITION FOR REVIEW**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Page:**

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES ..... 3

ISSUES ON REVIEW..... 4

NECESSITY OF REVIEW.....5

STATEMENT OF THE CASE ..... 6

STATEMENT OF APPEALABILITY .....8

STATEMENT OF FACTS ..... 8

ARGUMENT

**THE PROSECUTION PRESENTED CONSTITUTIONALLY-  
INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO PROVE THE GANG  
ENHANCEMENT**

.....13

CONCLUSION ..... 22

CERTIFICATE OF WORD COUNT ..... 23

PROOF OF SERVICE.....24

ATTACHMENT: OPINION OF THE COURT OF APPEAL, “Exhibit A”

**TABLE OF AUTHORITIES**

<b><u>Cases:</u></b>	<b><u>Page:</u></b>
<u>In re Frank S.</u> (2000) 141 Cal.App.4th 1192.....	15
<u>Jackson v. Virginia</u> (1979) 443 U.S. 307 .....	13
<u>MacDonald v. Hedgepath</u> (9 <sup>th</sup> Cir. 2018) 907 F.3d 1212.....	15
<u>People v. Albillar</u> (2010) 51 Cal. 4 <sup>th</sup> 47 .....	14
<u>People v. Gonzalez</u> (2006) 232 Cal.App.4th 1449.....	19
<u>People v. Jasso</u> (2012) 211 Cal.App.4th 1354.....	19
<u>People v. Johnson</u> (1980) 26 Cal.3d 557.....	13
<u>People v. Jones</u> (2009) 47 Cal.4th 566.....	14
<u>People v. Leon</u> (2008) 161 Cal.App.4th 149.....	13
<u>People v. Ochoa</u> (2009) 179 Cal.App.4th 650 .....	15
<u>People v. Perez</u> (2017) 18 Cal.App.5th 598.....	15
<u>People v. Perez</u> (1992) 2 Cal.4th 1117.....	18
<u>People v. Prunty</u> (2015) 62 Cal.4th 59.....	6, 20-22
<u>People v. Rios</u> (2013) 222 Cal.App.4th 542.....	14
<u>People v. Ramon</u> (2009) 175 Cal.App.4th 843 .....	15
<u>People v. Vang</u> (2011) 52 Cal.4th 1038.....	5

**Penal Code:**

§ 186.22(b)(1) .....	6, 7, 13
§ 186.22(b)(4)(A) .....	7, 15
§ 246.....	7
§ 246.3 .....	7
§ 1237 .....	7
§ 12022.53 (c).....	7
§ 12022.53 (h).....	7

**California Rules of Court:**

Rule 13 .....	6
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Plaintiff and Respondent,  
  
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CHRISTAN RENTERIA,  
  
Defendant and Appellant.

S \_\_\_\_\_  
No. F076973  
Tulare County VCF304654

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TO THE HONORABLE CHIEF JUSTICE AND TO THE HONORABLE ASSOCIATE JUSTICES OF THE  
SUPREME COURT OF CALIFORNIA:

Petitioner Cristan Renteria, appellant and petitioner in the above-entitled case, respectfully petitions this Court for review following the unpublished opinion rendered by the Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District, filed on January 5, 2021, affirming the trial court’s judgement sentencing Mr. Renteria to two consecutive terms of 23 years to life in the state prison. A copy of that Opinion is attached to this petition as “Exhibit A.”

ISSUES ON REVIEW

This Petition for Review presents the following important question of law of statewide significance:

Did the prosecution adduce sufficient evidence that a defendant committed

crimes for the benefit of the gang where the prosecution offered a theory that the defendant, a member of a subset gang, committed the crimes for the benefit of umbrella gang, but did not establish that the defendant intended to benefit the umbrella gang, nor establish the primary activities of the umbrella gang, nor show that the predicate acts committed by the umbrella gang were somehow connected with the subset to which defendant belonged?

#### NECESSITY FOR REVIEW

Review is necessary to secure uniformity of decision and settle important questions of law.

The trial court determined that the crime of shooting at an inhabited dwelling occurred for the benefit of a criminal street gang, which allowed it to increase the sentence on each of two counts from a determinate term of three years to an indeterminate term of 23 years to life. It ran the counts consecutively. The Fifth Appellate District affirmed in a 2-1 decision, with Justice Smith dissenting. However, the evidence did not show beyond a reasonable doubt that Mr. Renteria, who belonged to “SSK” subset of the “Sureno” gang, acted for the benefit of that umbrella gang, as required by the decisions of this Court.

First, the prosecution failed to prove that Mr. Renteria acted to benefit the umbrella gang because the prosecutor based its hypothetical to the gang expert on facts regarding a prior incident it never established. (People v. Vang (2011) 52 Cal.4th 1038, 1046.) The prosecutor’s use of the improper hypothetical wrongly allowed the

jury to believe that Mr. Renteria had contemporaneously called out “Sur Trace” at the time of the incident, and that the house he shot at was inhabited by or related to a rival gang. (Slip Opinion, Justice Smith dissenting, at 10-16.) As a result, the prosecution did not offer sufficient evidence to prove that Mr. Renteria acted for the benefit of the umbrella gang. (Id. at 17.)

Second, the prosecution never proved, as required by the STEP Act, Penal Code section 186.22, that the umbrella gang had as one of its “primary activities” the commission of enumerated offenses. (Slip Opinion Justice Smith dissenting, at 1-7.)

Finally, the prosecution never proved that the predicate acts committed by the Sureno umbrella gang were committed by persons associated or organized into one gang, namely, the same gang to which Mr. Renteria belonged, as required by this Court in People v. Prunty (2015) 62 Cal.4th 59, 71, 74. (Slip Opinion, Justice Smith dissenting, at 17-20.)

This Court should grant review to set statewide standards for the sufficiency of evidence of the gang allegation. It should grant review to resolve the legal dispute between the majority and Justice Smith regarding the quantum of proof the prosecution must offer to prove the gang allegation, and to turn a short determinate sentence into lifetime incarceration.

### **STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

The Office of the Tulare County District Attorney charged appellant Cristian

Renteria in an information with three felonies: shooting at an inhabited dwelling on August 8, 2014 located at 1650 W. Meritt Avenue in violation of Penal Code section 246; shooting at an inhabited dwelling on August 8, 2014 located at 1632 W. Meritt Avenue, and with discharging a firearm on August 7, 2014 with gross negligence in violation of Penal Code section 246.3, subdivision (a). (CT 120-122.) The information further alleged that the crimes were committed to benefit a street gang in violation of Penal Code section 186.22(b)(1)(c) and 186.22(b). It also alleged that with respect to the shootings at an inhabited dwelling, that in each case Mr. Renteria personally used and discharged a weapon in violation of Penal Code sections 12022.53(b) and 12022.53(c).

After a four-day trial, the jury on December 11, 2017 found Mr. Renteria not guilty of the negligent shooting charge, but guilty on the two shootings at an inhabited dwelling charges, and further found the enhancements attached to each of those counts true. (CT 311.)

At sentencing on January 25, 2018, Judge Kathryn Montejano sentenced Mr. Renteria to two consecutive 23-life terms in prison for the two August 8, 2014 shootings. (CT 355.) Each term consisted of the low term of three years on the shooting at an inhabited dwell consecutive to 20 years for the discharge of the firearm. (RT 716-717.) The court found each term carried life because Mr. Renteria acted to benefit the gang pursuant to Penal Code section 186.22(b)(4)(A). (CT 371-372.) The court granted Mr. Renteria 1451 days credit, including 1262 days actually

served. (CT 356.)

Mr. Renteria filed a timely notice of appeal on January 29, 2018. (CT 381.)

### STATEMENT OF APPEALABILITY

This appeal is from a final judgment of conviction which disposes of all the issues between the parties. (Penal Code §1237, California Rules of Court, Rule 13.)

### STATEMENT OF FACTS

#### A. Prosecution Case:

James Villalobos lived on the east side of Denair Street in the City of Tulare in August 2014. (RT 252.) He lived between Merritt Avenue on the north and Woodward Street on the south. (RT 255.) On the evening August 7, 2014 while Mr. Villalobos worked outside of the house on his car in the driveway, he heard a noise and saw a flash from across the street. (RT 255-258.) He thought a shooting might have taken place. (RT 268.) He told the police he heard five shots from a pistol. (RT 292, 333.) He saw a person wearing a long T shirt walking south, but he could not make out any details in the darkness. (RT 261-262). He described the man to the police as a 5'7", 160 pound Hispanic man, who fired the shots northbound then walked southbound to Woodward, where he ran away westbound. (Rt 336.) He called 911 (RT 267.) A police officer responded, and later that officer showed him pictures. (RT 272.) He “guessed” and picked out a picture of Mr. Renteria, and said he believed “40% sure that the picture depicted the man he saw. (RT 282-283, 502-503.)



Tulare Police Officer Eric Wilson responded to the scene at 8:58 p.m. on August 7, 2014. He found 6 .22 brass collar Remington casings clustered on the west side of Denair street at the intersection of Merritt Avenue. (RT 303, 324, 332.) He placed them in an envelope for which he created a label and initialed the label. (RT 329.)

Anthony Arenviaz lived on Merritt Avenue in Tulare, California on August 8, 2014. (RT 347.) Around 10:30 p.m that night he saw five or six young men gathered in a vacant field outside his house. (RT 352.) He heard the group holler “Sur Trace.” (RT 359.) He recognized one of them, Cristian Renteria, as a neighbor who lived nearby. He spoke briefly to Mr. Renteria that evening. (RT 356.) Mr. Renteria left, but returned shortly with another man. (RT 361.) They walked south on Denair and reappeared walking northbound toward the intersection of Denair and Merritt. (RT 362.) Mr. Arenviaz then saw Mr. Renteria lift a silver gun in the air and shoot at Jack Duran’s house on Merritt and then, after dogs barked, shoot at Harvey Demp’s home on Merritt. (RT 364, 366.) Mr. Arenviaz called 911 and reported the incident. (RT 367.) Later, officers showed him a photographic lineup, and he picked Mr. Renteria’s photo out of it and identified him as the shooter. (RT 371-372, 495.)

Jacquelin Dunn visited her cousin Harvey Demp’s home at 1632 West Merritt on August 8, 2018. (RT 383, 389.) While sitting on the living room couch she heard several gunshots. (RT 385.) A bullet struck the TV in the living room. (RT 386.)

Jack Duran lived at 1650 West Merritt on August 8, 2014. (RT 392.) He lived directly north of Denair Street which formed a T intersection at his house. (RT 394.)

The police came to his house and pointed out damage near his doorbell. (RT 396.) He could not determine when that damage had occurred. (RT 398.) Mr. Duran denied that any of his family engaged in gang activity. (RT 396-397.)

Andrea Lincon-Solis, a Tulare police officer, responded to a “shots fired” call on August 8, 2014 at Denair and Merritt and found two .22 caliber casings at the intersection. (RT 400-402.) She placed the casings in an envelope to which she attached a computer-generated label. (RT 404.)

Tim Sunderland, a Tulare officer, responded to the same call on August 8, 2018 and interviewed witness Arenvaz. (RT 414.) He tried to contact the occupants of 1650 West Merritt, a residence pointed out by Mr. Arenvaz, but received no response. (RT 415.) He observed multiple bullet holes in and above the garage door. (RT 417.) He noticed a sawed-off shotgun inside the garage. (RT 418.) Officer Sunderland found two Remington .22 caliber casings at the southeast corner of Merritt Avenue and Denair. (RT 424.) He placed the casings in an envelope and affixed a computer-generated label to it. (RT 426.) Officer Sunderland had previously contacted Mr. Renteria in 2008 at Los Tules Middle School, where the assistant principal had contacted him about a student bringing a knife onto campus. (RT 431.) Mr. Renteria, then 13, admitted he had brought the knife to school for protection and that he belonged to a “southern gang.” (RT 434.)

Nancy McCombs, a criminalist at the Department of Justice lab in Fresno, testified that she examined the contents of the envelopes which bore the labels

prepared by Officers Sunderland, Lincon-Solis and Wilson. (RT 462.) The envelopes contained ten brass-colored .22 casings in all. (RT 452.) Ms. McCombs determined based on the chamber marks on all ten of the casings that they were all fired from the same firearm. (RT 453.) Jerrett Robertson, a Tulare police officer, found Mr. Renteria, then 15, with another boy in the back of residence in 2010. (RT 479.) The other boy held a spray paint can. (RT 480.) The interior and exterior of the house contained fresh spray paint markings. (RT 482.) He questioned Mr. Renteria at his home on Olympia Street. Mr. Renteria said he knew the house was vacant, but he remained silent when Officer Robertson asked him if he tagged the residence. (RT 485.) Officer Robertson found “SSK” painted inside the residence. (RT 488.)

Officer Jacob Adney arrested Cristian Renteria on August 13, 2014. (RT 507.) He found a plastic container with the word “SUR” written on it in his father’s home. (RT 517.) He initially questioned Mr. Renteria in the back of his patrol car. He recorded the conversation. Mr. Renteria denied involvement in any crime and told him that he lived with his girlfriend and her mother on “O” street, on the opposite side of town from the shooting. (RT 525, ART 28, 37, 40.) However, Officer Adney’s independent investigation determined that Mr. Renteria’s girlfriend and her mother actually lived at 1779 West Wooward, several houses away from the location of the shooting. (RT 519.) Mr. Renteria admitted that some “guys” threatened him with a shotgun on West Street, a quarter mile east of Denair. (CT 518, ART 47.)

Later that same night Officer Adney interviewed him again at the police station

and recorded the conversation on videotape. (RT 522.) Mr. Renteria admitted that he belonged to the Southside Kings gang. (ART 9.) He admitted his girlfriend lived in the area of the shooting and that he recognized the houses involved in the shooting at 1650 and 1632 West Merritt. (ART 16, RT 524.)

Officer Adney, an experienced gang officer, related that he had arrested Francisco Cortez, a Sureno or Southside gang member, for possession of a loaded firearm in 2014 and that Mr. Cortez suffered a conviction for that crime. (RT 551.) He also arrested Fabio Delreal, another Sureno gang member in 2012 for possession of a loaded firearm and that he suffered a conviction for that offense. (RT 554.) Finally, he related the circumstance of the arrest of Armando Flores, a Sureno gang member for a drive-by shooting in 2009, who suffered a conviction for that offense. (RT 555.) Officer Adney opined that Cortez, Delreal and Flores each engaged in Sureno gang activity in committing their respective crimes. (RT 551, 553,555.)

Officer Adney identified the South Side Kings (“SSK”) as a subset of the Sureno gang. (RT 559, 584.) He opined that based upon Mr. Renteria’s statements and his history, that he belonged to the Sureno gang. (RT 587.) He translated “Sur Trace” as an expression signifying a Southern gang affiliated with the Mexican Mafia. (RT 544-547.) He identified the neighborhood where the shootings occurred as “contested turf” between Southsiders and their arch-rivals, the “Nortenos.” (RT 548.) He also had observed that Robert Pompa Jr., a person associated with the property owned by Jack Duran, himself associated with persons in the Norteno gang. (RT 587, 600-603.)

Officer Adney also listened to recorded calls made by Mr. Renteria to his girlfriend after his arrest, where he told her that he “fucked up” by going out that night; that if questioned by the police she should “stick to the story,” and that “they were trying so hard to get the truth out of me.” (RT 617, 620-621.)

Officer Adney opined that a gang member “hit up” by another gang who then shoots at houses in an area claimed by both gangs, does so for the benefit of his criminal street gang in order to enhance its reputation or notoriety for violence. (RT 606-612.)

## **ARGUMENT**

### **THE PROSECUTION PRESENTED CONSTITUTIONALLY- INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO PROVE THE GANG ENHANCEMENT**

The Due Process clause of the United States Constitution requires that the prosecution adduce evidence of a crime which, viewing the whole evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, could convince a rational juror of the truth of the charge beyond a reasonable doubt. (Jackson v. Virginia (1979) 443 U.S. 307, 318-319; People v. Johnson (1980) 26 Cal.3d 557, 576.) The Jackson standard applies to enhancements. (People v. Leon (2008) 161 Cal.App.4th 149, 161.)

The gang enhancement of Penal Code section 188.22(b) provides additional punishment for “any person who is convicted of a felony committed for the benefit, at the direction of, or in the association with any criminal street gang, with the specific

intent to promote, further, or assist in any criminal conduct by gang members.<sup>1</sup>” The trial court instructed the jury that to prove the enhancement, “the People must prove that: (1) The defendant committed the crime for the benefit or in association with a criminal street gang and (2) the defendant intended to assist, further or promote criminal conduct by gang members.” (RT 648.)

Criminal conduct by a gang member does not necessarily fall within the gang enhancement, since a gang member may commit crimes for his own personal reasons. (People v. Albillar ( 2010 ) 51 Cal.4th 47 , 60.) Instead, an appellate court must carefully analyze the two prongs of the gang enhancement--the “gang-related” prong and the “specific intent prong”-- to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to support the enhancement. (Ibid.)

Where a gang members acts alone, appellate courts carefully scrutinize the evidence demonstrating the two prongs of the gang enhancement. (People v. Rios (2013) 222 Cal.App.4th 542.) “Where the defendant acts alone, the combination of the charged offense and gang membership alone is insufficient to support an inference on the specific intent prong of the gang enhancement. Otherwise, the gang

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<sup>1</sup> When gang conduct occurs during the crime of shooting into an inhabited dwelling in violation of Penal Code section 246, that crime becomes punishable by an indeterminate life sentence pursuant to Penal Code section 186.22(b)(4)(A). Further, the court may also impose an additional 20-year firearm discharge enhancement to that sentence pursuant to Penal Code section 12022.53 (c), since that enhancement applies to life crimes. (People v. Jones (2009) 47 Cal.4th 566, 578; Pen. Code §12022.53 (a)(17).)

enhancement would be used merely to punish gang membership.” (Id. at 574.)

Thus, a gang member possessing a knife while riding his bike does not qualify for the gang enhancement where the prosecution produces no evidence he acted on behalf of the gang other than his gang membership. (In re Frank S. (2000) 141 Cal.App.4th 1192, 1199.) Nor does a gang member driving a car while possessing a firearm act for the benefit of the gang without further proof of his specific intent to do so. (People v. Ramon (2009) 175 Cal. App.4th 843, 853.) Nor does a gang member who commits a carjacking without further proof of intent qualify for the gang enhancement. (People v. Ochoa (2009) 179 Cal.App.4th 650, 652-653.) Even a gang member who commits murder and attempted murder by shooting men at a crowded party cannot suffer the gang enhancement without further proof, such as gang-related conduct at the party, that the particular crimes were gang-related and intended to benefit the gang. (People v. Perez (2017) 18 Cal.App.5th 598, 609.) Finally, a gang member who commits an armed robbery does not violate the gang enhancement without evidence that the robbery was gang-related and that he intended to benefit the gang. (Macdonald v. Hedgepeth (9<sup>TH</sup> Cir. 2018) 907 F.3d 1212. In each of these cited cases, appellate courts discounted the testimony of the prosecution’s gang expert that the crime appeared gang related and reversed the true finding on the gang enhancement because, in each case, no evidentiary facts adduced at the trial actually showed the conduct intentionally gang-related.

Similarly here, although the prosecution proved that Mr. Renteria joined the

Southside gang as a teenager and admitted membership within it, and even assuming that some of the persons with whom Mr. Renteria associated that evening had connections to that gang, the prosecution failed to show that in shooting at the houses Mr. Renteria intended to promote or benefit the gang. Officer Adney's opinion testimony could not satisfy that intent element because he offered no solid or credible facts to back it up.

The prosecution tried to prove the intent prong by "associating" one of the houses--that located at 1650 W. Merritt and owned by Mr. Duran--with the rival "Norteno" gang. Yet it never achieved this in any credible way, where a rational trier of fact could believe it beyond a reasonable doubt. The questioning of Officer Adney revealed that he believed that Robert Pompa Jr. was "associated" with the 1650 residence (RT 587), and that he had once observed Mr. Pompa Jr. in the company of a Norteno gang member. (RT 601-603.) Nothing about this evidence shows that Pompa lived at 1650 W. Merritt at the time of the shooting or that 1650 W. Merritt functioned as some sort of repository for Norteno activity at that precise time. Mr. Duran denied that his family maintained any gang affiliation. Further, when the prosecutor in a hypothetical to Officer Adney asked him to assume the 1650 residence "known to be associated with Norteno gang activity," the trial court struck that reference as unsupported by the evidence. (RT 605:6-19.)

The prosecution produced no evidence of Norteno graffiti or Norteno activity at the 1650 Merritt home. Officer Sunderland observed a sawed-off shotgun in Mr.



Duran's garage, but no evidence demonstrated that gun belonged to the Norteno gang or that the Norteno gang-or anybody else-- had used it against Mr. Renteria.

The prosecution case for the gang enhancement thus remained entirely speculative, since it brought forward no admissible, credible, solid evidence that the shooting occurred for a gang purpose rather than a personal vendetta. Mr. Renteria admitted that at some unspecified time he got "hit up," but no evidence showed the manner in which that event related to Mr. Duran's house.<sup>2</sup> In sum, the prosecution proved a gang member did a shooting, but failed to prove that he did it for his gang or for a gang purpose.

In its Opposing Brief, Respondent argued that the following evidence shows that the prosecution presented sufficient evidence to prove the gang enhancement pursuant to Penal Code section 186.22, subdivision (b):

1. Jack Duran's house was associated with the rival gang (RB 11);
2. Mr. Renteria was "hit up" with a shotgun by the rival gang (RB 13);
3. The crime occurred in "disputed territory" (RB (13)
4. Mr. Renteria was with a group shortly before the shooting where someone yelled gang slurs (RB 13);
5. The police found a shotgun in Mr. Duran's garage (RB 17);

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<sup>2</sup>The prosecution produced no gang-related evidence relating to Mr. Demp's house. Mr. Arenivaz believed the shooting at the Demp house occurred because when the dogs barked "he was trying to shut 'em up." (RT 364.)

6. The detective once saw a resident of Mr. Duran's home, Robert Pompa Jr, "in the company of rival gang members. (RT 17); and

7. The gang expert opined that a person "hit up" must retaliate. (RB 13).

These "facts," even in combination, fall fair short of the "credible, solid evidence" needed to prove the elements of a crime. (People v. Johnson (1980) 26 Cal.3d 557, 578.) First, the prosecution did not prove that Duran's house was associated with a gang at the time of the crime, a failure which the trial court acknowledged. (RT 605, Slip Opinion, Justice Smith dissenting, at 13 n.0.) Second, Mr. Renteria was not "hit up" near the houses which were shot, and the prosecution offered no direct connection between the "hiiting up" and the shooting. Third, the prosecution never established that the gang slogans shouted in the vacant lot had anything to do with Mr. Renteria or with the houses eventually shot at. (Slip Opinion, Justice Smith dissenting, at 14-16.) Fourth, no evidence established that the shotgun in Duran's garage had anything to do with the shotgun apparently used in the confrontation where Mr. Renteria was "hit up." (Slip Opinion, Justice Smith dissenting at 13, n.9.) Fifth and finally, no evidence showed Mr. Pompa, Jr. still lived at the Duran house or that he belonged to the rival gang or that he had anything to do with the shooting incidents. (Ibid.) In sum, the prosecution here simply offered the jury speculation, rather than solid evidence. Speculation does not constitute the substantial evidence necessary to support a verdict. (People v. Perez (1992) 2 Cal.4th 1117, 1133.)

Further, the cases cited by Respondent do not establish that the weak showing here amounted to sufficient evidence to support the gang enhancement. People v. Gonzalez (2006) 232 Cal.App.4th 1449 (cited by Respondent at RB 16) does hold that a combination of factors can constitute sufficient evidence, but there the prosecution proved that three gang members with a stolen firearm were headed for a known gang hangout. (Id. at 1466-1467.) There, the prosecution therefore presented solid evidence of gang members working together for gang purposes. Here, the prosecution presented speculative evidence of a gang member acting on his own for unknown reasons. People v. Jasso (2012) 211 Cal.App.4th 1354, 1377 (cited by Respondent at RB 18) does not hold that where a crime occurs for no obvious reason it must amount to a gang crime. There, the prosecution accused Jasso, an admitted Norteno, of shooting at Munoz, a known rival Sureño, for gang purposes. The court upheld the gang enhancement using the following language:

“In addition, as we have noted, defendant knew Muñoz to be a Sureño, Muñoz was dressed in the blue Sureño color when defendant shot at him, and there was no obvious reason for one person to shoot at someone he barely knew on the basis defendant gave for committing this crime, i.e., that Muñoz's neighbor, who was a friend of defendant, and Muñoz did not like each other.” (Id. at 1377.)

Thus, in Jasso, the prosecution presented evidence of a known gang member shooting

at a known rival wearing his colors and then fabricating a motive for his act. That sort of solid evidence does not appear in this case, where the prosecution failed to present a clear and credible connection of the “victim” houses to the rival gang.

Finally, in People v. Prunty (2015) 62 Cal.4th 59, the Supreme Court addressed the sufficiency of proof that a defendant acted for the benefit of a “criminal street gang” pursuant to Penal Code section 186.22, subdivision (b)(1). It specifically set forth rules of proof relating to the “predicate acts” which the prosecution must show to prove the existence of a “criminal street gang.”

According to Prunty, where a defendant belongs to a “subset” of a larger gang, the prosecution must prove that “the ‘gang’ that the defendant sought to benefit, and the ‘gang’ that the prosecution proves to exist, are one and the same.” (Id. at 74.) This proof cannot simply amount to a showing that the subset and the umbrella gang or other subsets share a common name or symbols. (Id. at 76.) Instead, the prosecution must show some sort of “organizational” or “associational” connection between the subset and umbrella gang or other subset gangs. (Id. at 77-80.) The prosecution might show, for example, that the gangs report to the same “shotcaller” or protect the same geographical area, or show loyalty to the same person, or back up each other, or employ the same “initiation” procedures. Ibid. But however the prosecution elects to prove the gang enhancement, that critical “sameness requirement” mandates that “the prosecution must show that the group the defendant acted to benefit, the group that committed the predicate offenses, and the

group whose primary activities are introduced, is one and the same.” (Id. at 81.)

In Prunty, the prosecution alleged that Mr. Prunty, a confessed Norteno belonging to the Detroit Boulevard subset, committed an assault to benefit the Norteno gang. It adduced evidence of predicate acts committed by members of the Varrio Gardenland Norteños, Del Paso Heights Norteños and Varrio Centro Norteños. (Id. at 69.) The Supreme Court found such evidence insufficient to prove the gang enhancement. It held that the prosecution never produced evidence “that could connect these three groups to one another, or to an overarching Sacramento-area Norteño criminal street gang.” (Id. at 82.) The Court found the prosecutor never produced evidence that “the specific subsets involved in committing the predicate offenses have any ongoing relationship –the kind of relationship that amounts to being part of the same group—with the entity defendant sought to benefit.” (Id. at 83.)

Prunty similarly applies here to invalidate the gang enhancement. Mr. Renteria admitted he belonged to “SSK,” which Officer Jacob Adney identified as a Sureno gang subset. Officer Adney also identified Francisco Cortez, Babio Delreal and Armando Flores as Sureno gang members who had committed various alleged predicate crimes in the recent past. (See Opening Brief, at 9-10.) However Officer Adney never provided evidence that connected Cortez, Delreal or Flores to Mr. Renteria or to SSK. The prosecution never adduced evidence that connected the criminal acts of the three men with the gang to which Mr. Renteria belonged or to the gang Mr. Renteria allegedly sought to benefit. Although Officer Adney testified regarding the enmity

between the Nortenos and Surenos, he never offered detailed testimony connecting the SSK gang in which Mr. Renteria admitted membership to the gang on whose behalf Cortez, Delreal and Flores acted. The evidence of the gang enhancement therefore appears insufficient under the Prunty test, and this Court should order that enhancement stricken.

#### CONCLUSION

For the reasons expressed herein, this Court should grant review on the issue of whether the prosecution adduced sufficient evidence to prove the gang enhancement.

January 27, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

\_\_\_\_\_/s/ \_\_\_\_\_

James Bisnow

Attorney for Petitioner Christian Renteria

CERTIFICATE OF WORD COUNT

I hereby certify that this Petition for Review contains 5188 words.

January 27, 2021

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
James Bisnow  
Attorney for Petitioner  
Cristian Renteria

**PROOF OF SERVICE BY MAIL**

I am an attorney residing in Los Angeles, California, I am over the age of 18 years, and I am not a party to this action. My business address is 117 East Colorado Blvd., Suite 600, Pasadena, Ca. 91105.

On January 27, 2021 I served the foregoing document described as APPELLANT'S PETITION FOR REVIEW on all interested parties in this action by placing a true copy thereof enclosed in a sealed envelope with postage thereon fully prepaid, in the United States mail at Los Angeles, California, addressed as follows:

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FIFTH DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL  
2424 Ventura Street  
Fresno, CA 93721 (eletronic)

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed at Pasadena, California, January 27, 2021

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
JAMES BISNOW



## OPINION OF THE COURT OF APPEAL

**NOT TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL REPORTS**

IN THE COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
FIFTH APPELLATE DISTRICT

THE PEOPLE,

Plaintiff and Respondent,

v.

CRISTIAN RENTERIA,

Defendant and Appellant.

F076973

(Super. Ct. No. VCF304654)

**OPINION**

APPEAL from a judgment of the Superior Court of Tulare County. Kathryn T. Montejano, Judge.

James Bisnow, under appointment by the Court of Appeal, for Defendant and Appellant.

Xavier Becerra, Attorney General, Lance E. Winters and Gerald A. Engler, Chief Assistant Attorneys General, Michael P. Farrell, Assistant Attorney General, Louis M. Vasquez, Darren K. Indermill, Lewis A. Martinez, and Cavan M. Cox II, Deputy Attorneys General, for Plaintiff and Respondent.

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**SEE CONCURRING AND DISSENTING OPINION**

Cristian Renteria (defendant) stands convicted, following a jury trial, of two counts of shooting at an inhabited dwelling for the benefit of a criminal street gang, in the commission of which he personally used and intentionally discharged a firearm. (Pen. Code, §§ 186.22, subd. (b), 246, 12022.5, subd. (a), 12022.53, subd. (c); counts 1 & 2.)<sup>1</sup> He was sentenced to two consecutive terms of 23 years to life in prison, and ordered to pay various fees, fines, and assessments. On appeal, we hold: (1) Substantial evidence supports the gang enhancements; (2) Defendant has failed to establish ineffective assistance of counsel; and (3) Defendant is not entitled to a remand to present evidence and make a record of information relevant to his eventual youth offender parole hearing; but (4) The judgment must be modified to strike the section 12022.5 enhancements; and (5) Defendant is entitled to a remand to have the trial court exercise its discretion whether to strike the section 12022.53 enhancements. Accordingly, we affirm the judgment as modified and remand the matter to the trial court to exercise its discretion.

## **FACTS**<sup>2</sup>

### *The Charged Offenses*

James V. resided on Denair Street, between Woodward and Merritt Avenues, in Tulare. On the evening of August 7, he was in the driveway of his house when he heard what sounded like fireworks. He saw a flash near the corner of Woodward and Denair. According to his trial testimony, he then saw a person walking south, away from the area

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<sup>1</sup> All statutory references are to the Penal Code.

The jury acquitted defendant of discharging a firearm with gross negligence for the benefit of a criminal street gang. (§§ 186.22, subd. (b), 246.3, subd. (a); count 3.)

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, dates in the statement of facts are from the year 2014. The events of August 7 gave rise to count 3. The events of August 8 gave rise to counts 1 and 2.

Pursuant to California Rules of Court, rule 8.90, we refer to some persons by their first names or initials. No disrespect is intended.

of the flash, but could not tell if that person was a male or a female. Because he thought a shooting might have occurred, James called the police.

Tulare Police Officer Wilson was dispatched to the area at approximately 8:58 p.m. He found six .22-caliber brass shell casings, all Remington brand, within a 10-foot cluster near a vehicle that was parked on the west side of Denair.

Wilson spoke with James at the scene. James reported he had heard what sounded like a “pop shot.” When he looked in the direction of the sound, he heard five more gunshots from a pistol. James said he saw a Hispanic male, approximately five feet seven inches tall and 160 pounds, wearing a long white T-shirt and blue jeans. This person was kneeling behind the parked vehicle and firing a pistol northward. The person got up, walked quickly southbound, and then ran westbound on Woodward.

As of August 8, Anthony A. resided on Merritt, near where Denair dead ends at Merritt and by a vacant field. Not long before 10:00 or 10:30 that night, Anthony was inside when his wife and children told him there were some youngsters outside. Anthony went outside to see who it was and to talk to them. He was tired of things that were happening in the neighborhood, and he wanted to tell them that he did not want it ever happening at his house.

Once outside, Anthony saw at least five or six young male adults just past his house, heading toward the field. Some were hollering “SUR, trece.” One young man — defendant — recognized Anthony. He and Anthony lived a few houses away from each other. Every time Anthony and his wife passed defendant’s house when going to the store, defendant would greet them respectfully. This night, when defendant recognized Anthony, defendant “took a different tone” and spoke respectfully to Anthony. He explained that a couple of the “young adult – young boys” were drunk, and the group was trying to help them get home. Anthony said okay and that he did not want any problems and for them to get home safely and have a good night. He then went back inside.

A little while later, Anthony heard a sound like a “pop” in the field. He went outside and sat on his front porch, waiting to see if anybody would come back, so he could ask them what was going on. Defendant and one other person returned. They came from the field area, walked west on Merritt, and then began walking south on Denair, on the east side of the street. Anthony lost sight of them for a couple of minutes, then saw them walking north on Denair, on the west side of the street. They stopped near the north side of Merritt, at the intersection with Denair. Jack D. lived in the house just north of where they stopped, which was two houses west of Anthony’s home. Harvey D., an older Black man, lived in the house between Anthony and Jack.

Defendant and his companion both went almost across the intersection to the north side. Both stepped up. Defendant had a small metal object in his hand. He lifted it up and started shooting at Jack’s house. He fired four or five times. Two dogs at Harvey’s house were barking. Defendant moved to get in front of that house, fired toward it a couple times, returned to Jack’s house and “unloaded the clip,” and then he and his companion ran south on Denair. Anthony went inside and called 911.

Just before the shooting started, one of Harvey’s sons had closed the garage door and gone inside. Harvey’s cousin, who was in the living room, heard four gunshots and then three later on. One bullet struck the television in the living room, and went through the wall and into the bedroom beyond.

Jack’s grandchildren, including grandson’s S.D. and B.D., resided in his home with him and his wife. Jack did not see the shooting occur, but there was damage near his doorbell that he had not seen before the police pointed it out to him. Jack was familiar with the terms “Norte[ñ]o” and “Northerners,” which he thought had to do with gangs. To his knowledge, no one in his family was involved in gang activity.

Tulare Police Officer Sunderland responded to the area at approximately 11:50 p.m. on August 8. He spoke to Anthony, then went to Jack’s house. Concerned about the welfare of the occupants, he banged on the front door and the garage door, but

received no response. Because there were a number of bullet holes in the garage door and the stucco above it, Sunderland opened the garage door. No one was present, but Sunderland noticed a sawed-off shotgun inside the garage. Sunderland then went next door and spoke to Harvey's son. Harvey's son drew Sunderland's attention to two bullet holes in the front screen door and damage inside the house.

Sunderland found two Remington .22-caliber, brass-colored shell casings at the southeast corner of Merritt and Denair. Another police officer found two expended .22-caliber brass shell casings in the intersection of Merritt and Denair. Subsequent testing showed the shell casings recovered on August 7 and August 8 all were fired from the same firearm.

At the time of the shootings, Tulare Police Officer Adney was a detective in the gang unit. He responded to the August 8 call and spoke with Anthony, and had him point out the house where he believed the shooter lived. Anthony pointed to a residence on Olympia. Adney personally had investigated incidents involving that residence, and had personal knowledge defendant lived there. The residence was a known Sureño residence.

Adney created a photographic lineup that contained defendant's photograph. When shown the lineup later on the night of the shooting, Anthony identified defendant's photograph.

The next day, Adney went to Jack D.'s residence. B.D. was outside. When Adney approached, B.D. quickly went inside. Adney knocked on the door, but no one answered initially. He kept knocking, and eventually B.D. came to the door. B.D. was not cooperative.

Upon learning shots were fired in the area on August 7, Adney contacted James, who agreed to look at a photographic lineup. Adney administered the standard admonition, then asked if James recognized anyone in the lineup that he had seen on the

night of the incident. James pointed to defendant's photograph and said he was 40 percent sure.<sup>3</sup>

Defendant was arrested on August 13. While seated in Adney's vehicle, he asked to speak to Adney. He was advised of, and waived, his constitutional rights. During this interview (an audio recording of which was played for the jury), defendant said that on the night of the shootings at Merritt and Denair, he was with his girlfriend, Monica L., and their baby. He was there for several hours in the afternoon, then returned to his father's house on West Alpine, where he stayed for the rest of the night.<sup>4</sup> He denied being involved in shooting at a house. Eventually, he said he "got hit up" and heard a noise like a shotgun, and he ran. This happened on West Street, which Adney estimated was about a quarter of a mile from Denair. Defendant agreed when Adney said that in the gang life, a person is not allowed to be a victim, but has to retaliate and do it himself. Defendant said, however, that he was his own person and would not let someone tell him what to do.

Defendant said it was getting dark when the gun was pulled on him. He felt scared and "kind of pissed." He guessed they were Northerners. They asked where he was from. He did not tell them " 'South Side Kings' "; when they asked him, that was when he heard the noise and ran.

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<sup>3</sup> James testified at trial that he did not recognize anyone, but selected a photograph he thought might have shown the perpetrator. The officer who showed him the photographs told him to take a guess, and he did. Adney denied telling James to take a guess or pressuring him to make a selection.

<sup>4</sup> Defendant said Monica lived on O Street, which, according to Adney, was on the east side of town, while Merritt and Denair were on the far northwest side. Adney determined Monica actually lived on Woodward, a few houses west of Denair and one block south of Merritt.

Defendant consented to a search of his father's residence. No firearms were located; however, a blue container with "SUR" written on it was found. Monica's residence also was searched. No firearm was found.

Defendant was taken to the police department and booked. Adney and Detective Guerrero conducted a second interview with him (an audio-video recording of which was played for the jury), at the outset of which defendant was again advised of, and waived, his rights. Defendant admitted being a Southerner and being "Kings." He said he had been a member for a couple of years, and had been jumped in. He explained that he was jumped in for 13 seconds, because "M" was the 13th letter of the alphabet and "M" stood for Mexican Mafia. Asked what the Mexican Mafia had to do with Sureños, defendant replied, "All I know is that we just get along 'em [*sic*]."

When shown photographs of the houses that were struck by gunfire, defendant said he had seen "some Black people" around one of them, but that was all he knew. He denied hearing the noise that sounded like a shotgun at the other of the two houses. He said there were a lot of people who knew him "out there" that did not like him, because he associated with southsiders.

#### *The Gang Evidence*

Sunderland arrested defendant in October 2008 at a middle school in Tulare. Sunderland was called to the school in response to a student who had brought a knife onto campus. The assistant principal showed Sunderland a blue bandana and a blue razor blade knife. After Sunderland advised defendant of his constitutional rights, defendant said he was scared and had brought the knife to school for protection. Defendant initially denied being a southern gang member, but then admitted he had been one for about a year.

On June 25, 2011, Tulare Police Officer Robertson responded to a residence in Tulare in response to a trespassing report. When he and another officer arrived, they noticed the front door to the residence was open. Robertson found defendant and



Edwin C. in back, just outside the house. Edwin was holding a can of blue spray paint. Both cooperated when Robertson escorted them to the front of the house, but defendant pulled away when Robertson started to handcuff him and said he was not going to go to jail. Robertson was able to restrain him. Robertson saw fresh blue spray paint on the back of the house and throughout the residence. Among the graffiti were “SSK,” “Chap KILLA,” “X3,” and “KIXGS.” At the time, defendant lived on Olympia Avenue.

In addition to testifying concerning his investigation into the charged offenses, Adney testified as a gang expert. He explained that under the Penal Code, a gang is any ongoing association, organization, or group of three or more people having a common name and identifying marks or symbols, and who actively participate in criminal activity. To join a gang, people used to get jumped in, i.e., they fought multiple gang members for a certain length of time. More recently, people get “crimed in,” meaning they “put in work” — commit crimes for the benefit of the gang.

According to Adney, “[r]espect is everything” in the gang culture, and is the “hallmark” of the Sureño gang. A person can gain respect by putting in work for the gang, not being a coward, and committing crimes of opportunity or any type of crime that will benefit the gang as a whole, whether against rival gang members or people in the community. Typically, the more violent someone is, the more respected that person is. A person gains respect through fear and intimidation, both by being feared by the community and by being feared by one’s own gang members because of the work the person puts in for the gang. Gang members sometimes utter gang slurs while committing crimes. A gang slur can be any type of statement to let other people know who is responsible for the crime.

Adney explained that there are rules for gang members. Southerners are “pretty much” street-level affiliates of the Mexican Mafia, so they follow the same rules. One rule is to not be a coward. Another is to not be an informant for law enforcement. A member’s violation of the gang’s rules can be considered an act of treason, and can result

in punishment, assault, or being killed. If a gang member is a victim of a crime, a response is required. Reporting it or talking to the police can result in the gang member being deemed an informant. The person is expected to retaliate, because his respect is everything to him. If the gang member does not try to get revenge or payback, he loses all respect that he has from his gang, and he does nothing for the gang as a whole.

Adney opined that a crime committed by a gang member can benefit or promote a gang even if the victim is not a rival gang member. Gang crimes — particularly violent ones — are in the news and on social media. Because of fear and intimidation, members of the community often are reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement in the investigation of gang crimes. The intimidation of witnesses or the community as a whole increases the gang's control over its territory, and makes it less likely for witnesses to come forward and cooperate in the investigation of gang crimes. Adney had personal experiences with witnesses' houses being shot at, their property vandalized, and the witnesses being threatened and assaulted.

Adney had training regarding, and personal experience investigating crimes involving, the Sureño gang, and had had personal contact with members of that gang. He explained that in the mid-1980's or early 1990's some families that were part of the Latin Times in Los Angeles moved to Tulare County. When they came to Tulare County, they had a feud with Northerners, and started consolidating gangs — one of which was the South Side Kings — into a single gang. As of the time of trial, Adney estimated there were no less than 500 members of the Sureño gang in Tulare County.

Adney explained that the Sureño gang has a structure or hierarchy. The gang identifies with the color blue and number 13. The number 13 is used because "M" is the 13th letter of the alphabet. It represents the Mexican Mafia. "X3" is a way of representing the number 13. The word "SUR" is Spanish for south, while the word "trece" is Spanish for 13.

The rivals of the Sureño gang are the Norteño gang, and there is a history of violence between the two groups. Sureño gang members use the derogatory terms “busters” and “chaps” to refer to Norteños. “Sureño” means Southerner, while “Norteño” means Northerner. Sureños sometimes refer to themselves as Southerners, while Norteños sometimes refer to themselves as Northerners. Norteños identify with the color red and number 14. “N” is the 14th letter of the alphabet, and signifies Nuestra Familia.

Adney explained that graffiti can be a way of gangs identifying their turf or territory. Some turf is contested, meaning it is claimed by both gangs. This can happen when Northerners and Southerners live in the same neighborhood, and typically means there are more problems in that neighborhood. The neighborhood in which the charged shootings occurred was contested territory in 2014.

Adney gave examples of persons who committed crimes for the Sureño gang. One was Francisco Cortez. On April 10, 2014, Adney and Guerrero were on duty in Tulare when they saw a vehicle travel through several intersections and into an alleyway. There, the car came to an abrupt stop and two subjects got out. A loaded magazine fell from one of them. One subject was detained. The other — Cortez — dropped a gun as he ran. He was also apprehended. Cortez and the vehicle’s other occupants were all Sureño gang members. Cortez was convicted of criminal possession of a firearm, a felony, with a gang enhancement as a result of the incident. In Adney’s opinion, the crime fit the pattern of criminal activity that Sureño gang members have engaged in in Tulare County.

A second example was Fabio Delreal. On June 12, 2014, Adney and Guerrero were on duty in Tulare when they observed a vehicle occupied by Delreal, a known Sureño gang member. A parole search was conducted of his person and vehicle, and a loaded, stolen firearm was found inside the vehicle. Delreal was convicted of a felony with a gang enhancement as a result. In Adney’s opinion, the crime fit the pattern of criminal activity that Sureño gang members have engaged in in Tulare County.

A third example was Armando Flores. On February 4, 2009, shots were fired from a passing vehicle at a vehicle that was backing out of a residential driveway. When the suspect vehicle was located several days later, it was occupied by Flores and Daniel Villa Gomez, both of whom were Sureño gang members. Two firearms were located in the vehicle. Gomez admitted being the driver and identified Flores as the shooter. Each was convicted of a felony with a gang enhancement as a result. In Adney's opinion, the crimes fit the pattern of criminal activity that Sureño gang members have engaged in in Tulare County.

Adney explained that the Sureño gang has cliques or subsets of which South Side Kings is one. All identify with the color blue and the number 13, and all have Norteños as their common enemy. The subsets are united by an organizational or associational connection. They share information and work together. They share weapons with each other. Adney personally had investigated cases in which different subsets of the Sureño gang in Tulare County worked together as a single organization to commit crimes.

Adney investigated defendant to determine whether he was involved with any gang. Adney used a 10-criteria system to validate someone. The person must meet three of the criteria, unless he admits gang membership after being taken into custody.

With respect to Sunderland's contact with defendant at school, it was significant that defendant possessed a blue bandana. Anyone with knowledge of gangs would know this was an indication he was part of the Sureño gang. It also enhanced his reputation by showing he was bold enough to wear the gang's colors, knowing that rival gang members could assault him for it. As for the knife, gang members arm themselves for crimes of opportunity, either in coming across rival gang members or being disrespected or challenged by a nongang member.

With respect to the 2011 vandalism case, "SSK" was an acronym for South Side Kings, a Sureño gang of which defendant was a part. "Chap killer" basically meant Norteño killer. "KIXGS" was typical with the Sureño gang, as its members will

substitute something for the letter “N.” “X3” represented the number 13. Adney was familiar with Edwin C.; he was a member of the Sureño gang and of the South Side Kings. There were also other incidents on which Adney based his opinion concerning defendant.

Based on his knowledge, training, experience, and investigation of the current case and defendant, Adney opined that on August 7 and 8, defendant was a member of the Sureño gang.

Prior to the shooting of August 8, Adney was familiar with some of Jack D.’s relatives who lived at or were associated with Jack’s house on Merritt Avenue. In particular, he was familiar with Jack’s two grandsons, one of whom was at the house when Adney went there the day after the shooting. Adney had had personal contact with the grandsons, both in his capacity as a gang detective and while he was a patrol officer prior to his gang assignment. The majority of Adney’s contacts at the house were with two other subjects, R.P., Jr., and R.P., Sr., whom he knew were associated with Jack’s residence. Adney personally had seen R.P., Jr., associating with Norteño gang members.

Adney was asked to assume the following hypothetical facts were true: A witness observes several individuals near his house late at night. He hears one or more call out “SUR trece.” After a few minutes, one of them comes back, produces a firearm, and shoots at two houses. The second house is shot at after dogs on the property start barking. A sawed-off shotgun is seen in the garage of the first house. The area is claimed by both Norteño and Sureño gangs. The shooter is a member of the Sureño gang. Earlier that night, he was “hit up” by some individuals as he was walking home, and the Norteño gang members pulled a gun on him.

Based on the hypothetical facts, Adney opined this was a gang shooting. It benefited the Sureño gang in a variety of ways, whether the victim was a rival gang member or a regular citizen. It showed the perpetrator was willing to put in work for the gang and to be violent. “SUR trece” let everyone know who was responsible. The

shooter would elevate his status within the gang, and also elevate the status of the gang as a whole by creating fear and intimidating the victims, anyone who observed the shooting, and anyone who lived in the neighborhood. This in turn would make people reluctant to talk to the police, resulting in suspects not getting arrested and cases not getting solved. This would allow gang members to carry on their daily gang activities, whether in this or a new neighborhood. A shooting under the circumstances of the hypothetical would bolster the Sureño gang's reputation for violence, elevate the shooter's status within his own gang, and garner respect for other Sureño gang members.

It was significant to Adney that when the shooter was “hit up” — challenged or shown disrespect in such a way that the recipient would be expected to respond — earlier, he believed Norteños were the ones who pulled a gun on him. It showed the person was not a coward and was not showing weakness. In the gang context, being asked where a person is from means what gang they are a part of. It is very disrespectful for a gang member to be hit up and challenged as to where he is from.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **I**

#### **SUFFICIENCY OF THE EVIDENCE**

Defendant contends the evidence is insufficient to sustain the true findings on the gang enhancements. We disagree.

#### **A. General Legal Principles**

The test of sufficiency of the evidence is whether, reviewing the whole record in the light most favorable to the judgment below, substantial evidence is disclosed such that a reasonable trier of fact could find the essential elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. (*People v. Johnson* (1980) 26 Cal.3d 557, 578; accord, *Jackson v. Virginia* (1979) 443 U.S. 307, 319.) Substantial evidence is that evidence which is “reasonable, credible, and of solid value.” (*People v. Johnson, supra*, at p. 578.) An appellate court must “presume in support of the judgment the existence of every fact the

trier could reasonably deduce from the evidence.” (*People v. Reilly* (1970) 3 Cal.3d 421, 425.) An appellate court must not reweigh the evidence (*People v. Culver* (1973) 10 Cal.3d 542, 548), reappraise the credibility of the witnesses, or resolve factual conflicts, as these are functions reserved for the trier of fact (*In re Frederick G.* (1979) 96 Cal.App.3d 353, 367). “If the circumstances reasonably justify the [trier of fact’s] findings, reversal is not warranted merely because the circumstances might also be reasonably reconciled with a contrary finding. [Citations.]” (*People v. Redmond* (1969) 71 Cal.2d 745, 755.) This standard of review is applicable regardless of whether the prosecution relies primarily on direct or on circumstantial evidence (*People v. Lenart* (2004) 32 Cal.4th 1107, 1125), and applies equally to convictions and enhancement allegations (*People v. Hajek and Vo* (2014) 58 Cal.4th 1144, 1197, disapproved on another ground in *People v. Rangel* (2016) 62 Cal.4th 1192, 1216; *People v. Garcia* (2014) 224 Cal.App.4th 519, 522-523).

**B. The Two Prongs of the Gang Enhancements**

The gang enhancements required proof defendant committed the substantive offenses (1) “for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with any criminal street gang,” and (2) “with the specific intent to promote, further, or assist in any criminal conduct by gang members.” (§ 186.22, subd. (b)(1), (4).) Defendant says neither prong was shown by substantial evidence. We disagree.

1. Benefit, direction, or association

“[T]he Legislature included the requirement that the crime to be enhanced be committed for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with a criminal street gang to make it ‘clear that a criminal offense is subject to increased punishment . . . only if the crime is “gang related.” ’ [Citation.] Not every crime committed by gang members is related to a gang.” (*People v. Albillar* (2010) 51 Cal.4th 47, 60 (*Albillar*).) A crime is gang related, however, if, inter alia, it is committed in association with the gang, or it is committed for the benefit of the gang. (*Ibid.*) Thus, if the crimes were committed for the

benefit of a criminal street gang, they need not also have been committed in association with the gang. (See *People v. Garcia* (2017) 9 Cal.App.5th 364, 379; *People v. Weddington* (2016) 246 Cal.App.4th 468, 484.)

Adney testified concerning how the charged crimes benefited the Sureño criminal street gang, even if they were not committed against rival gang members. Moreover, there was evidence Jack D.'s house had at least some link to Norteños, even if it was not a hotbed of rival gang activity. The neighborhood was contested territory, and Anthony testified he was tired of "issues" happening around the neighborhood and did not "want that happening ever on [his] house." Defendant told Adney he had been "hit up" by people he thought were Northerners. Although he said this happened at a different location, jurors reasonably could have inferred, in light of the sawed-off shotgun in Jack D.'s garage, the fact defendant lied about where Monica lived, and the fact defendant was not likely to want to place himself at the scene of a shooting, that he lied. Viewed as a whole, the evidence was sufficient to establish the first prong of the gang enhancement. (See *Albillar, supra*, 51 Cal.4th at p. 63; *People v. Pettie* (2017) 16 Cal.App.5th 23, 51.)

## 2. Intent

With regard to the second prong, section 186.22, subdivision (b)(1) requires the specific intent to promote, further, or assist in *any* criminal conduct by gang members — including the current offenses — and not merely *other* criminal conduct by gang members. (*Albillar, supra*, 51 Cal.4th at p. 65.) In *People v. Rios* (2013) 222 Cal.App.4th 542, the appellate court essentially limited *Albillar*'s holding in this regard to cases where the defendant acted in concert with others. The court stated: "[W]here the defendant acts alone, the combination of the charged offense and gang membership alone is insufficient to support an inference on the specific intent prong of the gang enhancement. Otherwise, the gang enhancement would be used merely to punish gang membership." (*People v. Rios, supra*, at pp. 573-574.) Clearly, however, section 186.22, subdivision (b) applies to lone actors. (See *People v. Rios, supra*, at p. 546; see also



*People v. McDonald* (2015) 238 Cal.App.4th 16, 39-40.) In *People v. Hill* (2006) 142 Cal.App.4th 770, the Court of Appeal reasoned: “[T]he specific intent required by the statute is ‘to promote, further, or assist in *any* criminal conduct by gang members.’ [Citation.] Therefore, defendant’s own criminal threat qualified as the gang-related criminal activity. No further evidence on this element was necessary.” (*Id.* at p. 774.)

It is not altogether certain defendant acted alone. Even if he did, however, the evidence went well beyond the mere combination of the charged offenses and gang membership. (Cf. *People v. Rios, supra*, 222 Cal.App.4th at p. 573 [only facts prosecution asked expert to consider in hypothetical were (1) person was gang member and (2) he possessed gun].) Adney testified to the importance of respect in gang culture and to Sureños in particular. He explained that if a Sureño is a victim of a crime or is shown disrespect, a response is required. Showing one is willing to put in work for the gang and be violent elevates that person’s status within the gang and the status of the gang as a whole. Intimidation of witnesses and the community increases the gang’s control of territory.

“A reasonable jury could infer, based on this testimony and other evidence in the record, that [defendant] intended for the [shooting at Jack D.’s house] to have the predicted effect of intimidating rival gang members and neighborhood residents, thus facilitating future crimes committed by himself and his fellow gang members.” (*People v. Vazquez* (2009) 178 Cal.App.4th 347, 353.) Jurors reasonably could also have inferred defendant intended (1) the shooting at Jack D.’s house as retaliation for getting “hit up” earlier, and so as a means of recouping respect for himself and for the Sureño gang, and (2) the shooting at Harvey’s house as a means of intimidating possible witnesses, and to quiet the dogs and facilitate his escape, thereby furthering his gang’s reputation and control of contested territory, and his own gang-motivated criminal conduct. As such, the evidence was sufficient to establish the second prong of the gang enhancement.

**C. The Existence of a Criminal Street Gang**

This should, but does not, end our analysis.<sup>5</sup> Although not raised by the parties, this court invited them to address the issue of whether the evidence was sufficient under *People v. Prunty* (2015) 62 Cal.4th 59 (*Prunty*). We conclude that it was.

In his supplemental briefing, defendant asserts the evidence failed to show the group he acted to benefit, the group that committed the predicate offenses, and the group whose primary activities were introduced were one in the same. Defendant points to evidence he “admitted he belonged to ‘SSK,’ ” which was “identified as a Sureño gang subset,” and to evidence the predicate acts were committed by Sureño gang members. He argues there needed to be testimony connecting the Sureños to the SSK. The Attorney General responds that the evidence was sufficient because it showed defendant was a member of the Sureño criminal street gang, his actions benefited the Sureño criminal street gang, and the predicate acts were committed by Sureños. We agree with the Attorney General. Since the prosecution’s theory of why a criminal street gang exists did not turn on the conduct of one or more gang subsets, the requirements of *Prunty* do not apply.

As part of proof of the gang enhancement, the prosecution must prove the existence of a criminal street gang. The Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (the STEP Act) “defines ‘criminal street gang’ as any ongoing association that

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<sup>5</sup> Recently, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg explained the principle of party presentation. “In our adversarial system of adjudication, we follow the principle of party presentation . . . [citation], ‘in both civil and criminal cases, in the first instance and on appeal . . . , we rely on the parties to frame the issues for decision and assign to courts the role of neutral arbiter of matters the parties present.’ [Citation.] In criminal cases, departures from the party presentation principle have usually occurred ‘to protect a *pro se* litigant’s rights.’ [Citations.] But as a general rule, our system ‘is designed around the premise that [parties represented by competent counsel] know what is best for them, and are responsible for advancing the facts and argument entitling them to relief.’ [Citation.]” (*United States v. Sineneng-Smith* (2020) 590 U.S. \_\_\_, \_\_\_ [140 S.Ct. 1575, 1579], fn. omitted.)

consists of three or more persons, that has a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, that has as one of its ‘primary activities’ the commission of certain specified criminal offenses, and that engages through its members in a ‘pattern of criminal gang activity.’ ([§ 186.22], subd. (f), italics [omitted].) A gang engages in a ‘pattern of criminal gang activity’ when its members participate in ‘two or more’ specified criminal offenses (the so-called ‘predicate offenses’) that are committed within a certain time frame and ‘on separate occasions, or by two or more persons.’ (*Id.*, subd. (e).)” (*People v. Loewn* (1997) 17 Cal.4th 1, 4.) “Thus, for a group to fall within the statutory definition of a ‘criminal street gang,’ these requirements must be met: (1) the group must be an ongoing association of three or more persons sharing a common name or common identifying sign or symbol; (2) one of the group’s primary activities must be the commission of one of the specified predicate offenses; and (3) the group’s members must ‘engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.’ [Citations.]” (*Id.* at p. 8.) A pattern of criminal gang activity can be proven, inter alia, through evidence of the charged offense and another offense committed on a prior occasion by the defendant’s fellow gang member. (*People v. Gardeley* (1996) 14 Cal.4th 605, 625, disapproved on another ground in *People v. Sanchez* (2016) 63 Cal.4th 665, 686, fn. 13.)

*If the prosecution’s theory of why a criminal street gang exists turns on the existence and conduct of one or more gang subsets — for example, when “the prosecution seeks to prove the street gang enhancement by showing a defendant committed a felony to benefit a given gang, but establishes the commission of the required predicate offenses with evidence of crimes committed by members of the gang’s alleged subsets” — then the prosecution must prove an associational or organizational connection between the gang and the subsets. (Prunty, supra, 62 Cal.4th at pp. 67-68.)*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There was testimony describing the structure of the gang as a county-level gang that had subsets. Asked about the history of the Sureño gang in Tulare County, Adney explained that when certain families moved from Los Angeles to Tulare County, they

Prunty was charged with attempted murder and assault with a firearm. To prove each offense was subject to a gang enhancement under section 186.22, subdivision (b), the prosecution introduced evidence that Prunty admitted he was a Norteño gang member and held membership in the Detroit Boulevard Norteño “ ‘set.’ ” Prunty’s clothing, previous contacts with law enforcement, and possession of Norteño graffiti and other paraphernalia were consistent with Norteño gang membership. (*Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 68.) Prunty’s companion in the crimes was a member of the Varrio Franklin Boulevard Norteños. (*Ibid.*) With respect to the prosecution’s theory Prunty committed the charged offenses with the intent to benefit the Norteños, evidence was presented concerning Norteños in general, and that Norteños in Sacramento (the relevant

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started consolidating the local gangs — one of which was SSK — into a single gang. Adney did name cliques of the Sureño gang in Tulare County. Additionally, although unnecessary given the prosecution’s theory, Adney was asked leading questions about whether the cliques were united by an organizational or associational connection, worked together, shared information with each other, and shared weapons with each other to which he gave conclusory answers. “In general, evidence that shows subset members have communicated, worked together, or share a relationship (however formal or informal) will permit the jury to infer that the subsets should be treated as a single street gang.” (*Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at pp. 78-79.) Adney’s conclusory testimony in this regard does not constitute substantial evidence, because it lacks an adequate foundation. An expert’s opinion “ ‘may not be based “on assumptions of fact without evidentiary support . . . .” ’ [Citation.]” (*People v. Flores* (2020) 9 Cal.5th 371, 398; see *In re Alexander L.* (2007) 149 Cal.App.4th 605, 612.) Adney also testified, however, that he personally had investigated cases in which different subsets of the Sureño gang in Tulare County had worked together as a single organization to commit crimes. This testimony, based as it was on Adney’s own investigations, neither constituted opinion testimony nor lacked foundation.

The concurring and dissenting opinion says that, given Adney’s testimony the county-level Sureño gang operated through subsets, *Prunty* required the prosecution to show a connection between the Sureño gang and its subsets, or among the subsets, beyond Adney’s testimony. (Conc. & dis. opn. of Smith, J., *post*, pp. 19-20.) We do not read *Prunty* to reach so broadly. The mere existence of such evidence does not, and did not in this case, demonstrate that the prosecution’s theory of why a criminal street gang exists turned on the existence and conduct of one or more gang subsets.

geographical area) were not associated with any particular “ ‘turf,’ ” but were found all over Sacramento with a lot of subsets based on different neighborhoods. (*Id.* at p. 69.) To prove the Sacramento-area Norteños engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity, the prosecution presented evidence of predicate offenses. One offense was shown to have been committed by two members of the Varrío Gardenland Norteños. Another was shown to have been committed by a member of the Varrío Centro Norteños. Aside from testimony that the Varrío Gardenland Norteños and the Varrío Centro Norteños referred to themselves as Norteños, the prosecution produced no specific evidence showing they identified with a larger Norteño group, or that they shared a connection with each other or with the two Norteño-identified subsets to which Prunty and his companion associated. (*Id.* at pp. 82-83.)

Our Supreme Court did not find an issue with Prunty self-identifying as both a member of the Detroit Boulevard Norteños and the larger umbrella Norteño gang. (*Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 82.) “[W]here the prosecution’s evidence fell short [was] with respect to the predicate offenses.” (*Ibid.*) The perpetrators of the predicate offenses were identified as members of three Norteño subsets. (*Ibid.*)

The difference between how the prosecution sought to prove the existence of a criminal street gang in *Prunty* and how the prosecution proved the existence of a criminal street gang in defendant’s case is readily apparent. Here, the evidence showed defendant identified as a member of the SSK subset of the Sureños and also as a Sureño. Although, it is clear SSK was not shown to be a criminal street gang, as defined by the STEP Act, in its own right,<sup>7</sup> the prosecution’s theory — and the evidence presented — was that the gang defendant acted to benefit, was the same gang to whom the perpetrators of the

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<sup>7</sup> Although we can surmise SSK was an ongoing association of three or more persons who shared a common name or identifying sign or symbol, no evidence was presented as to the group’s primary activities or that the group’s members engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.

predicate acts belonged. (*Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 76.) The gang slur shouted a short time before the shootings was “SUR trece,” not merely “SSK” or a slur specific to a subset. The predicate acts were committed by Sureños, and the primary activities of the Sureño criminal street gang in Tulare County were those committed as the predicate acts. Nothing in *Prunty* precludes a prosecutor from relying on a broader group such as the Sureños as the relevant criminal street gang. (See *People v. Pettie, supra*, 16 Cal.App.5th at p. 49.)

In addition to incorrectly finding *Prunty* was violated, the concurring and dissenting opinion finds insufficient evidence of the primary activities element of the statutory definition of a criminal street gang. However, neither party raised this issue, nor was that issue in this court’s request for supplemental briefing. That request read, in pertinent part: “The parties have briefed the issue of sufficiency of the evidence underlying the gang enhancements imposed in this case . . . . The parties are hereby notified that they may file a supplemental brief addressing whether the evidence underlying the gang enhancements is sufficient under *People v. Prunty* (2015) 62 Cal.4th 59.” The primary activities discussion in the concurring and dissenting opinion is set apart by a separate heading and does not discuss *Prunty*. Again, the principle of party presentation has been contravened. “‘[C]ourts are essentially passive instruments of government.’ [Citation.] They ‘do not, or should not, sally forth each day looking for wrongs to right. [They] wait for cases to come to [them], and when [cases arise, courts] normally decide only questions presented by the parties.’ [Citation.]” (*United States v. Sineneng-Smith, supra*, 590 U.S. at p. \_\_\_ [140 S.Ct. 1575, 1579].)

The concurring and dissenting justice appears to take the position that if a party claims evidence is insufficient to support a conviction or enhancement because it fails to establish one of multiple elements thereof, a reviewing court is free to reverse a judgment based on deficiencies in the evidence regarding a separate and distinct element, regardless of whether the opposing party has been given an opportunity to address the

precise matter. (Conc. & dis. opn. of Smith, J., *post*, p. 6.) Not surprisingly, the concurring and dissenting opinion cites no authority for such a startling proposition. In its quest to find grounds for reversal, the concurrence and dissent fails to follow basic rules of appellate review, and instead improperly concocts an argument for the defense that defendant himself did not see fit to raise and to which the Attorney General has not been given the opportunity to respond.

The concurrence and dissent unpersuasively tries to claim that in so doing, it does not run afoul of the principle of party presentation. (Conc. & dis. opn. of Smith, J., *post*, p. 6.) But unless we are reviewing a judgment pursuant to *People v. Wende* (1979) 25 Cal.3d 436, it is not our place, as neutral arbiters, to search out issues on behalf of a party. To do so outside the confines of *Wende* review or other limited contexts is not judicial review, it is partisan advocacy. And while we are not “hidebound by the precise arguments of counsel” (*United States v. Sineneng-Smith*, *supra*, 590 U.S. at p. \_\_\_ [140 S.Ct. 1575, 1581]), neither are we free to create new issues upon which to reverse while failing to afford the parties the opportunity to address them.

Since the evidence permitted the jury to reasonably conclude that the criminal street gang defendant sought to benefit included the perpetrators of the primary activities and predicate offenses (*Prunty*, *supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 76), it was sufficient to establish the existence of the requisite criminal street gang.

## II

### **INEFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL**

Defendant contends he received ineffective assistance of counsel because, during closing argument, his trial attorney discussed the concept of reasonable doubt, but failed to relate that concept to the facts of the case or to discuss those facts with the jury. We conclude defendant has not shown cause for reversal.

The burden of proving ineffective assistance of counsel is on the defendant. (*People v. Pope* (1979) 23 Cal.3d 412, 425, overruled on another ground in *People v.*

*Berryman* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 1048, 1081, fn. 10.) “To secure reversal of a conviction upon the ground of ineffective assistance of counsel under either the state or federal Constitution, a defendant must establish (1) that defense counsel’s performance fell below an objective standard of reasonableness, i.e., that counsel’s performance did not meet the standard to be expected of a reasonably competent attorney, and (2) that there is a reasonable probability that defendant would have obtained a more favorable result absent counsel’s shortcomings. [Citations.] ‘A reasonable probability is a probability sufficient to undermine confidence in the outcome.’ [Citations.]” (*People v. Cunningham* (2001) 25 Cal.4th 926, 1003; see generally *Strickland v. Washington* (1984) 466 U.S. 668, 687-694.)

“If the record contains no explanation for the challenged behavior, an appellate court will reject the claim of ineffective assistance ‘unless counsel was asked for an explanation and failed to provide one, or unless there simply could be no satisfactory explanation.’ [Citation.]” (*People v. Kipp* (1998) 18 Cal.4th 349, 367.) In other words, “in assessing a Sixth Amendment attack on trial counsel’s adequacy mounted on *direct appeal*, competency is *presumed* unless the record *affirmatively* excludes a rational basis for the trial attorney’s choice. [Citations.]” (*People v. Musselwhite* (1998) 17 Cal.4th 1216, 1260, original italics.)

“The right to counsel guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment to the federal Constitution includes the right of counsel to make a closing argument in a criminal case. [Citation.]” (*People v. Diggs* (1986) 177 Cal.App.3d 958, 969, fn. omitted.) “Closing argument may be waived in an appropriate case as a matter of tactics. [Citations.] However, having chosen to make a closing argument, counsel cannot argue against his client. [Citations.] More particularly, unless his client consents, counsel cannot expressly or impliedly argue to the jury that his client is guilty. [Citations.]” (*Id.* at p. 970.)



Defense counsel’s closing argument at defendant’s trial was, as defendant asserts, brief, covering approximately five pages of reporter’s transcript. Counsel argued the concept of reasonable doubt in general, but was not factually specific. In so doing, however, he did not (contrary to defendant’s assertion on appeal) argue against defendant or imply defendant was guilty.<sup>8</sup>

“ ‘The decision of how to argue to the jury after the presentation of evidence is inherently tactical’ [citation], and there is a ‘strong presumption’ that counsel’s actions were sound trial strategy under the circumstances prevailing at trial. [Citation.]” (*People v. Samayoa* (1997) 15 Cal.4th 795, 856; see *People v. Cudjo* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 585, 634-635; *People v. Mayfield* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 142, 186.) “The mere fact that the issue could have been argued differently, or with a different emphasis or focus, does not establish ineffective assistance. [Citation.]” (*People v. Mincey* (1992) 2 Cal.4th 408, 471; see *People v. Jennings* (1991) 53 Cal.3d 334, 379-380.)

“[T]he appellate record sheds no light on why trial counsel acted as he did; he was not asked to explain his performance; although we may doubt that a satisfactory explanation could be provided, we are unable to conclude that it could not.” (*People v. Bell* (1989) 49 Cal.3d 502, 546.) Accordingly, defendant’s claim is rejected on appeal.

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<sup>8</sup> Citing *McCoy v. Louisiana* (2018) 584 U.S. \_\_\_\_ [138 S.Ct. 1500], defendant claims “[a] criminal defendant has a constitutional right to insist that his lawyer argue his innocence in closing argument.” *McCoy* dealt with a situation in which, over the defendant’s express objection, defense counsel conceded guilt after concluding the evidence was overwhelming and a concession afforded the defendant the best chance of avoiding a death sentence. (*Id.* at pp. \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ [138 S.Ct. at pp. 1505-1507].) The United States Supreme Court held that “[w]hen a client expressly asserts that the objective of ‘his defence’ is to maintain innocence of the charged criminal acts, his lawyer must abide by that objective and may not override it by conceding guilt. [Citations.]” (*Id.* at p. \_\_\_\_ [138 S.Ct. at p. 1509].) The record before us contains nothing to suggest *McCoy* is implicated.

### III

#### SENTENCING ISSUES

Defendant was sentenced on January 25, 2018. The probation officer recommended imposition of concurrent terms of 27 years to life on counts 1 and 2, calculated as the upper seven-year term for each violation of section 246, plus 20 years for each firearm enhancement (§ 12022.53, subd. (c)), plus an indeterminate life term for each of the gang enhancements (§ 186.22, subd. (b)(4)(B)). The probation officer further recommended a stay of the section 12022.5 firearm enhancements.

At the sentencing hearing, the only subjects discussed were whether the aggravated terms should be imposed for the section 246 violations, and whether concurrent or consecutive sentences were appropriate. The court ultimately imposed two consecutive terms of 23 years to life. It also imposed a four-year term on each count pursuant to section 12022.5, but stayed those terms pursuant to section 12022.53, subdivision (f).<sup>9</sup>

#### **A. The Firearm Enhancements**

A firearm use enhancement may not be imposed pursuant to section 12022.5 where use of a firearm is an element of the underlying offense. (§ 12022.5, subd. (a).) This precludes application of such an enhancement to the crime proscribed by section 246. (*People v. Kramer* (2002) 29 Cal.4th 720, 723, fn. 2.) Accordingly, the Attorney General concedes the section 12022.5 enhancements imposed here must be stricken. We will order the judgment modified accordingly.

The Attorney General also agrees remand is appropriate to permit the trial court to exercise its discretion whether to strike the section 12022.53 enhancements.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Section 12022.53, subdivision (f) prohibits imposition of an enhancement pursuant to section 12022.5 when an enhancement pursuant to section 12022.53 is imposed.

<sup>10</sup> A violation of section 246 is not listed, in section 12022.53, subdivision (a), as one of the felonies to which section 12022.53 applies. Because defendant received a life term

Effective January 1, 2018, Senate Bill No. 620 (2017-2018 Reg. Sess.) (Stats. 2017, ch. 682, § 2) gave trial courts previously unavailable discretion to strike or dismiss enhancements imposed pursuant to section 12022.53 “in the interest of justice pursuant to Section 1385 . . . .” (§ 12022.53, subd. (h).)<sup>11</sup> Defendant was sentenced after the effective date of the legislation, and a reviewing court generally presumes the trial court knew and applied the correct law in performing its duties. (*People v. Nance* (1991) 1 Cal.App.4th 1453, 1456.) However, “ [d]efendants are entitled to sentencing decisions made in the exercise of the “informed discretion” of the sentencing court. [Citations.] A court which is unaware of the scope of its discretionary powers can no more exercise that “informed discretion” than one whose sentence is or may have been based on misinformation regarding a material aspect of a defendant’s record.’ [Citation.] In such circumstances, [the California Supreme Court has] held that the appropriate remedy is to remand for resentencing unless the record ‘clearly indicate[s]’ that the trial court would have reached the same conclusion ‘even if it had been aware that it had such discretion.’ [Citations.]” (*People v. Gutierrez* (2014) 58 Cal.4th 1354, 1391.)

We agree with the parties that the record strongly suggests the court, counsel, and probation officer all were unaware of the change in the law.<sup>12</sup> There is no clear indication the trial court would have imposed either or both enhancements had it known it

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on each count pursuant to section 186.22, subdivision (b)(4), however, he falls within section 12022.53, subdivision (a)(17), which makes section 12022.53 applicable to “[a]ny felony punishable by death or imprisonment in the state prison for life.” (See *People v. Jones* (2009) 47 Cal.4th 566, 568-569.)

<sup>11</sup> The same discretion was granted with respect to enhancements imposed pursuant to section 12022.5. (§ 12022.5, subd. (c), as amended by Stats. 2017, ch. 682, § 1.)

<sup>12</sup> Defendant cites to a statement in the probation officer’s report that section 12022.53 enhancements “cannot be stayed or stricken . . . .” This statement appeared in the original probation report. It was not repeated in the amended report that was signed as having been read and considered by the trial court. Nevertheless, the amended report implied the enhancements were mandatory.

was not required to do so. Accordingly, we will remand the matter to give the court the opportunity to exercise its discretion with respect to the section 12022.53, subdivision (c) enhancements.<sup>13</sup>

**B. Franklin**

Defendant, who was 19 years old at the time of the offenses, contends the matter should be remanded to afford him the opportunity to present evidence and information relevant to his eventual youth offender parole hearing, pursuant to *People v. Franklin* (2016) 63 Cal.4th 261 (*Franklin*). We disagree.

Generally speaking, a person who was sentenced to a lengthy prison term for an offense committed when he or she was age 25 or younger, is entitled to a youth offender parole hearing. (§ 3051, subd. (a)(1).) When assessing a prisoner’s suitability for parole, the parole board is required to “give great weight to the diminished culpability of youth as compared to adults, the hallmark features of youth, and any subsequent growth and increased maturity of the prisoner . . . .” (§ 4801, subd. (c); see § 3051, subd. (f)(1).)

In *Franklin*, the California Supreme Court reasoned that the foregoing statutes “contemplate that information regarding the juvenile offender’s characteristics and circumstances at the time of the offense will be available at a youth offender parole hearing to facilitate the [parole board’s] consideration. . . . Assembling . . . statements ‘about the individual before the crime’ is typically a task more easily done at or near the time of the juvenile’s offense rather than decades later . . . .” (*Franklin, supra*, 63 Cal.4th at pp. 283-284.)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> We express no opinion as to how the trial court should exercise its discretion. If, after remand, there is no change in sentence with respect to the enhancement imposed as to count 1, the abstract of judgment must be corrected to show that enhancement was imposed pursuant to section 12022.53, subdivision (c), not section 12022.55, subdivision (c) as the abstract currently states.

<sup>14</sup> When first enacted, section 3051 applied to juveniles in the true sense of the word: offenders under age 18. (Stats. 2013, ch. 312, § 4, eff. Jan. 1, 2014.) The constitutional underpinnings of the statute, as discussed in *Graham v. Florida* (2010) 560 U.S. 48,

The state high court concluded that Franklin, who was 16 years old when he committed murder, and who was sentenced before the decisions in *Miller* and *Caballero* and before the enactment of sections 3051 and 4801 (*Franklin, supra*, 63 Cal.4th at p. 268), may not have had an adequate opportunity at sentencing “to make a record of mitigating evidence tied to his youth” (*id.* at p. 269). Accordingly, it remanded the matter not for resentencing, but to permit the trial court to determine “whether Franklin was afforded sufficient opportunity to make a record of information relevant to his eventual youth offender parole hearing.” (*Id.* at p. 284.) If Franklin did not have sufficient opportunity, the trial court was empowered to receive pertinent evidence and information from both parties, with “[t]he goal of any such proceeding [being] to provide an opportunity for the parties to make an accurate record of the juvenile offender’s characteristics and circumstances at the time of the offense so that the [parole board], years later, may properly discharge its obligation to ‘give great weight to’ youth-related factors [citation] in determining whether the offender is ‘fit to rejoin society’ despite having committed a serious crime ‘while he was a child in the eyes of the law’ [citation].” (*Ibid.*)

Although little, if any, information contemplated by *Franklin* was presented at sentencing, we conclude defendant is not entitled to a remand. *People v. Woods* (2018) 19 Cal.App.5th 1080 is on point:

“Unlike the defendant in *Franklin*, defendant was 19 years old at the time of his offense and thus he was not subjected to a sentence that violated constitutional principles prohibiting a minor from being sentenced to the functional equivalent of life without parole without considering how minors are different from adults and how those differences counsel against

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*Miller v. Alabama* (2012) 567 U.S. 460, and *People v. Caballero* (2012) 55 Cal.4th 262 (see *Franklin, supra*, 63 Cal.4th at p. 277), also distinguish between juveniles and adults. Our state Legislature has since expanded the scope of the statute, first to offenders under age 23 (Stats. 2015, ch. 471, § 1, eff. Jan. 1, 2016), and most recently to offenders age 25 or younger (Stats. 2017, ch. 675, § 1, eff. Jan. 1, 2018).

irrevocably sentencing a minor to a lifetime in prison. Moreover, unlike the defendant in *Franklin*, defendant was not sentenced at a time when youth offender parole hearings were not yet part of California law. . . . Thus, unlike the situation in *Franklin*, when defendant was sentenced in this case . . . section 3051 was already in place and had already been amended to encompass offenders like him . . . , and subdivision (c) of . . . section 4801 already identified the various factors to be considered at a youth offender parole hearing. Thus unlike the defendant in *Franklin*, defendant had both the opportunity and incentive to put information on the record related to a future youth offender parole hearing.

“Under these circumstances, there is no reasonable basis for concluding, as defendant argues, that defendant was denied a sufficient opportunity to put on the record the kinds of information that . . . sections 3051 and 4801, subdivision (c) deem relevant at a youth offender parole hearing.” (*People v. Woods, supra*, 19 Cal.App.5th at pp. 1088-1089, italics added; accord, *People v. Medrano* (2019) 40 Cal.App.5th 961, 963; cf. *People v. Rodriguez* (2018) 4 Cal.5th 1123, 1131-1132; *In re Loza* (2018) 27 Cal.App.5th 797, 807; *People v. Jones* (2017) 7 Cal.App.5th 787, 819.)

Defendant says nothing in the record shows defense counsel realized he had the opportunity or duty to make a record of information relevant to defendant’s eventual youth offender parole hearing. To the contrary, when the court and parties were setting a date for sentencing, the court asked whether defense counsel wanted a long probation report or a short probation report. Defense counsel requested a long report, as there were issues he wanted to brief regarding defendant’s age and youth. The court agreed it would be helpful for him to have “all that social information.” Thus, it appears a *Franklin*-type hearing was contemplated. Although defendant was represented by different counsel (albeit apparently from the same law office as trial counsel) at sentencing, nothing in the record suggests that attorney was unaware of *Franklin*.

Defendant says that since the matter is being remanded with respect to the firearm enhancements, we should additionally order the court to hold a *Franklin* hearing. We decline to place an extra burden on the trial court where defendant did not avail himself

of the opportunity to make the pertinent record at sentencing and it is clear he would not have been prevented from doing so.

This does not preclude defendant from making a pertinent record, however. In *In re Cook* (2019) 7 Cal.5th 439, 446-447, the California Supreme Court held that an offender whose conviction is final may file a motion in the trial court under section 1203.01 for the purpose of making a record to preserve evidence of youth-related factors. Accordingly, our rejection of defendant's *Franklin* claim is without prejudice to defendant "filing a motion in the trial court for a *Franklin* proceeding under the authority of section 1203.01" and *Cook, supra*, at page 460. (See *People v. Medrano, supra*, 40 Cal.App.5th at p. 963.)

### DISPOSITION

The judgment is modified to strike the section 12022.5 enhancements. As so modified, the judgment is affirmed. The matter is remanded to the trial court with directions to exercise its discretion pursuant to section 12022.53, subdivision (h) and, if necessary following exercise of that discretion, to resentence defendant accordingly. The trial court shall cause to be prepared an amended abstract of judgment reflecting the foregoing modification and any resentencing, and, if no resentencing occurs, showing the enhancement on count 1 was imposed pursuant to section 12022.53, subdivision (c), not section 12022.55, subdivision (c). The trial court shall further cause a certified copy of the amended abstract of judgment to be transmitted to the appropriate authorities.

  
DETJEN, Acting P.J.

I CONCUR:

  
MEEHAN, J.

SMITH, J., Concurring and Dissenting.

Renteria was convicted of two counts of shooting at an inhabited dwelling. Gang enhancements attached to each count of conviction were found true.

I respectfully dissent from the majority's conclusion that the gang enhancement attached to each count of conviction was supported by sufficient evidence. I would reverse the gang enhancement as to each count as well as the 20-year Penal Code<sup>1</sup> section 12022.53, subdivision (c), firearm enhancements triggered once Renteria became subject to life terms pursuant to section 186.22, subdivision (b)(4)(A), as a consequence of the gang enhancement findings. Otherwise, I concur with the majority opinion.

#### **I. Evidence was Insufficient to Support Gang Enhancements**

Penal Code section 186.22, also known as the Street Terrorism and Prevention Act (the STEP Act), imposes various punishments on individuals who commit gang-related crimes. The gang enhancement codified in section 186.22, subdivision (b), applies to those who commit felonies “for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with any criminal street gang.” A criminal street gang, in turn, is defined in section 186.22, subdivision (f), as any “ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons” that shares a common name or common identifying symbol; that has as one of its “primary activities” the commission of certain enumerated offenses; and “whose members individually or collectively” have committed or attempted to commit certain predicate offenses. “To prove that a criminal street gang exists in accordance with these statutory provisions, the prosecution must demonstrate that the gang satisfies the separate elements of the STEP Act’s definition *and* that the defendant sought to benefit that particular gang when committing the underlying felony.” (*People v. Prunty* (2015) 62 Cal.4th 59, 67 (*Prunty*), italics added.)

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<sup>1</sup> Undesignated statutory references are to the Penal Code.



Here, the prosecution sought to demonstrate that a county-level Sureño gang satisfied the separate elements of the STEP Act’s definition of a criminal street gang and that Renteria sought to benefit that specific gang when committing the underlying shootings. The prosecution’s evidence in these respects was deficient. The prosecution failed to satisfy all the elements of the STEP Act’s definition of a criminal street gang, with reference to the Sureño gang. Specifically, there was insufficient evidence to support the “primary activities” element of the statutory definition of a criminal street gang. The prosecution adduced no direct evidence of the primary activities of the Sureño gang and the indirect evidence was insufficient. In addition, the prosecution failed to prove that, when committing the underlying shootings, Renteria acted to benefit the county-level Sureño gang, as opposed to the South Side Kings, a Sureño subset of which he was a member. Finally, the prosecution’s evidence indicated that the county-level Sureño gang operated through a collection of subsets and the prosecution’s theory of the existence of the county-level Sureño gang necessarily turned on the conduct of its subsets, but the prosecution failed to show that the subsets were united by “an associational or organizational connection.” (*Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 67.) Therefore, the gang enhancements should be reversed for insufficiency of the evidence.

***A. Insufficient Evidence of Primary Activities Element of Street Gang Definition***

The prosecution introduced expert testimony from its gang expert regarding the county-level Sureño gang. The gang expert indicated the county-level Sureño gang was geographically dispersed and operated through subsets such as the South Side Kings, SUR Town Locos, Loco Park, Wicked Ass Sureños, and South Side Winos. The gang expert further indicated the county-level Sureño gang was large, with no less than 500 members.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The gang expert indicated the Sureño gang operated county-wide, which would include the various metropolitan and rural areas of Tulare County. Renteria’s crimes

The expert described three predicate offenses that he had personally investigated in the city of Tulare and that he attributed to Sureño gang members.<sup>3</sup> However, the expert offered no testimony about the primary activities of the county-level Sureño gang.

The majority asserts, without discussion, that the gang expert's testimony regarding three predicate offenses also established the primary activities of the county-level Sureño gang. (Maj. opn. *ante*, at pp. 10-11.) On the instant record, I disagree with this assertion.

The prosecutor asked the prosecution's gang expert, Tulare Police Officer Jacob Adney, to give examples of crimes committed on behalf of the Sureño gang, in order to show that the Sureño gang engaged in a pattern of criminal activity. Adney described three predicate offenses. Adney testified that, on April 10, 2014, four people were in a car, all four were Sureño gang members. One of them, Francisco Cortez, was found in possession of "a .380[-]caliber firearm" and was subsequently convicted of criminal possession of a firearm (felon in possession) under section 29800. Adney next testified that on June 12, 2014, a "loaded stolen firearm" was found in a "vehicle occupied by" Fabio Delreal, a Sureño gang member, who was subsequently convicted of criminal possession of a firearm (felon in possession) under section 29800. Finally, Adney testified that on February 4, 2009, shots were fired, from a passing car, at a car pulling out of a driveway. The suspect vehicle was located three days later, with two firearms in it. Armando Flores, a Sureño gang member who was in the car, was convicted of criminal possession of a firearm. Another person who was in the car, Daniel Villa Gomez, was convicted of a separate offense, "shooting [at a vehicle]" under section 246.

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occurred in the city of Tulare. In addition to the city of Tulare, Tulare County contains the metropolitan areas of Visalia and Porterville, along with numerous smaller communities.

<sup>3</sup> The jury was instructed that the predicate offenses included shooting at an occupied motor vehicle and two types of firearm possession offenses.

Adney did not identify the subsets of the perpetrators of the predicate offenses. He also did not testify about the primary activities of the Sureño gang in Tulare County or any of its constituent subsets, including the South Side Kings (of which Renteria was a member).

In assessing the nature of the gang’s primary activities, the trier of fact may look to both the past and present criminal activities of the gang. (*People v. Sengpadychith* (2001) 26 Cal.4th 316, 323 (*Sengpadychith*.) Isolated criminal conduct, however, is not enough. “Sufficient proof of the gang’s primary activities might consist of evidence that the group’s members *consistently and repeatedly* have committed criminal activity listed in the gang statute.” (*Id.* at p. 324.) “Also sufficient might be expert testimony” based on an adequate factual foundation. (*Ibid.*)

Predicate offenses may constitute, depending on the context and record, evidence of the primary activities of the gang in question. (*Sengpadychith, supra*, 26 Cal.4th at p. 323 [evidence that gang members committed predicate offenses alone can be, but is “[n]ot necessarily,” sufficient to prove the gang’s primary activities].) Here, the People adduced proof of three incidents involving crimes by Sureño members: two incidents from 2014 and one from 2009. Firearm possession offenses by Cortez and Delreal in 2014, and, *five years earlier*, in 2009, a firearm possession offense by Flores and an offense of shooting at an occupied vehicle by Gomez, is insufficient to show that the commission of these crimes was a primary activity of the county-level Sureño gang. This evidence merely showed that members of the 500-strong, county-wide Sureño gang had committed a few crimes over the last five years. (See *Ibid.* [a gang’s primary activities, by definition, “exclude the occasional commission of [qualifying] crimes by the group’s members”].)

The county-level Sureño gang at issue was a relatively complex entity—it had at least 500 members and operated county-wide through multiple subsets. Without further evidence regarding the activities of the gang, there was insufficient evidence for the jury

to conclude that commission of the specific offenses at issue (i.e., illegal firearm possession and shooting at an occupied vehicle) constituted “one of the group’s ‘chief’ or ‘principal’ occupations.”<sup>4</sup> (*Sengpadychith, supra*, 26 Cal. 4th at p. 323.)

In my view, given the instant record, the People did not adduce sufficient evidence of the primary activities of the county-level Sureño gang, and, in turn, failed to prove that the county-level Sureño constituted a criminal street gang for purposes of the gang enhancement statute.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, I would reverse the gang enhancement that was applied to each count of conviction.

The majority notes that, “[a]s part of proof of the gang enhancement, the prosecution must prove the existence of a criminal street gang.” (Maj. opn. *ante*, at p. 17.) Further, the majority explicitly takes the position that, here, the “predicate acts were committed by Sureños” and “the primary activities of the Sureño criminal street gang in Tulare County were those committed as the predicate acts.” (Maj. opn. *ante*, at p. 21.) However, when it is suggested their position—that the predicate acts sufficed to establish

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<sup>4</sup> The jury was instructed, in relevant part, that a criminal street gang was a group that had “as one or more of its primary activities, the commission of shooting at [an] occupied motor vehicle (PC 246), carrying a loaded firearm-not registered (PC 12031(a)(1)), or felon in possession of a firearm (PC 29800(a)(1)).” The jury was further instructed: “In order to qualify as a *primary activity*, the crime must be one of the group’s chief or principal activities rather than an occasional act committed by one or more persons who happen to be members of the group.”

<sup>5</sup> “[T]he ‘criminal street gang’ component of a gang enhancement requires proof of three essential elements: (1) that there be an ‘ongoing’ association involving three or more participants, having a ‘common name or common identifying sign or symbol’; (2) that the group has as one of its ‘primary activities’ the commission of one or more specified crimes; and (3) the group’s members either separately or as a group ‘have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.’” (*People v. Vy* (2004) 122 Cal.App.4th 1209, 1222, overruled on other grounds by *People v. Sanchez* (2016) 63 Cal.4th 665, as recognized in *In re Thomas* (2018) 30 Cal.App.5th 744, 752-753; see *In re Alexander L.* (2007) 149 Cal.App.4th 605, 610-611.)

the primary activities of the Sureño gang—is incorrect, the majority in turn asserts we are precluded from addressing the primary activities element of the gang enhancement.

Here, the primary issue Renteria raises on appeal is a challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence supporting the imposition of the gang enhancements. This issue requires us to review the entire record to ascertain whether sufficient evidence supports the gang enhancements. The deficiency in the evidence with respect to the “primary activities” element of the gang enhancements is readily apparent on the face of the record. Under these circumstances, we are duty bound to address it. (See, e.g., *United States Nat. Bank of Ore. v. Independent Ins. Agents of America, Inc.* (1993) 508 U.S. 439, 447 [holding that “a court may consider an issue ‘antecedent to ... and ultimately dispositive of’ the dispute before it, even an issue the parties fail to identify and brief,” quoting *Arcadia v. Ohio Power Co.* (1990) 498 U.S. 73, 77; *United States v. Tutty* (2d. Cir. 2010) 612 F.3d 128, 131 [courts of review may consider unraised issues when justice so requires].) Indeed, although the parties’ briefing may be inartful, the question of primary activities is part and parcel of the issue of the sufficiency of the evidence supporting the gang enhancements and underpins the majority’s own analysis.

Nonetheless, the majority declares we are not “free to create new issues upon which to reverse while failing to afford the parties the opportunity to address them.” (Maj. opn. *ante*, at p. 22.) The “primary activities” issue is not cut from whole cloth as the majority suggests, and the parties were specifically given an opportunity, pursuant to an issue letter from this court, to address the issue of the prosecution’s proof of the existence of a criminal street gang under *Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th 59. The majority, however, takes issue with the “heading” under which I have addressed the question of the insufficiency of the evidence supporting the primary activities element. (Maj. opn. *ante*, at p. 22.)

Finally, the majority contends that addressing the sufficiency of the evidence to support the primary activities element would contravene “the principle of party

presentation” as explicated in *United States v. Sineneng-Smith* (2020) 140 S.Ct. 1575 (*Sineneng-Smith*). The majority’s reliance on *Sineneng-Smith* is perplexing as the scenario addressed in that case bears no resemblance to the instant matter.

In *Sineneng-Smith*, the federal high court faulted the Ninth Circuit’s handling of the case. The Ninth Circuit, following oral argument in the case, declined to hear the party-presented controversy, and instead sua sponte named three amici and invited them to advance issues framed by the panel (including a question appellant herself never raised and which cut against the appellant’s theory at trial), and held a second oral argument at which the amici were given greater roles than the parties themselves. (*Sineneng-Smith, supra*, 140 S.Ct. at pp. at 1578, 1580-1581.) The high court determined these drastic steps contravened the party presentation principle as the case ended up being “radical[ly] transform[ed].” (*Id.* at pp. 1578-1579, 1582.) At the same time, the high court made clear that the “party presentation principle is supple, not ironclad,” and specifically noted that “[t]here are no doubt circumstances in which a modest initiating role for a court is appropriate.” (*Id.* at p. 1579.) Furthermore, *Sineneng-Smith* reinforced the general principle that “a court is not hidebound by the precise arguments of counsel.” (*Id.* at p. 1581.) The majority’s reliance on *Sineneng-Smith*, where the Ninth Circuit sidelined the parties and solicited arguments from strangers to the litigation, is unavailing.

***B. Evidence was Insufficient to Show Renteria Acted to Benefit County-Level Sureño Gang***

As the majority notes, the prosecution’s theory was that the gang Renteria acted to benefit was a county-level Sureño gang. (Maj. opn. *ante*, at pp. 12, 15.) However, the prosecution’s gang expert opined that Renteria was a member of the South Side Kings, a subset of a county-level Sureño gang, *and* of the county-level Sureño gang as well. Here, assuming there was sufficient evidence to show that Renteria acted to benefit a gang, the evidence was insufficient to show that the gang he acted to benefit was the county-level Sureño gang as opposed to his own subset, the South Side Kings.

The evidence that Renteria was a member of South Side Kings and the Sureño gang did not automatically clarify which of these two gangs he sought to benefit when he committed the shootings. Accordingly, the prosecution presented other evidence to support its theory that Renteria sought to benefit the Sureño gang when he committed the instant shootings. Specifically, the prosecution presented evidence of an incident involving Renteria and a group of unknown boys that occurred at some point before the shootings took place (some unidentified boys in the group had shouted a Sureño slur). The prosecution also presented the opinion of its gang expert that the shootings were committed to benefit the county-level Sureño gang.

However, this evidence was insufficient to show Renteria sought to benefit the county-level Sureño gang. First, the prosecution failed to show that the earlier incident, in which some unknown and unidentified boys had shouted a Sureño slur, was connected to the shootings. As for the gang expert's testimony that the gang Renteria acted to benefit was the Sureño gang, that opinion was based largely on the evidence of the earlier incident. More importantly, the gang expert's opinion was elicited in response to a hypothetical question posed by the prosecutor, but the hypothetical question misstated the relevant facts, thereby eviscerating the evidentiary value of the expert's opinion. I will explain below why the evidence regarding the earlier incident was insufficient to connect it to the shootings, as well as why the hypothetical question underlying the gang expert's opinion that the gang Renteria acted to benefit was the county-level Sureño gang, was improper.

**(i) Earlier Incident Involving Group of Boys**

The earlier incident was witnessed and described by Anthony A., who subsequently also saw Renteria shoot at the two houses. Renteria lived only a few houses away from Anthony's house and from the houses at which the shots were directed. The earlier incident took place sometime before the charged shootings, which occurred shortly before midnight, on August 8, 2014. There is no evidence in the record as to the

time of the earlier incident or of a tight temporal connection between the earlier incident and the subsequent shootings at midnight.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the prior incident, Anthony testified that a group of five or six boys, one of whom was Renteria, had walked past his house. “[S]ome” in the group were shouting things, including “slang gang words” like “SUR, trece.” Anthony was familiar with Renteria, who lived nearby and always interacted respectfully with Anthony and Anthony’s wife. Anthony asked Renteria what the boys were up to and Renteria explained some were drunk, and everyone was going home. The boys continued across an open field next to Anthony’s house. Anthony noted it was common for people to cut through the field. Renteria’s explanation that some of the boys were drunk (presumably those who were shouting things) and were being helped home, was uncontradicted. Anthony went back into his house after talking to Renteria, who lived immediately north of the open field.

A little while later, Anthony heard a sound like a “pop” in the field. Anthony was not asked and did not further specify how much time had passed between the prior incident involving the group of boys and the time he heard the pop in the field. Anthony came back outside. He turned his front porch light off and sat on the porch in the dark. He saw Renteria and an unidentified person emerge from the field area.<sup>7</sup> The two walked down a side street (Denair); two minutes later the two walked back up that same side street. Upon their return, Renteria first shot at one house (near Anthony’s house) and

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<sup>6</sup> The prosecutor asked Anthony: “All right. About what time was this shooting?” Anthony responded: “I don’t really recall the time. I know it was pretty late ‘cause it was really dark at that time so it was probably maybe 10:00, 10:30.” Later Anthony repeated that it was “dark” when the shootings occurred. Anthony’s estimation of the time the shootings occurred was somewhat incorrect. The shootings occurred around 11:50 p.m., as reflected in police dispatch times.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony “only recognized one” of the two, namely Renteria.



then, after dogs barked at the neighboring house, Renteria shot at the latter house as well. Renteria and his unidentified companion then ran away.

Here, the People did not show the earlier incident involving the group of five or six boys (some of whom were evidently drunk and were shouting gang slurs) was connected to the shootings. There was no evidence, for example, that the earlier incident occurred immediately before the shootings, such that the jury properly could infer the two incidents were temporally connected. Indeed, Anthony clarified that the incident with the group of boys, during which he spoke to Renteria, did *not* occur at the time of the shootings.<sup>8</sup> In addition, there was no evidence that Renteria or his companion during the shooting had shouted a gang slur during the prior incident. Indeed, there was no evidence that Renteria's companion during the shootings was even *present* during the earlier incident and part of the group of boys involved there. Aside from Renteria, the record contains no information about any of the boys in the larger group. Similarly, the record is silent as to the person who was with Renteria when Renteria shot the houses.

**(ii) Gang Expert's Opinion was Based on Improper Hypothetical**

The prosecution called Tulare Police Officer Jacob Adney as its gang expert. Adney testified that a Sureño gang existed at the county level in Tulare county. His testimony indicated the Sureño gang was not local to the city of Tulare, where Renteria lived and the instant shootings occurred, but operated throughout the county.

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<sup>8</sup> As noted above, Anthony testified that first the group of boys went by his house; that was when he spoke to Renteria. A little while later, after he heard the pop sound in the field, Anthony came back outside and saw Renteria and another figure go south on Denair, before they returned, and Renteria committed the shootings. Anthony was shown the photographic line-up in which he had identified Renteria. Anthony was asked: "And so you talked to the same person that's depicted in that photograph [who] was one of those two people that came and passed by your house the second time?" Anthony responded: "Yes." Anthony was asked a followup question: "Okay. Now, that's not the time of the shooting; correct?" Anthony replied: "No." Anthony thus clarified that the time he talked to Renteria and the time of the shooting were separate, not contemporaneous, events.

Accordingly, it was a large gang, with “no less than 500” members, collectively. The expert testified that the Sureño gang operated through subsets and named multiple subsets that comprised the gang (e.g., South Side Kings (SSK), SUR Town Locos, Loco Park, Wicked Ass Sureños, South Side Winos).

Adney testified that Renteria was a member of the South Side Kings subset of the county-level Sureño gang and of the Sureño gang. Adney’s conclusion that Renteria was part of these gangs was based in part on an incident from June 2011. Renteria and another person were found at a vacant residence that had been tagged with blue gang graffiti; the person with Renteria was holding a can of spray paint. The graffiti consisted, among other things, of the letters, “SSK,” on the interior and exterior of the residence. Adney testified that the person with Renteria was “a part of the Sureño gang, and he’s also a part of the same subset that Cristian Renteria is a part of[,] which is the South Side Kings.”

When Adney interrogated Renteria after Renteria was arrested on August 13, 2014, for the instant offense, Renteria acknowledged that he was a member of the South Side Kings and the Sureño gang. Renteria was asked, “You’re a southerner?” He answered, “Yeah.” He was asked, as a follow-up, “What are you?” He replied, “Kings.” In closing argument, the prosecutor referred to Renteria’s interrogation: “You also have the defendant’s admission after his arrest in the video interview when he first tries to deny it, but then when Detective Adney says come on, let’s be real, he says okay, yeah, I’m a Southerner, I’m with the Kings.”

Adney described the colors and symbols associated with the Sureño gang as well as with its subsets. Adney testified that gang members sometimes uttered a gang “slur” during the commission of a crime, to draw attention to the crime. Specifically, he said: “If you’re committing a crime, and you’re yelling out a gang slur, something about your gang, you know, whether it’s King, South Side, SUR or trece, whatever it is, what that is sending a message letting [people] know who’s responsible for this.” Adney noted the

word “Sureño” meant “Southerner.” He further explained that the Sureño gang identified with “[t]he color blue” and “the [n]umber 13.” Adney said the word “SUR” was “Spanish for south” and the word “trece” was “Spanish for 13.” Adney also noted that the Sureño gang’s rivals were the Norteño gang. As for the subsets of the county-level Sureño gang, Adney testified that all the subsets of that gang similarly identified with the color blue and the number 13, and harbored an enmity with the Norteño gang.

Finally, the prosecutor presented a hypothetical question to Adney, in which he asked Adney to assume certain facts, to elicit his opinions regarding the instant shootings. The relevance of the hypothetical scenario, and of Adney’s testimony about it, depended on the extent to which the facts of the hypothetical matched the facts in evidence. However, the hypothetical scenario posited by the prosecutor misstated and deviated from the facts in evidence, thereby eviscerating the evidentiary value of Adney’s testimony related to the hypothetical.

The prosecutor posed the following hypothetical question:

“Assume that a witness observes several individuals near his house later at night. He hears one or more of them calling out SUR trece. He continues to watch for a few minutes, and one of them comes back, produces a firearm and shoots at two houses.

“The first house is a residence known to be associated with Norteño gang activity. The second house is shot at after the dogs on that property start barking.

“Assume that a sawed-off shotgun is seen in the garage of the first house.

“Assume that this happens in an area that is claimed by both Norteño and Sureño gangs as their territory.

“Assume that the shooter is a member of the Sureño gang and that earlier that same night, he was hit up by some individuals while he was walking home, and he believes that Norteño gang members pulled a gun on him.

“In your opinion, would the shooting committed under those circumstances be committed ... at the direction of, for the benefit of or in association with a criminal street gang with a specific intent to promote, further or assist in criminal conduct by gang members?”

Defense counsel objected on grounds the question “contain[ed] assumptions that have not been presented at trial.” The trial court sustained the objection in part. The court agreed the hypothetical was inaccurate to the extent it represented the first house that was shot at as associated with Norteño gang activity and this portion of the hypothetical was dropped.<sup>9</sup> The hypothetical deviated from the evidence in other critical

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<sup>9</sup> Although not relevant for the purposes of the present discussion, it appears the trial court correctly ruled there was no competent evidence linking Jack D.’s house with Norteño gang members at the time of the shootings. Adney had unsuccessfully attempted to show a connection between Jack D.’s house and Norteños. Adney described his contacts with a person called Robert P., Jr. Adney testified he had spoken to Robert P., Jr. on three occasions: once “in the area of Cross and H Street,” another time in front of Jack D.’s house on Merritt Avenue, and a third time at “Coelho and Cross.” Adney added that when he saw Robert P., Jr. at “Coelho and Cross,” a known Norteño was at the scene. However, Adney could not specify when these contacts with Robert P., Jr. occurred, and did not explain, regarding the instance when he saw Robert P., Jr. in front of Jack D.’s house, what Robert P., Jr. was doing there. Significantly, Adney did not testify that Robert P., Jr. was a Norteño. Rather, Adney simply indicated that, at some unspecified point in time, he had seen Robert P., Jr., at a random location, where a known Norteño was present, and at another unspecified time, had seen Robert P., Jr. in front of Jack D.’s house. Adney’s vague and attenuated testimony did not constitute competent evidence of a link between Jack D.’s house and Norteños.

The majority points to evidence that one of the officers who responded to the scene of the shootings, noticed a sawed-off shotgun in Jack D.’s garage. (Maj. opn. *ante*, at p. 5.) There is no further information in the record about the sawed-off shotgun spotted in the garage by the officer. More specifically, there is no evidence the weapon in question was a functional shotgun; nor did the officer investigate to whom the weapon belonged and why it was there. Based on the officer’s discovery, Renteria was interrogated as to whether he was threatened with a shotgun when he was hit up earlier in day, on the day the shootings occurred. Renteria denied he saw any gun when he was hit up, noting he only heard a “shoo shoo” sound like a shotgun during the encounter and ran away. The officer’s bare testimony that he happened to see a sawed-off shotgun in Jack D.’s garage does not support an inference that Jack D.’s house was associated with Norteños.

respects as well. As relevant here, the hypothetical did not match the events surrounding the shootings as described by Anthony, the only eyewitness to those events.

In the hypothetical, the prosecutor stated: “Assume that a witness observes several individuals near his house later at night. He hears one or more of them calling out SUR trece. *He continues to watch for a few minutes*, and one of them comes back, produces a firearm and shoots at two houses.” (Italics added.) However, as explained above, while Anthony noted he saw the group of boys a little while before the shootings occurred, he did not clarify how much time elapsed between the time he saw the boys and the time of the shootings. He confirmed, moreover, that the two incidents did not occur at the same time. Anthony also testified that following the incident with the group of boys, he went back inside his house. He only emerged later, after he heard a “pop” sound in the open field. It was then that he saw two people, one of whom was Renteria, walking down Denair, and sat down on his dark porch to see whether they would return. They returned two minutes later, whereupon Renteria shot at the houses.<sup>10</sup>

In giving his opinion as to whether the shootings benefitted the Sureño gang, Adney went much further than the hypothetical and assumed that *the shooter* shouted SUR trece *when* he committed the shootings, and, based on that assumption, opined that the shootings benefitted the Sureño gang. Specifically, he stated: “So when a Sureño gang member goes and does a shooting, it’s showing that he’s willing to put in work for the gang. He’s willing to show that he’s violent. He’s not going to be a coward, and *by saying the word SUR trece while they’re committing this act*, this is for everybody to know who’s responsible for this shooting. [¶] ... [¶] *And so not only is the subject*

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Finally, Jack. D. testified that none of the people living at his house had any gang connection.

<sup>10</sup> The hypothetical deviated from the facts in evidence in yet another respect. Although Renteria acknowledged during his interrogation that he was hit up earlier that day by potential Norteños, he did not say the hit up occurred when he was walking home or that it occurred by his home.

*committing the act*, not only is he showing that he's violent, *but because he's saying these words* and because he's a part of a much larger gang, it's enhancing the reputation of the whole gang as a whole.” (Italics and bold added.)

Defense counsel again objected: “Your Honor, I'd like to make an objection. The statement is nonresponsive to the hypothetical and also misstates the evidence in the answer. [¶] According to the hypothetical, the word SUR trece was said earlier in the evening, not during the commission of the offense, and there was no evidence as to who said that statement.” The prosecutor contended that SUR trece was said minutes before the shooting. The court overruled the objection.

The hypothetical, and use of it, were improper. (See *People v. Vang* (2011) 52 Cal.4th 1038, 1046 (*Vang*) [a hypothetical question posed to an expert must “assume facts within the limits of the evidence, not unfairly assembled”]; *People v. Boyette* (2002) 29 Cal.4th 381, 449 [while “ ‘an expert may render opinion testimony on the basis of facts given “in a hypothetical question that asks the expert to assume their truth,” ’ ” “a party cannot use this method of questioning a witness to place before the jury facts divorced from the actual evidence and for which no evidence is ever introduced”]; *People v. Franklin* (2016) 248 Cal.App.4th 938, 949 [“While an expert may render an opinion assuming the truth of facts set forth in a hypothetical question, the ‘hypothetical question must be rooted in facts shown by the evidence.’”]; *People v. Richardson* (2008) 43 Cal.4th 959, 1008 [an “expert’s opinion may not be based ‘on assumptions of fact without evidentiary support [citation], or on speculative or conjectural factors.’ ”].) Consequently, the expert’s testimony and opinions based on the facts assumed to be true in the hypothetical had no evidentiary value. In other words, the gang expert’s opinion that Renteria acted to benefit the Sureño gang was of no evidentiary significance. (See *Vang, supra*, 52 Cal.4th at p. 1046 [“A hypothetical question not based on the evidence is irrelevant and of no help to the jury.”]; *People v. Gardeley* (1996) 14 Cal.4th 605, 618

[“Like a house built on sand, the expert’s opinion is no better than the facts on which it is based.”], overruled on other grounds by *People v. Sanchez, supra*, 63 Cal.4th 665.)

The prosecutor similarly mischaracterized the evidence, if mistakenly, during his closing argument. In his closing argument the prosecutor highlighted the earlier incident involving the group of boys, characterizing it as having occurred “minutes” before the shootings, to draw a connection between Renteria and the Sureño gang. The prosecutor specifically observed that some boys had shouted “SUR trece” “minutes” before the shooting, to suggest that Renteria shot the houses to benefit, or in association with, the Sureño gang.<sup>11</sup> Not only did the evidence not show that the earlier incident occurred “minutes” before the shootings, but the record did not disclose substantial evidence to connect the earlier incident to the shootings.

Indeed, in testifying about gangs generally, Adney testified that a gang slur shouted *during* the commission of a crime serves to connect the crime to the relevant gang. Adney’s opinion testimony reiterated this principle, as he opined, “by saying the word SUR trece *while* they’re committing this act, this is for everybody to know who’s responsible for this shooting.” (Italics added.) However, here Anthony confirmed that the slurs were not shouted at the same time as the shootings. Furthermore, there was no evidence the slurs were shouted within a tight window of time in relation to the shootings, such that the shouting of the slurs could rationally be connected to the shootings. (Cf. *Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 67 [the defendant in *Prunty*, who identified as a Norteño and claimed membership in a particular Norteño subset, had “uttered gang slurs and invoked ‘Norte’ *when* shooting a perceived rival gang member,” italics added].)

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<sup>11</sup> In contrast to Anthony’s trial testimony, the prosecutor also argued, if mistakenly, that Anthony did not go back inside his house after speaking to Renteria during the incident involving the group of boys, but “decided to wait outside” his house.

**(iii) Conclusion: Evidence was Insufficient to Show Renteria Acted to Benefit Sureño Gang**

Here, the evidence was that Renteria was a member of the South Side Kings subset, which, along with other evidence, showed he was also a member of a larger, county-level Sureño gang. However, the hypothetical presented to the gang expert omitted any reference to the fact that Renteria was a member of the South Side Kings; rather, the gang expert was asked to assume that Renteria was simply a Sureño. More importantly, as discussed above, the hypothetical distorted the record in assuming that the earlier incident in which someone shouted SUR trece, a Sureño slur, was essentially contemporaneous with the shootings. Since Adney's opinion that the gang Renteria acted to benefit was the Sureño gang was tied to the prosecutor's improper hypothetical question (and encompassed additional, incorrect assumptions beyond those included in the hypothetical), it was ultimately irrelevant and of no help to the jury, if not prejudicial.

In light of this record, I conclude that the evidence was insufficient to support a conclusion, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the gang that Renteria acted to benefit was the county-level Sureño gang. Therefore, even assuming the prosecution proved the county-level Sureño gang existed as a criminal street gang with respect to predicate offenses and primary activities, there was insufficient evidence to prove that the gang Renteria acted to benefit was this specific gang, rather than his own subset, the South Side Kings. In turn, there was insufficient evidence to support the gang enhancements attached to the counts of conviction.

***C. Insufficient Evidence to Show Constituent Subsets of County-Level Sureño Gang Were United by an Associational or Organizational Connection***

As discussed above, the prosecution's theory was that Renteria committed the shootings to benefit the Sureño gang. The prosecution also posited that the Sureño gang existed as a criminal street gang as defined in section 186.22, subdivision (f). Officer Adney, the prosecution's gang expert, testified that the Sureño gang existed at the county level, was a large gang with "no less than 500 members," and operated through subsets,



such as the South Side Kings, SUR Town Locos, Loco Park, Wicked Ass Sureños, South Side Winos. The expert further testified, by answering a series of questions in the affirmative, that the subsets worked together, shared information, shared weapons, and operated as a single entity. He also affirmatively answered a question as to whether he had personally investigated cases where different subsets had worked as a single organization to commit crimes.<sup>12</sup>

The expert's testimony posited a county-level structure where a collection of subsets, totaling 500 members, collectively operated as the Sureño gang, or, stated differently, where the various subsets of the Sureño gang, totaling 500 members, worked together to give effect to the gang's criminal objectives. In turn, the prosecution's theory regarding the existence of a criminal street gang turned on the existence and conduct of these subsets.

However, when it came to evidence of predicate offenses, the gang expert described predicate offenses as offenses committed by Sureño gang members, without identifying the subsets to which these gang members belonged and without providing substantive evidence to establish the subsets were in fact united by means of associational or organizational connections into one gang. (See *Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 71 [“where the prosecution's case positing the existence of a single ‘criminal street gang’ for purposes of section 186.22[, subd.] (f) turns on the existence and conduct of one or more gang subsets, then the prosecution must show some associational or organizational connection uniting those subsets”].) The gang expert's monosyllabic, affirmative answers to questions about the organizational connections binding the different subsets into one county-level Sureño gang did not count, as this testimony was purely

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<sup>12</sup> Adney provided no details or facts regarding any case he had personally investigated in this regard, only a bare, affirmative response to the question.

conclusory. (See *Prunty, supra*, at pp. 84-85 [gang expert’s “purely conclusory” testimony is “essentially of no use to the fact finder”].)

The majority contends, as do the People, that *Prunty* did not apply as the People posited the existence of a larger Sureño gang and, therefore, the People’s theory of the existence of a criminal street gang did not really turn on subsets at all. (Maj. opn. *ante*, at pp. 20-22.) The majority’s rationale glosses over the gang expert’s testimony that the Sureño gang operated through subsets, totaling 500 members county-wide.<sup>13</sup> *In People v. Nicholes* (2016) 246 Cal.App.4th 836 (*Nicholes*), the court rejected the argument advanced by the majority, finding it to be “at odds with our Supreme Court’s statement that that it ‘granted review in [*Prunty*] to address the showing prosecutors must make when attempting to show that “multiple subsets of the Norteños may be treated as a whole” under section 186.22[, subdivision] (f).” (*Id.* at p. 845, quoting *Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 71, fn. 2.)

Given Adney’s testimony that the county-level Sureño gang operated through subsets, the prosecution was required to show some connection between the Sureño gang and its subsets, or among some of the subsets, beyond the conclusory testimony offered by Adney. (See *Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th 59 [“the STEP Act requires the prosecution to introduce evidence showing an associational or organizational connection that unites members of a putative criminal street gang”].) While Adney testified that historically there was some indication of consolidation among some subsets of the Sureño gang, there was no evidence of any “ongoing” connection, formal or informal, uniting any of the subsets. (See *Id.* at p. 83 [there must be evidence of an “ongoing relationship” between

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<sup>13</sup> *Prunty* clarified that “the [STEP] Act requires that the gang the defendant sought to benefit, the individuals that the prosecution claims constitute an ‘organization, association, or group,’ and the group whose actions the prosecution alleges satisfy the ‘primary activities’ and predicate offense requirements of section 186.22[, subdivision] (f), must be one and the same.” (*Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at pp 75-76.)

the putative members of group posited by the prosecution].) Adney also indicated that he had personally investigated instances where different subsets had worked together to commit crimes, but his testimony to this effect was merely in the form of a “[y]es” response to a question on the point. Adney provided no details or facts to enable the jury to assess the nature or quality of the interaction between the subsets.

At a minimum, the prosecution should have identified the subsets that committed the predicate offenses and showed some connection between them, or between them and the Sureño gang. (See *Nicholes, supra*, 246 Cal.App.4th at p. 848 [“At a minimum, *Prunty* requires that the prosecution, in a case involving Norteños and testimony that Norteños operate through subsets, introduce evidence specific to the subsets at issue.”].) In sum, given the total dearth of any substantive evidence regarding the relationship between the Sureño gang and its subsets, the evidence supporting the gang enhancements was insufficient under *Prunty*. (See *Nicholes, supra*, at p. 848 [reversing for insufficient evidence “where the gang expert did no more than characterize the relevant individuals as Norteños, explain that Norteños are associated with the Nuestra Familia prison gang, and give general testimony not linked to the particular subsets involved in this case”].)

In this case, the evidence of subsets served as the fibers with which the fabric of the prosecution’s proof of the existence of the Sureño gang was woven. Without some type of competent evidence that would *permit an inference* that the Sureño gang’s subsets were united by an associational or organizational connection into a single gang, the evidence was insufficient to support the gang enhancements attached to the counts of conviction. (See *Prunty, supra*, 62 Cal.4th at p. 74 [“Some organizational or associational connection, whether formal or informal, must exist among subsets of a ‘criminal street gang.’”].)

#### ***D. Conclusion***

Here, the evidence was insufficient to establish the county-level Sureño gang’s primary activities, to show that Renteria acted to benefit the Sureño gang rather than his

own subset, and to show that the relevant subsets of the Sureño gang were united by some kind of associational or organizational connection, formal or informal. I conclude the evidence was insufficient to support the gang enhancements attached to the counts of conviction. I would therefore reverse the gang enhancements and the section 12022.53, subdivision (c) firearm enhancements that were triggered once Renteria became subject to life terms pursuant to section 186.22, subdivision (b)(4)(A), as a consequence of the gang enhancement findings.

  
SMITH, J.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
Supreme Court of California

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