



## **CONFLICTS IN ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS AND THEIR UTILIZATION IN LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES: UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVE**

*Conflitos em grupos de crime organizado e sua utilização em atividades de aplicação da lei: perspectiva ucraniana*

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## ABSTRACT

Conflicts within organized crime groups (OCGs) are not merely manifestations of internal processes but rather a crucial aspect of their operation. These conflicts arise from various factors, including competition for control over resources, power, or territories. The consequences of OCGs conflicts can be dramatic, often involving violent clashes, killings, and other forms of violence that deepen the criminalization of social structures and undermine the rule of law. This research emphasizes the significance of examining OCGs conflicts from the perspectives of criminal policy and law enforcement. By analyzing the causes and consequences of such conflicts, the study explores potential strategies for managing and mitigating these conflicts to enhance public safety. Understanding the mechanics and dynamics of conflict within the criminal milieu enables the development of more effective crime prevention and control methods. Investigating OCGs conflicts holds the potential to improve our comprehension of crime mechanisms and contribute to its reduction through the formulation of evidence-based recommendations for criminal justice practitioners.

**Keywords:** Ukraine; law enforcement activities; crime prevention; conflict levels; organized crime groups (OCGs).

## RESUMO

Os conflitos dentro de grupos do crime organizado (GCOs) não são apenas manifestações de processos internos, mas sim um aspecto crucial de sua operação. Esses conflitos surgem de vários fatores, incluindo a competição pelo controle de recursos, poder ou territórios. As consequências dos conflitos de GCOs podem ser dramáticas, frequentemente envolvendo confrontos violentos, assassinatos e outras formas de violência que aprofundam a criminalização das estruturas sociais e minam o estado de direito. Esta pesquisa enfatiza a importância de examinar os conflitos de GCOs sob a perspectiva da política criminal e da aplicação da lei. Ao analisar as causas e consequências desses conflitos, o estudo explora estratégias potenciais para gerenciar e mitigar esses conflitos para melhorar a segurança pública. Compreender a mecânica e a dinâmica do conflito dentro do meio criminoso permite o desenvolvimento de métodos mais eficazes de prevenção e controle do crime. Investigar conflitos de GCOs tem o potencial de melhorar nossa compreensão dos mecanismos do crime e contribuir para sua redução por meio da formulação de recomendações baseadas em evidências para profissionais da justiça criminal.

**Palavras-chave:** Ucrânia; atividades de aplicação da lei; prevenção criminal; níveis de conflito; grupos criminosos organizados (GCOs).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organized crime (FELSON, 2006)<sup>1</sup> is a transnational issue that harms the economy and financial system. It also disrupts the rules of social coexistence, contributing to the emergence of groups that are destructive to society (AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2024)<sup>2</sup>, including organized crime groups (OCGs).

The Global Organized Crime Index for 2023 (GLOBAL INITIATIVE, 2024) shows a continuous rise in organized crime worldwide: 83% of the global population lives in conditions of high crime rates. Conversely, the number of people living in conditions of low resilience to organized crime has significantly decreased worldwide: currently, this affects 62% of the global population, compared to 79.4% in 2021 (RELIEFWEB, 2023).

Thus, the work on developing existing and finding new approaches to combat OCGs remains relevant. For example, Brazilian researchers Marcos Alan Ferreira & Anna Beatriz Gonçalves (2022), in their empirical study, present a perspective on the self-organization of organized crime groups. They reached a positive conclusion regarding the concept of “Pax Monopolista,” which posits that the dominance of one powerful OCG in illegal markets contributes to pacification. Their article demonstrates that where there is neither a monopoly on illegal markets nor territorial hegemony, the level of gang violence increases, as seen in areas outside São Paulo, such as urban regions in Northern Brazil.

In contrast to the aforementioned, John Bailey and Taylor Matthew M. (2009) point out that confrontation between a “monopolistic” OCG and the state can undermine the authority of the latter by disrupting the state-OCG balance, resulting in increased levels of violence and brutal conflict.

Equilibrium is also discussed in the research of American scholar Frederick T. Martens (1986), who argues that the elimination of organized crime could undermine the principle of freedom from government interference. He believes that the goal of law enforcement should be to establish and maintain a balance between the government’s duty to uphold its legitimacy and the rights of citizens.

In other words, as William M. LeoGrande & Megan Kurten (2022), assert, under conditions of intensified state law enforcement measures, organizational capacity to counter the state, and weak ties to the political class, OCGs will adopt a strategy of confrontation rather than adaptation to new

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<sup>1</sup> The term “organized crime” conveys a specific image popularized by television, which is not substantiated by scholarly research and experience.

<sup>2</sup> Group – in social psychology, the term refers to two or more interdependent individuals who influence one another through social interactions that commonly include structures involving roles and norms, a degree of cohesiveness, and shared goals.

conditions. This dynamic inevitably leads to increased tension and further escalation of conflict between them and state structures.

The aforementioned empirical and theoretical research in the field of combating organized crime directly or indirectly highlights the importance of studying conflicts within OCGs for their proper utilization in law enforcement activities to artificially create “advantageous situations” or “acceptable indices”.

When examining the subject of this research, it is essential to note that most countries use international law as a basis for national laws in combating organized crime. According to these laws, a criminal offense is considered to be committed by an organized group if it involves three or more individuals (UNITED NATIONS, 2020)<sup>3</sup> (Table. 1).

№	Countries or unions	Quantity of individuals
1	Brazil	Three or more (CÓDIGO PENAL, 1940) <sup>4</sup>
2	European Union	Not clearly, two or more or three or more according to EC recommendations
3	Italy	Three or more
4	Japan	Not specified
5	Portugal	Not specified, but according to EC Recommendations: three or more
6	Spain	Three or more
7	Ukraine	Three or more (VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE, 2001) <sup>5</sup>
8	U.S.	Not specified

Table. 1: Comparison (ČERNÝ, 2020)<sup>6</sup> of legal norms regarding the number of individuals defined by countries (SOUZA, 2007)

Organized Crime Groups (OCGs) are social entities where personal and group relations are often accompanied by various conflicts. OCGs emerge through the interaction of two opposing forces: one centripetal, aimed at integration and cohesion, and the other centrifugal (GRAHAM et al., 2017),<sup>7</sup> leading to differentiation and potentially group disintegration.

<sup>3</sup> “Organized criminal group” shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

<sup>4</sup> Associarem-se 3 (três) ou mais pessoas, para o fim específico de cometer crimes.

<sup>5</sup> A criminal offence shall be deemed to have been committed by an organised group where several persons (three or more) participated in its preparation or commission, who have previously established a stable association for the purpose of committing of this and other offence (or offences), and have been consolidated by a common plan with assigned roles designed to achieve this plan known to all members of the group.

<sup>6</sup> Micro comparison, studies aspects, such as a specific problem, a legal institute or any other element or aspect that can be analyzed in isolation.

<sup>7</sup> Centripetal (centrum + petere = “center-seeking”) force pulling inward toward the smaller and more immediate circles of kin and tribe. Even those who advocate for egalitarian forms of effective altruism have expressed the conflicting intuition that people normatively should devote more moral concern to close family members than to non-kin, or that people should care more for proximate others than for strangers in other parts of the world. The centrifugal force can also be motivated by both rational and intuitive factors, including group attachment.

Centrifugal (centrum + fugio = “center-fleeing”) force playing out over time, pushing from the center of the moral circle out to the outermost circles. Such a force can be motivated by a number of intuitive and rational factors,

This interaction affects the structure of OCGs, their functional and psychological aspects, and creates specific conflict situations within the group that law enforcement agencies should leverage in combating organized crime. It is important to differentiate between the levels of conflicts (WESTMAAS, 2022), that can arise within OCGs: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflicts (Table. 2).

№	Levels of conflicts		Personal-group relationships	
	Internal	External	Personal	Group
1	Intrapersonal		Within individuals	
2		Interpersonal	Interpersonal	
3	Intragroup			Within the group
4		Intergroup		Between groups

Table. 2: Levels of conflicts (AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2024)<sup>8</sup>

Considering the above, the research problem lies in the study of intra-personal and interpersonal conflicts among members of OCGs, particularly how these conflicts affect the functioning and stability of such groups. The issue includes an in-depth investigation of the psychological and social factors that contribute to the emergence of conflicts, as well as the mechanisms employed by criminal leaders to manage conflicts, maintain control, and uphold hierarchy within the OCGs.

Research hypotheses:

- intrapersonal conflicts among members of OCGs arise from the contradictions between individual values, ambitions, and psychological needs on one hand, and the rigid demands imposed by the criminal hierarchy on the other. This generates emotional instability, moral discomfort, and potentially weakens the motivation to participate in the group's activities;

- interpersonal conflicts within OCGs may be caused not only by internal psychological tension and competition among members but also by deliberate manipulative actions of leaders who seek to strengthen their control and ensure loyalty, using conflicts as a tool to consolidate their power and maintain internal discipline.

The primary method is content analysis of scholarly sources and statistical data from law enforcement agencies related to the activities of OCGs and the conflicts associated with them. The

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including compassion and empathy for increasingly distant social targets, aversion to the prejudice inherent in drawing the line between any two categories, concerns of fairness and equality, and utilitarian principles of maximizing welfare regardless of social proximity.

<sup>8</sup> Intrapsychic conflict – In psychoanalytic theory, the clash of opposing forces within the psyche, such as conflicting drives, wishes, or agencies. Also called inner conflict; internal conflict; intrapersonal conflict; psychic conflict.

Interpersonal conflict – Disagreement or discord between people with respect to goals, values, or attitudes.

Intragroup conflict – Disagreement or confrontation between two or more members of a single group.

Intergroup conflict – Disagreement or confrontation between two or more groups and their members.



methodological approach is based on a combination of socio-psychological and criminological perspectives, allowing for the study of conflicts as internal processes within the personalities of OCG members, as well as external influences of the environment on their behavior. Attention has been drawn to the conducted analysis of quantitative indicators of detected organized groups and criminal organizations in Ukraine for the period 2014-2022, which allows for an assessment of their dynamics and structure.

The research task involved analyzing conflicts based on their levels, nature, and impact on the functioning of OCGs, as well as exploring the potential use of this knowledge in law enforcement activities to establish control over organized crime, localize it, neutralize it, and eliminate it (VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE, 1993).<sup>9</sup>

## 2. INTRAPERSONAL CONFLICTS OCGs

The emergence and development of the aforementioned levels of conflict have their specific characteristics. Among various contributing factors to intrapersonal conflicts in OCGs (KEDIA, 2022),<sup>10</sup> the primary factor is the status of participants (AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2024).<sup>11</sup> Such conflicts invariably stem from members' adherence to group norms and leaders as their representatives, which is essential for the existence of criminal hierarchies (UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME, 2024).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the opportunities for individual choice within these OCGs are always constrained and dependent on how members associate themselves with the group, their interest in achieving collective goals, and the ultimate outcomes of criminal activities (COUTINHO et al., 2020).

Two different examples illustrate the peculiarities of intrapersonal conflicts arising among members of OCGs, linked to the psychology of association with criminal environments.

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<sup>9</sup> The goal of combating organized crime is establishing control over organized crime, its localization, neutralization, and elimination; addressing the causes and conditions of organized crime's existence.

<sup>10</sup> Internal conflict also referred to as “cognitive dissonance”, is the experience of holding conflicting psychological beliefs or desires.

<sup>11</sup> Cognitive dissonance – An unpleasant psychological state resulting from inconsistency between two or more elements in a cognitive system. It is presumed to involve a state of heightened arousal and to have characteristics similar to physiological drives (e.g., hunger). Thus, cognitive dissonance creates a motivational drive in an individual to reduce the dissonance.

<sup>12</sup> The hierarchical model defines organized crime as a group of interdependent actors in which there is a clear ranking among participants that distinguishes leaders from other members in the criminal enterprise. This structure has been termed the “bureaucratic,” “corporate,” or “organizational” model of organized crime. This description of organized criminal groups sees it as a government-like or military-like structure, in which illegal activities are organized and approved by superiors and carried out by lower-level operatives who are part of the group.

The first example is when associates are involved in a criminal association through partnership, either collectively establishing it, or voluntarily and consciously joining later with initial full acceptance of expectations regarding future group criminal activities, group structure, and norms.

Factors contributing to potential intrapersonal conflicts in such cases often originate from outside the group unity and cohesion, stemming more from the purely emotional state of the individual, their personal expectations, and experiences.

Even if a person fully identifies with a criminal group, they still may have dual concerns (ELGOIBAR et al., 2017):<sup>13</sup>

- on one hand, there is a predominance of self-serving attitudes, often leading to desires for enrichment and wealth accumulation. Consequently, indifference and a cynical attitude toward others develop, characterized by consumerist psychology;

- on the other hand, this person is aware of their criminal activity, fears potential punishment, and may feel guilt and remorse, often leading to a sharp internal struggle of motivations and a profound intrapersonal conflict. This conflict can prompt a change in lifestyle and a decision to abandon further criminal activities.

Another example involves the coerced, albeit conscious, entry of a person into OCGs under pressure from various circumstances or actions by certain individuals.

The specificity of such recruitment lies in the fact that their personal interests, goals, and aspirations often diverge from those of the group. Therefore, the conformity (CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY, 2024),<sup>14</sup> exhibited in the group behavior of these individuals is essentially a defensive shell that fails to fulfill the necessary functions of cohesion, maintaining group unity, and retaining members within the OCGs. Awareness of this discrepancy often becomes a cause of personal psychological imbalance, resentment, internal protest, which over time transforms into a protracted internal-personal conflict. A way out of this conflict can sometimes be found in interpersonal clashes within OCGs, most often with its leader or authoritative member.

It should also be noted that some isolated criminals attempt to join OCGs seeking protection and to gain “legitimacy” for their criminal existence. However, even in these cases, their personal interests and goals drive these individuals, which may not align with those of the group. This mismatch can lead to the emergence of internal-personal conflicts and subsequently interpersonal conflicts within the group as well.

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<sup>13</sup> The dual-concern model holds that the way in which parties handle conflicts can be described and is determined by two concerns: concern for self (own interests) and concern for others (relational interests).

<sup>14</sup> The fact or policy of behaving or thinking like everyone else, rather than being different (adaptive acceptance of “traditions” within OCGs).

Given the above, the conditions of forced involvement of certain members into OCGs are of particular interest for law enforcement practice. Specifically, their leaders utilize grounds such as: financial dependence resulting from previous financial loans or other material support; psychological support and advocacy from a leader or another member of the OCGs against real or perceived aggressors; ethnic ties (UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME, 2024);<sup>15</sup> gradual involvement in criminal activities through periodic receipt of insider information (CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY, 2024)<sup>16</sup> about the crime target from the person; tracking members of other OCGs or individual criminals committing specialized crimes and subjecting them to fear of disclosure to law enforcement; and threats of physical violence, including against relatives or close persons.

### 3. INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS OCGs

The above largely pertains to interpersonal conflicts within OCGs (BARKI & HARTWICK, 2004).<sup>17</sup> In general, such conflicts involve clashes over individual participants' incompatible interests, values, roles, as well as group interaction norms and rules. These often assume a universally accepted character within the criminal environment and may be obligatory for all members or exist in the form of oral or written guidelines and norms developed within a specific OCG. Such norms and rules can be an integral part of OCG members' interactions and act as regulators, with their violation almost invariably leading to interpersonal conflicts.

The starting point of psychological analysis of conflict data is that in any criminal group or organization, relationships between participants are primarily formed based on the satisfaction of their self-serving personal interests and needs. Therefore, in the criminal activities of OCGs, conflictual behavior (ELGOIBAR et al., 2017)<sup>18</sup> is inherent from the very beginning, as

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<sup>15</sup> Beginning in the 1970s and extending to the present day, many empirical studies and analyses of the operations and structure of organized criminal groups have occurred in different locations around the world. A significant number of these studies found that cultural or ethnic ties, rather than hierarchy, connected organized criminals together, and that many groups are local in nature without significant connections to larger groups or distant locations.

<sup>16</sup> Important information about a company or organization that is known only to the employees of the company or organization and not to the public.

<sup>17</sup> Interpersonal conflict is a dynamic process that occurs between individuals and/or groups who are in interdependent relationships, and is more likely to occur when a variety of background situational (e.g., zero-sum reward structures, scarce resources, etc.) and personal (e.g., previous history of conflicts, interpersonal diversity, etc.) conditions exist.

<sup>18</sup> Conflict behavior is defined as one party's reaction to the perception that one's own and the other party's current aspiration cannot be achieved simultaneously.

simultaneous satisfaction of self-serving personal interests and needs alongside corresponding group interests is quite problematic.

Such interpersonal conflicts in OCGs are widespread because they are constantly influenced by factors such as: individuals prioritizing their own interests over group interests; leaders exerting strict control over others; mistrust among members regarding the fair distribution of criminal proceeds; suspicion of collaboration with law enforcement agencies; claims to personal privileges by certain individuals; aspirations of members for self-assertion or higher status within the group hierarchy; suppression of dignity among participants; and the desire for revenge against perceived wrongdoers.

All of this is accompanied by corresponding emotions: dissatisfaction, outrage, offense, contempt, or fear of punishment from the leader. As a result, real conflicts arise, sometimes escalating into open confrontations where each side considers themselves right and defends their interests. This naturally raises questions about the compatibility of OCG members.

Yes, on one hand, it is quite possible to assume compatibility among most members, especially within cohesive groups structured horizontally in terms of organizational and psychological dynamics, where relationships are defined by clear operational roles and functions. This pertains to collaborative activities that are coordinated based on agreed-upon functions and partner roles.

At the same time, it is not possible to reliably assert psychological compatibility in terms of emotional relationships among participants in OCGs. Even if there is some overlap in personal traits, views, values, sympathies, and mutual attraction among them, these are often concealed; as such, openness is not welcomed in criminal environments.

Interpersonal conflicts in OCGs arise due to dissatisfaction with: specialization in criminal activities, methods and means of committing specific crimes, distribution of criminal proceeds; tactics and leadership style; internal group norms and penalties for their violation; restrictions on emotional interpersonal relationships.

In OCGs, there is a significant feature of interpersonal conflicts where their development is normatively dependent and controlled by leaders. They can manipulate interpersonal conflicts among their associates in a direction that benefits themselves, and this is quite common.

#### **4. INTERNAL GROUP CONFLICTS OCGs**

A particular place in the mechanism of emergence and course of these conflicts is occupied by the struggle of conflicting motives. Its essence lies in the fact that the actual motives of behavior and activity of one or several participants in the group do not coincide with the commonly accepted

group motives in a particular OCGs. Preconditions for this may arise even before a person enters OCGs, if they had their own personal goal, for example, to seek revenge against a common enemy with the group's help.

Conflict-generating factors within the system of internal group (SHAH et al., 2021)<sup>19</sup> relations in OCGs can be categorized into emotional and functional factors. Emotional factors include conflicting personal and group interests, needs, goals, motives, beliefs, and views. Functional factors arise when individuals and groups oppose each other due to conflicting perceptions of interactional content. Functional conflicts can often be resolved through adopting necessary constructive decisions, which involve choosing alternative interactions. For example, conflicts stemming from differences in methods and approaches to criminal activities can be constructively adjusted. Emotional conflicts, on the other hand, stem from participants' need to alleviate psychological tension rather than achieving specific results in criminal activity. Such conflicts may lead to participants being excluded from the group or even physically eliminated.

Alongside this, there are compelling practical observations that the higher the level of development of a criminal organization, the less frequently emotional factors lead to conflicts within it. Instead, functional discrepancies more commonly become the causes of their occurrence.

Internal group conflicts in OCGs have both objective and subjective reasons.

Objective reasons include organizational, informational, and technological problems, as well as irrational distribution of roles and responsibilities.

Subjective reasons stem from emotional factors, such as a negative psychological climate, psychological barriers, undesirable personality traits, and specific psychological characteristics of individuals (such as selfishness, lack of self-control, impulsiveness, inflated self-esteem and demands, or anxiety).

In studying and explaining intra-group conflicts, significant cognitive value lies in the differences between group formations that interact cooperatively or competitively (XU et al., 2020),<sup>20</sup> including along these parameters:

- communication: for cooperative alliances, typical of contact criminal groups, open communication and full exchange of information among participants are characteristic. In competitive interactions, more commonly observed in hierarchical criminal organizations, on the

<sup>19</sup>“State of discord” based on real or perceived incompatibilities or differences among members.

<sup>20</sup> A cooperative interaction eliminates any in-group bias as compared to the case where there is no interaction, and even introduces relatively more pro-sociality with respect to out-group.

A competitive interaction reduces pro-sociality in general, irrespective of whether others are in- or out-group.

contrary, there is a lack of communication among participants, with information being restricted and distorted;

- perception: cooperative interaction encourages participants towards similarity and commonality of interests, values, and enhances the ability to understand another perspective. Competitive processes amplify the perception of differences and the danger posed by the opposing side;

- attitude: cooperative processes lead to the formation of a partnership attitude towards each other, promoting mutual acceptance and expectations of being accepted. In contrast, competitive interactions foster distrust, increase readiness to react negatively to others' requests and needs, and encourage mutual disregard.

Their leaders primarily influence distribution of subjects in intra-group conflicts within OCGs. The escalation of tensions between leaders and their accomplices most often leads to conflicts.

The main reasons for these conflicts include errors in organizing criminal activities; leader's miscalculations leading to failed criminal actions; leader's desire to appropriate a significant portion of criminal profits; weak cohesion within the group; selfish behaviors of one or more members aiming to assert imagined advantages; presence of an atmosphere of concealed rivalry, psychological subjugation, and adaptation.

The primary causes of conflicts between leaders and members of OCGs are inequality, information restrictions on participants compared to leaders and unequal distribution of profits from criminal activities. However, these issues are mainly characteristic of criminal organizations with complex hierarchical structures. In smaller OCGs, intra-group conflicts more often stem from factors such as suppressed feelings of personal importance, jealousy, and distrust towards the leaders.

The most destructive intra-group conflicts within OCGs arise from disputes between their leaders and opposition figures known as "authorities" who are close to the leaders. Typically, these conflicts stem from the opposition members' desire to assert autonomy within the OCGs and assume leadership roles, while leaders seek to undermine their authority and eliminate them as rivals. Such conflicts usually unfold covertly, often culminating in the physical elimination of one another, which significantly destabilizes the OCGs.

Sometimes within OCGs, conflicts arise between the core members of these associations and their new members. Such clashes occur because groups expect new members to take active roles and fully adhere to group norms. Typically, new members face strict control, and even minor violations of group discipline can result in harsh sanctions being imposed on them.

Conflicts sometimes arise and escalate between the majority of the group and an individual who has become compromised within the group. The primary reason here is distrust towards such an individual. Conflicts between OCGs and members who decide to cease criminal activities and leave the organization occur in a particularly acute form. This can stem from the non-acceptance of such an exit under existing norms within the OCGs or from fear among the remaining participants and the leader themselves about the possibility of exposure and criminal liability. Attempts to resolve such conflicts often lead to tragic consequences as well.

The main formative role in the emergence of intra-group conflicts in OCGs is played by violations of specific group norms among their participants, notable among which are the following.

In terms of emotional relationship type, these violations include prohibition of independent departure from OCGs, as well as impermissibility of handing over fellow members to law enforcement; cautious and restrained behavior outside the criminal group's activities; mandatory "financial" contributions.

By functional relationship type, these violations include: conspiracy within OCGs, especially individual membership concealment; adherence to subordination and hierarchy within group structures; obligation to perform assigned roles and comply with decisions regarding criminal activities; caution and prudence in committing crimes; adherence to specified distribution of criminal proceeds; prohibition of unauthorized crimes or methods beyond planned actions during criminal activities.

The above-mentioned group norms are typically mandatory for all or the absolute majority of members within OCGs. Occasionally, only individuals close to the leaders become exceptions. Clearly, these group norms within OCGs possess a contradictory nature by their psychological content, as they inherently establish an unequal status between leaders and ordinary members of these OCGs from the outset. Although contradictions regarding these norms may not seem apparent at first glance, meaning they do not surface overtly, they continuously create ongoing psychological discomfort those transitions into persistent and acute internal-personal conflict. This emotional state, akin to a compressed spring, under certain conditions, finds its outlet in internal-group conflict explosions.

The group norms of OCGs have a very real, rather than declarative, nature, as evidenced by the severe sanctions imposed for their violation. Therefore, internal-group conflicts revolving around these norms, while occurring quite frequently, are doomed to short-term existence. This is not due to compromise or any other bloodless resolution but rather because of the application of coercive methods involving physical elimination.

Conflicts in OCGs also arise from informational discrepancies. This pertains to practical uninformedness or very limited knowledge among certain individuals surrounding the leader, for instance, regarding the group's overall standing within the criminal environment, its prospects for development and continued operation, and strategies for criminal activities.

## 5. INTER-GROUP CONFLICTS OCGs

The most complex and impactful conflict phenomena in the contemporary criminal environment are inter-group conflicts that arise between individual OCGs (BÖHM et al., 2020).<sup>21</sup>

These conflicts stem from a system of inter-group interaction occurring between groups of individuals as well as between their individual representatives, along with other participants who perceive each other as members of different groups. The immediate sources of such conflicts, like all others, are conflicting group interests, needs, roles, and aspirations. However, these conflicts primarily arise from clashes over the division of criminal control territories or from struggles for power within the criminal environment and for the actual existence of each OCG.

In the emergence of inter-group conflicts, the decisive factors are the reality of the contradictions and their significance for the conflicting parties. If confrontation becomes inevitable for OCGs, the more significant the group goals and the expected gains from achieving them, the more intense the inter-group conflict will be.

The reality of conflicting group interests is determined not only by their current existence but also by their transfer from the past, which also applies to certain threats and hostilities from competing parties. The reaction of the competing side engenders reciprocal hostility. External threats to OCGs enhance intra-group solidarity and contribute to individuals' fuller awareness of their group membership.

Threats also induce impermeability of group boundaries and decrease the likelihood of members deviating from group norms. Misconstruing external threats by group members also contributes to increasing intra-group solidarity. It is characteristic that leaders of OCGs often consciously exploit this regularity to strengthen their cohesion by artificially creating an image of an external enemy.

It should be noted that the leaders of these OCGs are not interested in exacerbating inter-group conflicts to avoid drawing attention from law enforcement agencies. However, despite this, criminal clashes do not subside; on the contrary, they often gain even greater strength.

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<sup>21</sup> From a psychological perspective, broadly defined, intergroup conflict is the perceived incompatibility of goals or values between two or more individuals, which emerges because these individuals classify themselves as members of different social groups.

## 6. THE UTILIZATION OF CONFLICTS WITHIN OCGS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Conflicts that arise within OCGs, given certain developments, lead to undermining their integrity, loss of mutual understanding among participants, emergence of confrontation, and hostility. These escalating tensions can ultimately lead to the destruction of OCGs. These patterns can certainly be leveraged in law enforcement activities, primarily to disband OCGs, expose them, and uncover the crimes they have committed.

The use of conflict resolution knowledge in law enforcement activities involves not only understanding the emergence and course of conflicts within criminal environments but also utilizing specific methods for their resolution that are tailored to these contexts.

In the context of this, the concept of “conflict management” in the criminal environment deserves attention. It most commonly refers to controlling the development of conflict by internal or external forces: typically, leaders of OCGs and criminal authorities who, in turn, are influenced by law enforcement agencies. The main goal here is to restrain conflict and prevent its escalation. Additionally, studying problem-solving methods that help avoid or reduce conflicts (ELGOIBAR et al., 2017),<sup>22</sup> and facilitate compromise, is crucial. This can involve negotiations between conflicting parties, the use of forceful methods, and intervention by third parties.

Conflict management in OCGs, which also has its own styles (SCARBROUGH, 2020),<sup>23</sup> is an acceptable form of influencing adversaries by leaders and resolving interpersonal or intra-group conflicts. However, this is characteristic of OCGs with direct interactive contact or with a clear hierarchical subordination across all structural levels.

In competing criminal groups and organizations, inter-group conflicts are primarily resolved through “negotiations,” which often end in armed clashes and mutual destruction. Timely receipt of information by law enforcement personnel about the progress of conflict resolution in the criminal environment allows for judicious intervention in these processes, directing them towards objectives necessary for law enforcement tasks.

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<sup>22</sup>Conflict management is deliberate action to deal with conflictive situations, either to prevent or to escalate them. Unlike conflict behavior, conflict management encompasses cognitive responses to conflict situations, which can vary from highly competitive to highly cooperative. Conflict management does not necessarily involve avoidance, reduction, or termination of conflict.

Problem solving is a win-win strategy aimed at “optimizing rather than satisfying the parties”. Great value is attached to one’s own interests and vision, but also a lot of attention is given to the needs, ideas, and interests of the other.

<sup>23</sup> The five strategies for managing conflict are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating.

Several functions of conflict understanding in OCGs are significant for the practical activities of law enforcement agencies:

- informational function: involves obtaining data on conflicts within OCGs, the parties involved, and their positions;
- dynamic function: allows identifying the weakest link in OCGs, which should be considered when selecting tactics for law enforcement operations and apprehending criminals;
- interactive function: helps establish contact with members of OCGs for further constructive development of interaction. For example, if it involves a person in acute conflict with other accomplices or the leader of OCGs due to excessive brutality in their criminal actions, contact can be anticipated. In such cases, individuals often hope for understanding of their personal positions, motivations, experiences, and corresponding external support;
- control function: serves as a tool for psychological influence by law enforcement agencies on conflicting parties, particularly through constructive negotiations with specific participants of the OCGs (INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF THE RED CROSS, 2023).<sup>24</sup> This aims to persuade them against further participation in criminal activities, discredit specific individuals in the eyes of others, thereby strengthening destructive processes within the criminal environment.

It is important to note the possibility of using artificially created conflicts within OCGs during law enforcement operations. In this context, a specific conflict becomes a stimulated event (by law enforcement) aimed at exerting a targeted, necessary influence on the involved parties. For example, this can involve clashes between group members resulting from the compromise of certain individuals, creating an atmosphere of distrust towards the group leader or other members by spreading specific disinformation about them. Such a tactic can be employed to disrupt OCGs, undermine the authority of its leader, and remove certain individuals from under their influence.

## 7. STUDY OF CONFLICTS IN OCGs: CRIMINAL-LEGAL ASPECTS IN UKRAINE

Research on conflicts within OCGs contributes to the development of effective criminal policy strategies and law enforcement activities in Ukraine. It is important to note that, alongside the aforementioned descriptive theory, empirical criminology plays a significant role, drawing on analytical data related to real cases of OCG activities and their conflicts. Additionally, normative criminology encompasses the current criminal legislation, including laws and codes, which also plays a crucial role in this field.

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<sup>24</sup> The option of peace negotiation with violent organized crime groups – whether intended to reduce or end widespread violence – is not a theoretical proposition. It is a reality of practice, and it is global.

Firstly, empirical criminology provides factual data on the activities of OCGs in Ukraine, allowing for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind conflict emergence. For instance, crime statistics, specific criminal cases, and law enforcement reports reveal trends in the conflicts arising within OCGs. This data helps outline the causes of these conflicts.

According to empirical data, conflicts within OCGs in Ukraine are acquiring new characteristics in the context of rising crime, especially during wartime. After a temporary decline in 2022 (Table. 3, Chart), the 25.1% increase in criminal proceedings against organized groups in 2023 indicates a resurgence in their activities. This trend may lead to an escalation of internal and interpersonal conflicts within these groups (OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL OF UKRAINE, 2024).

Data on rising crime in Ukraine's border regions, such as Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv, indicate an escalating competition among OCGs for control over territory and resources. For instance, a 38.3% increase in crime in Sumy suggests a rise in conflict situations, where groups are attempting to seize each other's areas of influence. This competition heightens the risk of violent confrontations (YEPRYNTSEV, 2023).

Year	Detected Organized Groups and Criminal Organizations	Change in Detected Quantity (%)	Detected Criminal Organizations	Change in Number of Criminal Organizations (%)
2014	185	-	7	-
2015	135	-27,0%	1	-85,7%
2016	136	+0,7%	4	+300%
2017	210	+54,4%	5	+25%
2018	288	+37,1%	12	+140%
2019	293	+1,7%	16	+33,3%
2020	377	+28,7%	21	+31,3%
2021	499	+32,4%	45	+114,3%
2022	360	-27,9%	37	-17,8%

Table. 3: Quantitative Indicators of Detected Organized Groups and Criminal Organizations in Ukraine: 2014-2022 (YEPRYNTSEV, 2023)

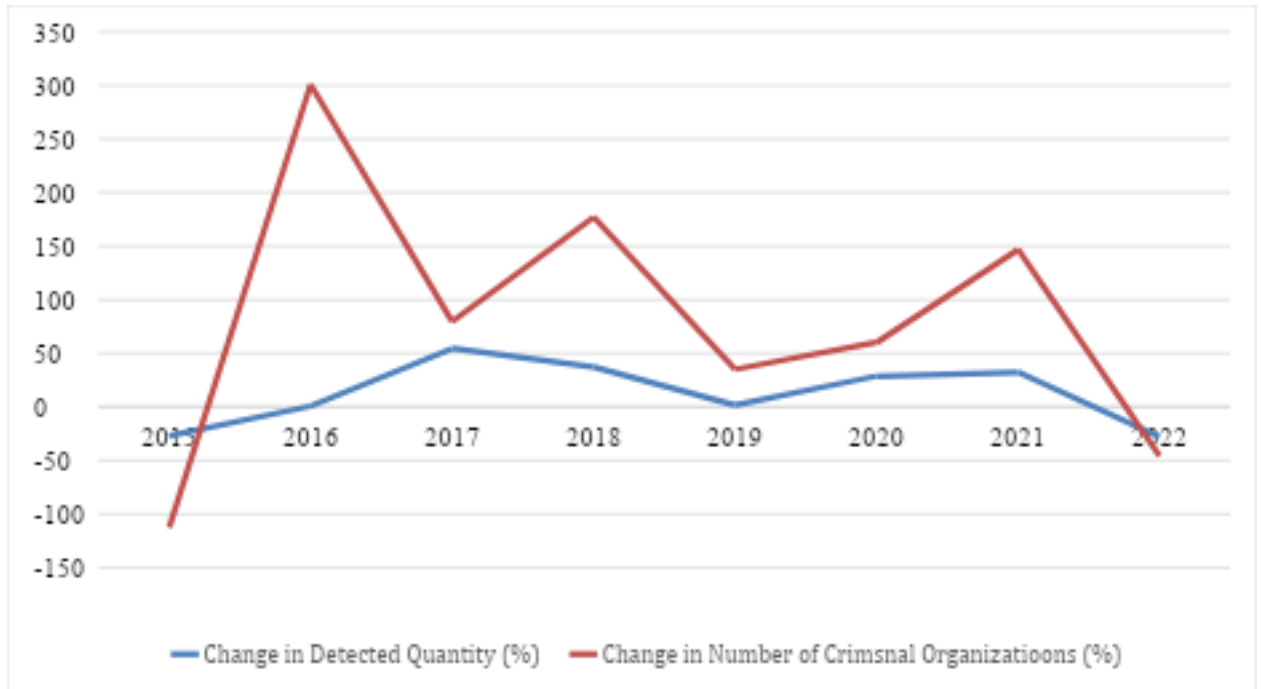


Chart: Graphical comparison of the relative growth rates of identified organized groups and criminal organizations in Ukraine: 2014-2022 (%)

The impact of martial law on the criminal situation in Ukraine is significant. The decrease in the rate of crime detection by law enforcement, due to a concentration of efforts on combating armed aggression, may lead to diminished control over the activities of OCGs. This, in turn, fosters the emergence of internal conflicts among group members, as the lack of external oversight intensifies competition for resources and power.

It is expected that after the war, OCGs will actively infiltrate legal social and economic structures. The processes of redistributing businesses and land may provoke tensions among different groups, as they compete for control over new assets. This competition could lead to increased conflicts as OCGs vie for dominance in these emerging markets.

Secondly, normative criminology is directly related to the regulation of law enforcement actions and the mechanisms employed to combat organized crime. Legislative acts, such as the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine and specialized laws, establish the legal framework for responding to crimes committed by organized groups (VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE, 2012).<sup>25</sup> They define which actions can be classified as crimes and the corresponding penalties that can be imposed

<sup>25</sup> In the course of pre-trial investigation of a grave crime or of a special grave crime, information, objects and documents of importance for pre-trial investigation may be obtained by the individual who in accordance with law conducts special assignment through taking part in an organised group or criminal organization, or by a participant in such group or organization who co-operates with pre-trial investigation agencies on the confidential basis.

on offenders, influencing the internal dynamics of OCGs and contributing to the emergence of conflicts.

Additionally, to shape Ukraine's criminal policy aimed at combating organized crime during martial law, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2020) approved the Strategy for Combating Organized Crime. This strategy serves as a key framework for addressing the challenges posed by organized criminal groups. Its implementation is vital for ensuring a coordinated response to the evolving criminal landscape in wartime.<sup>26</sup>

In this area, alongside legislators and the government, Ukrainian scholars such as Ivan Bohatyrov and Andrii Bohatyrov (2024, p. 19-20) are actively working. They propose: 1) conducting a criminological analysis with the involvement of scientific institutions; 2) limiting members of parliament to two terms to reduce corruption; 3) creating a mechanism to incentivize informants with financial rewards and the possibility of leniency; 4) implementing technical means of border control, including intelligent cameras and drones, to prevent crimes.

Another example of such research is the systematic approach of the aforementioned Pylyp Yepryntsev. He proposed a Concept for reforming the Department of Strategic Investigations of the National Police of Ukraine with specific steps: 1) defining key tasks and developing Regulations; 2) designing a system, structure, and staffing schedule; 3) developing qualification requirements and professional suitability criteria; 4) organizing professional training and skill enhancement; 5) preparing necessary legal acts and initiating amendments to legislation; 6) organizing financial and logistical support; 7) ensuring cooperation with state and law enforcement agencies; 8) organizing international cooperation (YEPRYNTSEV, 2023).

In addition, higher education institutions for law enforcement agencies in Ukraine include the study of at least general issues of conflicts and their application in combating organized crime. The table below (Table 4) briefly summarizes the relevant educational material, which correlates with the previous sections of this article. This integration of theoretical knowledge into practical law enforcement training enhances the overall understanding of conflict dynamics in the fight against organized crime.

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<sup>26</sup> The strategy defines the directions for the development of the system for combating organized crime and the mechanisms for implementing state policy in the relevant field under current conditions.

Type of Conflict	Description of Conflict	Causes of Occurrence	Conflict Management	Impact on Law Enforcement Activities
Intrapersonal	Conflicts within an individual related to group identification and personal ambitions	Degree of group involvement Internal struggle of motives	Identification of psychological states Psychological support	Understanding criminal psychology to predict their actions
Interpersonal	Conflicts between group members related to incompatible interests and values	Differences in interests Violation of group norms	Mediation and negotiation between parties Involvement of leaders	Identifying and neutralizing conflicts within groups
Intragroup	Conflicts within a group that threaten its existence	Incompatible goals and values Power struggles	Establishing clear norms and rules Psychological training	Preventing schisms in criminal organizations
Intergroup	Conflicts between different criminal groups	Competition for resources Mutual claims	Establishing contacts to avoid escalation	Identifying competition to prevent crimes

Table. 4: Types of Conflicts in Criminal Organizations and Their Significance for Law Enforcement Activities (ALBUL, 2023, p. 17-28)

Thus, empirical data indicate a rise in crime and an escalation of activities by OCGs. Normative aspects, such as legislation and strategies to combat organized crime, play a crucial role in shaping effective response measures. The lack of adequate oversight from law enforcement can lead to heightened conflicts, making the study of their causes and mechanisms essential for improving criminal policy.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

An objective understanding of conflicts within OCGs is critically important for the effective functioning of law enforcement agencies. This research confirms the proposed hypotheses that intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts among OCG members arise from contradictions between individual values and the rigid demands of the criminal hierarchy. These conflicts, as the analysis shows, not only generate emotional instability and moral discomfort but can also significantly impact the motivation of OCG members to participate in collective activities.

The study also confirms that interpersonal conflicts may result from both internal competition and manipulative actions by leaders seeking to strengthen their control. The successful

implementation of law enforcement measures requires a deep understanding of these dynamics, as they can be utilized to create favorable conditions for operations aimed at weakening OCGs.

Moreover, knowledge of conflict phenomena within criminal environments is highly relevant for undercover operations or the recruitment of confidential informants within OCGs. A key element of successful operations is the ability of agents (informants) to gain the trust of OCG members by exploiting the group's diverse interests, disagreements, and internal conflicts. By manipulating these dynamics, they can gather valuable evidence about the inner workings of criminal activities, which can be used in court proceedings (WHEATLEY, 2017).

In addition, the following measures are proposed for the study of conflicts within OCGs by law enforcement agencies, in the following sequence:

- the use of analytical tools for collecting and processing information, with a focus on monitoring social media and other communication platforms, to identify internal conflicts, both overt and potential, within OCGs: helps to identify OCG members who may be involved in conflict situations;
- establishing cooperation with other countries for the exchange of information on internal conflicts within international criminal networks;
- analysis of financial flows and transactions involving OCGs: to identify the financial motives behind conflicts and internal contradictions within OCGs;
- development of informational models for conflict prediction: based on historical data on previous conflicts and the behavior of OCG members; allows law enforcement agencies to adapt their tactics to potential changes and dynamics in conflict development within OCGs;
- deployment of confidential collaborators: to create a “favorable situation” by using psychological techniques and “conflict management” approaches within OCGs.

Thus, the results of this research not only confirm the proposed hypotheses but also offer practical recommendations for improving criminal policy in Ukraine. This, in turn, will contribute to better conflict management in criminal environments and ensure greater safety for society.

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