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Data-driven policing leads to gang arrests in 3 Stockton homicides

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Stockton Police Department

The investigation yielded **weapons, narcotics** and several high-profile arrests.

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The Stockton Police department is crediting new data-driven tactics for the arrests of 10 alleged gang members on charges of murder and possession of weapons, drugs and stolen property.

The 9-month investigation, which concluded Friday, looked into crimes in San Joaquin County dating back to August 2017 and linked to a gang called the East Oak Street Nortenos, according to a Facebook post shared by the Stockton Police Department on Tuesday.

One focus of the investigation was three unsolved murders, including the shooting last September of a 60-year-old man, Neftali Gonzalez Castaneda.

A second homicide victim was 18-year-old Briana Ballesteros, who had graduated early with honors from Cesar Chavez High School. She had gone out last September to pick up her boyfriend and was gunned down while waiting in her car, according to reports.

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Police also made arrests in connection with the killing of 19-year-old Daniel Ibarra. Ibarra was shot while seated in the backseat of a truck traveling near the intersection of Wilson Way and Anderson Street in Stockton. The driver and another front-seat passenger, both 18, were also critically wounded but recovered in a nearby hospital.

The East Oak Street Nortenos, a new subset of the Nortenos gang that has had a presence in Stockton since the 1970s, has been on law enforcement's radar for the past year and a half, said Officer Joseph Silva of the Stockton Police Department.

Silva credited part of the investigation's success to new policing strategies that the city has implemented since emerging from bankruptcy in 2012. They include using crime data for predictive policing and crime prevention, according to Silva.

"We are trying to move away from wide, blanket investigations and move towards more analytics and data-driven tactics," Silva said.

The department has expanded its team to include more crime analysts and detectives while also revamping its crime-prevention strategy, the department said.

Silva said the East Oak Street Nortenos have been responsible for most of the gun-related violence and crime in the area where the homicides and other incidents occurred. As a result, this investigation focused narrowly on only one gang, resulting in the 10 arrests and nine criminal cases that go back to two separate non-fatal shootings last August.

In the Facebook post, San Joaquin County Sheriff Steve Moore said: "I am very pleased with the hard work and efforts of our detectives, as well as members of the Stockton Police Department, that made these arrests possible. My hope is that these arrests will help the victims' families find some peace and begin the healing process."

Of the 10 individuals arrested, Salvadore Vega, 28 and Jesus Martinez, 20, were arrested in connection with all three homicides.

Weapons, ammunition and marijuana were also seized in the process of the investigation.

"The response has been overwhelming.," Silva said, especially from the families of victims, who were notified of the arrests immediately after the investigation closed on Friday.