

Strategies for Handling Horizontal Conflicts Among Motorcycle Gangs in Bandung

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Abstract

The phenomenon of motorcycle gang violence in Bandung has developed into a multidimensional social conflict, rooted not only in direct acts of aggression but also in structural and cultural violence. This study analyzes the horizontal conflicts among motorcycle gangs using Johan Galtung's violence triangle, Shaw and McKay's social disorganization theory, and Friedrich Glasl's conflict intervention framework. Employing Online Research Methods (ORM) and online content analysis, the research explores digital traces of gang-related violence, revealing how socioeconomic inequality, weak social cohesion, and cultural legitimization of violence contribute to the persistence of gang conflicts. The findings indicate that repressive law enforcement alone is insufficient, as conflicts have reached chronic levels of escalation. Lessons from Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit and Costa Rica's community-based prevention highlight the need for Indonesia to adopt a more holistic and participatory approach. The study recommends integrating law enforcement with preventive and transformative strategies, emphasizing education, youth empowerment, and community-based reconciliation to achieve sustainable conflict resolution.

Keywords: Motorcycle Gangs, Conflict Resolution, Violence Triangle, Social Disorganization, Bandung, Conflict Transformation



INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of violence involving motorcycle gangs in Bandung has become a significant social issue. In recent years, the city has recorded an increase in violent incidents involving these groups, ranging from clashes between gangs, brutal attacks on civilians, to the destruction of public facilities, all of which have contributed to a sense of insecurity among the community. Members of motorcycle gangs often develop a strong sense of identity through interactions with fellow members, which in turn encourages deviant behavior as a form of self-expression (Hadisiwi et al., 2013). Other studies highlight that criminal motorcycle gangs often adopt organizational structures resembling formal institutions, complete with leadership hierarchies, recruitment systems, and strict internal rules and sanctions. This structure enables gangs to maintain internal stability and safeguard their members' collective interests (van Deuren et al., 2022).

In general, the dominant approach in dealing with this conflict remains repressive, relying on law enforcement through raids, arrests, and detentions. Meanwhile, non-repressive approaches such as social mediation, transformation of intergroup relations, or strengthening community roles are rarely employed and have yet to become an official strategy for addressing gang conflicts.

Previous studies have mostly examined motorcycle gangs from criminological and sociological perspectives, viewing them as part of juvenile delinquency, social deviance, or the negative impact of globalized popular culture. However, few studies have attempted to analyze gang conflicts as a form of horizontal conflict with structural, cultural, and strategic dimensions, while also exploring conflict resolution as an alternative approach.

Bandung is a particularly relevant case study because, aside from being a center of education and culture, it is also home to various youth groups with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Social pressures, rapid urbanization, and the lack of positive social outlets have contributed to the rise of gangs as a means of identity-seeking and symbolic power. Within this context, this study is important in viewing motorcycle gangs not merely as perpetrators of violence, but as part of a larger system of social conflict. By combining Galtung's violence triangle theory, social disorganization theory, and John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation approach, this research seeks to formulate more contextual, sustainable strategies involving local actors in the conflict transformation process.

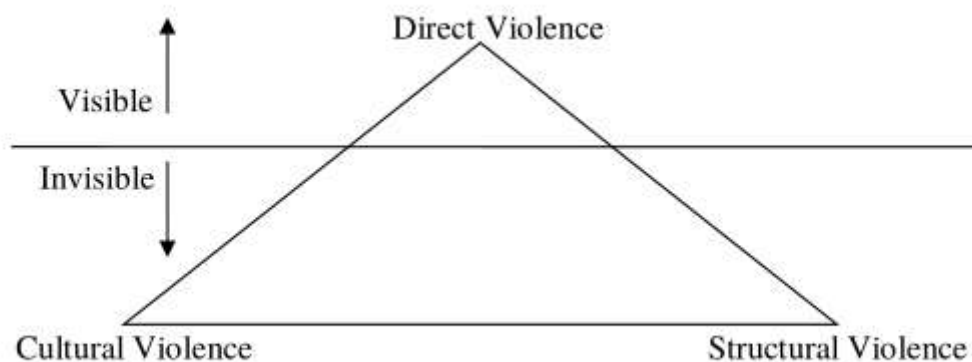
The aim of this study is to analyze in depth the root causes of horizontal conflicts among motorcycle gangs in Bandung, exploring the social, structural, and cultural dimensions behind



them. This includes identifying patterns of violence, the dynamics of interaction and rivalry among groups, and the factors that trigger and perpetuate conflict. Furthermore, the study examines strategies implemented by both security forces and non-state actors such as communities, families, and local leaders, in order to evaluate their effectiveness. Ultimately, the research is directed toward proposing alternative strategies for transformational and sustainable conflict resolution, integrating community-based approaches with contemporary conflict theories to establish a more humanistic and participatory framework.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

From a conflict theory perspective, violence perpetrated by motorcycle gangs can be understood through Johan Galtung's "violence triangle." According to Galtung, violence is not only direct but can also be structural and cultural. Structural violence refers to social and economic inequalities embedded within societal structures, while cultural violence is linked to cultural aspects that legitimize violence (Galtung, 1996). In the Bandung context, structural violence can be seen in the limited access to education and employment, while cultural violence is reflected in group norms that support aggressive actions.



Source: Galtung, 1996

In addition, the social disorganization theory developed by Shaw and McKay is also relevant in understanding this phenomenon. This theory argues that environments with high mobility, poverty, and weak social control tend to generate higher crime rates (Shaw & McKay,

1942). As a rapidly urbanizing city, Bandung faces challenges in building strong social cohesion, which creates room for groups such as motorcycle gangs to emerge.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs *Online Research Methods* (ORM) to analyze the dynamics of conflicts among motorcycle gangs in Bandung. This method was chosen because it enables access to widely dispersed digital data in online spaces, such as social media, online news coverage, video documentation, and public comments, which often serve as arenas of both expression and escalation of gang conflicts. In the context of motorcycle gang phenomena, many activities, symbols, and narratives of violence now take place or are documented online, making conventional methods such as surveys or face-to-face interviews less adequate or even risky (Eid & Diener, 2006). Moreover, digital media has become a crucial arena where group identities are shaped, claimed, and contested, allowing ORM to capture these dynamics in real time and in depth.

The methodological choice is also driven by the rapid growth of social media and digital platforms, which have transformed how society interacts, forms opinions, and mobilizes actions including in the context of gang violence. Consistent with the findings of Widianingsih et al. (2023), the use of this method enables the discovery of new insights that would not emerge in traditional field-based research. Thus, ORM is not only adaptive to contemporary developments but also opens space for findings that are more reflective of the realities of contemporary conflicts.

Data for this study were collected through web-based experiments as developed by Eid and Diener (2006). This procedure involved tracing relevant digital data from various sources such as government websites, online news media, academic journals, policy documents, as well as social media content and public forums related to motorcycle gangs in Bandung.

The analytical technique used is online content analysis, a set of methods for systematically examining and drawing conclusions from digital data through coding and interpretation processes. This method allows the researcher to identify patterns, narratives, and symbolic dynamics in online interactions among motorcycle gangs, as well as community responses to violent events (Widianingsih et al., 2023). Through this approach, the study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of conflict resolution strategies that are grounded in today's digital realities.



RESULT

This research employs three main theoretical approaches to analyze motorcycle gang conflicts in Bandung. First, Johan Galtung's theory of the violence triangle divides violence into three forms: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence includes physical or verbal acts such as fights or attacks between gangs. Structural violence refers to systemic injustices that prevent individuals or groups from having equal access to resources and opportunities. Meanwhile, cultural violence encompasses values, norms, and symbols that legitimize or justify violence (Galtung, 1996). This approach helps explain that motorcycle gang conflicts do not stand alone but are rooted in deeper social and cultural structures.

In the context of motorcycle gangs in Bandung, direct violence is evident in acts such as mob beatings, assaults, and the destruction of public facilities, which are frequently reported in local media (Febriani, 2024). Structural violence can be seen in the socio-economic inequalities faced by urban youth, such as limited access to education and employment opportunities, which push some young people to seek identity and solidarity within gang groups (Hadisiwi et al., 2013). Cultural violence is manifested in the street masculinity culture, where bravery, violence, and loyalty to the group serve as symbols of honor legitimized within gang subculture (van Deuren et al., 2022). This aligns with Hagedorn's (2008) findings, which show that gangs in various cities worldwide are often rooted in structural marginalization and sustain cultural values that tolerate violence as a survival strategy. Thus, Galtung's violence triangle theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding that motorcycle gang behavior is not merely street crime but part of a social system that produces and reproduces violence in multiple dimensions.

Second, this research draws on the social disorganization theory proposed by Shaw and McKay, which argues that crime and violence often emerge in communities experiencing disorganization conditions characterized by poverty, high population mobility, and weak informal social control (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Under these conditions, a criminal subculture develops as an alternative for individuals who have lost social orientation. In Bandung, neighborhoods with these characteristics often become recruitment grounds for motorcycle gangs, as such groups offer identity, protection, and solidarity not found in formal social environments.

This phenomenon can be better understood by examining the urban context of Bandung, which faces rapid urbanization, population growth, and socio-economic inequality. Data from the Bandung City Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023 shows that around 7.47% of the city's population lives below the poverty line, while the open unemployment rate reaches 8.32%, higher than the West Java average of 7.44% (BPS Kota Bandung, 2023). This reflects limited economic



access for part of the population, especially youth from lower-middle-class families. High-density neighborhoods such as Antapani and Kiaracondong, which are often hotspots for motorcycle gang conflicts, are typically marked by weak social control from both families and the surrounding community. This aligns with the findings of Sampson & Groves (1989), who emphasize that weak informal social networks and low community involvement in collective activities increase the risk of criminal subcultures emerging.

In addition to economic factors, education also serves as an indicator of social disorganization that contributes to motorcycle gang recruitment. A *Kompas* report (2010) noted that the majority of motorcycle gang members in Bandung have only completed elementary to junior high school, indicating a break in formal education pathways that should function as mechanisms of social integration. This situation is reinforced by the lack of positive outlets for youth expression in urban areas. As a result, motorcycle gangs become alternative spaces for obtaining social recognition, status, and group solidarity. Thus, social disorganization theory is relevant in explaining that motorcycle gangs in Bandung grow from structural roots such as poverty, unemployment, school dropouts, and weak social bonds in urban communities.

Third, Friedrich Glasl's conflict intervention framework is used to analyze conflict dynamics and potential interventions. Glasl divides conflicts into nine stages of escalation, ranging from latent tensions to open destructive violence. Each stage requires a different intervention approach, from facilitation and mediation to reconciliation and community-based conflict transformation (Glasl, 1999). This framework is applied in this research to assess the extent to which motorcycle gang conflicts have escalated, as well as to identify resolution strategies that can be applied contextually.

DISCUSSION

Motorcycle Gang Conflict Intervention in Bandung

Based on digital data tracing through online news and social media platforms, the pattern of violence carried out by motorcycle gangs in Bandung shows a consistent tendency in the form of mob beatings, stabbings, and vandalism of public facilities. Criminal activities, including inter-gang violence, are not merely the result of individual impulsiveness but part of a coordinated strategy within the gang's social framework. In other words, violence is a tool for maintaining reputation and expanding influence (van Deuren et al., 2022). Several areas consistently reported in conflict cases include Antapani, Kiaracondong, Cibiru, and Parongpong in West Bandung Regency. A significant case occurred on November 4, 2023, when five motorcycle gang members



attacked a resident at a gas station on Jalan AH Nasution, Antapani (Warsudi, 2023). This incident highlights densely populated urban areas experiencing high social pressure.

The majority of perpetrators are male teenagers between 15 and 24 years old, including junior and senior high school students. Common motives for their involvement include the search for identity, group solidarity, and inter-gang revenge. On December 23, 2023, 27 motorcycle gang members were arrested by Cimahi Police in the Parongpong area, including 17 students who were involved in vandalizing a meatball vendor's cart and assaulting residents (Ridwan, 2023). This illustrates the active involvement of students in gang violence, signaling weak social control within educational settings and families. Furthermore, motorcycle gangs maintain social cohesion by forming an internal culture that emphasizes loyalty, solidarity, and obedience. Members who violate the rules may face strict sanctions, even violence. This shows that interventions in gang conflicts cannot rely solely on law enforcement but must also address these internal dynamics (van Deuren et al., 2022).

Security forces have responded to this situation by increasing patrols, conducting judicial operations, and launching educational campaigns such as the Police Goes to School program in Greater Bandung. These efforts are often intensified ahead of high-risk periods, such as New Year's celebrations, when the potential for conflict rises (Syahril, 2023). However, the handling has been more repressive than transformational. In 18 major cases throughout 2023, most perpetrators were only subjected to arrests without follow-up programs to ensure social reintegration or rehabilitation (Febriani, 2024).

Furthermore, these dynamics reinforce the theoretical reading that such conflicts are not merely manifestations of street crime but part of structural violence rooted in poverty, social disorganization, and weak informal community control. From the perspective of Galtung's violence triangle theory, direct violence (motorcycle gang actions) emerges from the foundation of structural violence (social inequality) and cultural violence (legitimation of violence in street masculinity culture). Shaw & McKay's social disorganization theory is also relevant to understanding the emergence of gang subcultures in urban environments unable to sustain norms and social bonds.

Viewed through Glasl's conflict intervention model, motorcycle gang cases in Bandung have reached a chronic stage, where violence occurs repeatedly and has formed irrational conflict relations. This indicates that repressive interventions are insufficient. What is needed is intervention at the root of the conflict through community-based social transformation, such as strengthening family economies, youth empowerment, and reconciliation grounded in local



values. In this regard, Indonesia can learn from successful models in other countries, such as Scotland and Costa Rica, which have proven that cross-sector, community-based approaches are more effective in reducing long-term conflict escalation.

Comparison of Gang Conflict Management: Case Studies from Other Countries

To understand effective gang conflict resolution strategies, it is important to examine policies and approaches from other countries that have successfully reduced gang violence significantly. Two relevant examples are Scotland and Costa Rica, both of which have implemented community-based and social transformation strategies with positive results.

a. Scotland

Scotland is one of the best-known examples of a country that managed to curb youth gang violence through a public health approach. The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), established in 2005, adopted the principle that violence is a social disease that can be prevented, rather than merely a criminal act that must be punished (Harding, 2015). This approach involves collaboration among police, social workers, educators, religious leaders, and former offenders to address the root causes of violence.

Programs such as Mentors in Violence Prevention and the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) focus on direct engagement with high-risk individuals, offering life alternatives such as job training, rehabilitation, and social support. As a result, violence rates in Glasgow once labeled the most dangerous city in Europe dropped drastically within a decade.

b. Costa Rica

Costa Rica, a small country in Latin America, also faced gang violence issues but chose not to adopt militarized approaches like its neighboring countries. Instead, the government implemented the *Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana*, which combines social interventions, education, and the empowerment of local communities (Moreira, 2015).

Their main focus is prevention through youth education in high-risk areas, the creation of local jobs, and cross-institutional cooperation between police, schools, and civil society organizations. Costa Rica's success lies in its decision not to focus solely on law enforcement but instead to transform the structural roots of violence.

c. Reflection for the Indonesian Context

The models from Scotland and Costa Rica demonstrate that successful handling of motorcycle gang conflicts requires, first, a multi-sectoral approach (not only law enforcement, but also education, social, and cultural sectors). Second, it is necessary to balance prevention and



rehabilitation strategies with law enforcement. In addition, involving communities and former perpetrators as agents of change is crucial for field monitoring. Finally, a data-driven and locality-based approach is needed so that interventions are adapted to the context of each region.

In the context of Bandung and Indonesia in general, this approach can begin to be gradually adopted. Collaborative programs between the city government, schools, community leaders, and former motorcycle gang members can serve as a model for transforming conflict toward long-term social peace.

Table 1. Comparison Table of Gang Conflict Management Strategies

Aspect	Scotland (VRU)	Costa Rica	Indonesia (Bandung)
Basic Philosophy	Violence as a social disease (health model)	Community- and education-based prevention	Law enforcement and repressive approach
Main Approach	Collaborative: police, community, former offenders	Social preventive: education, employment, youth	Judicial operations, raids, patrols
Key Programs	Mentors in Violence Prevention, CIRV	Programa de Seguridad Ciudadana	Anti-Motorcycle Gang Task Force, police patrols
Community Involvement	High (community engaged as main agents)	Very high (participatory approach)	Low, community only as objects
Rehabilitation and Education	Yes (job training, counseling, mentoring)	Yes (education, family strengthening, youth development)	Limited, not yet a dominant approach
Outcomes	Significant reduction in violence in Glasgow	National-level reduction in gang violence	Fluctuating, no consistent downward trend
Adoption Potential	Can be applied with local modifications	Highly relevant for strengthening community institutions	Requires paradigm shift from repressive to preventive

Source: Author, 2025



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The motorcycle gang conflict in Bandung represents a form of violence that is not only direct and visible, but also rooted in deeper structural and cultural violence. This phenomenon involves young people, particularly adolescents, who are vulnerable to the influence of social environments that are weak in terms of control and support. Analysis using the theories of Galtung, Shaw & McKay, as well as Glasl's intervention model, shows that the patterns of violence observed are not merely symptoms of criminality, but rather part of a systemic failure to support the social integration of youth in urban areas. Repressive measures by law enforcement have proven insufficient in reducing both the intensity of violence and the recruitment of new gang members. Therefore, a strategic conflict resolution-based approach is needed, involving cross-sector collaboration among government, schools, community leaders, and religious institutions. Lessons from best practices in countries such as Scotland, with its Violence Reduction Unit, and Costa Rica, which emphasizes education and community involvement, can serve as models for building prevention and social reintegration systems. Indonesia, particularly the city of Bandung, needs to design policies that not only focus on enforcement but also address the structural roots of conflict through peace education, community economic empowerment, and sustained intergenerational dialogue.

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