JOURNAL OF CREATIVE WRITING
VOLUME 10 ISSUE 1
2026, Pp 67 – 79
ISSN 2410-6259
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HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.70771/JOCW.250

Analyzing The Delinquency Of Juvenile Gang Among The Gen Z In Urban Bangladesh: Perspective Of Social Disorganization And Strain Theory

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the burgeoning phenomenon of juvenile gang culture—locally known as "Kishore Gangs"—among Generation Z in the rapidly urbanizing metropolises of Dhaka and Chittagong, Bangladesh. It seeks to understand how the interplay of environmental factors and psychological stressors drives youth toward delinquent subcultures. Adopting a qualitative case study design with an ethnographic lens, the research utilized semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Data were collected from 17 participants, including 10 active or former gang members (aged 15–20) and 7 key informants (police, parents, and community leaders). Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the lived experiences of these youth within their socio-political landscape. The study reveals that gang affiliation is a "negotiated survival strategy" emerging from three distinct dynamics: (1) An environmental vacuum where a lack of formal social control is replaced by "organized disorganization" and political patronage; (2) General strain caused by a "digital-material conflict," where Gen Z's globalized digital aspirations collide with stagnant economic realities; and (3) The formation of a survivalist identity where motorcycles, social media visibility, and ties to political "Big Brothers" (Boro Bhais) serve as essential status markers and protective shields. This research fills a critical gap by integrating Social Disorganization and General Strain theories within the specific context of 2025 Bangladesh. It argues that Gen Z delinquency is not merely a rejection of norms, but a rational response to an institutional vacuum where political morphology harvests juvenile energy in exchange for subcultural protection.

KEYWORD
Juvenile delinquency, subculture, Social disorganization, Generation Z, Bangladesh

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INTRODUCTION

According to World Bank data, Generation Z represents a powerhouse demographic for Bangladesh, making up nearly 40% of the total population with over 65 million people aged 13 to 28. This generation is moving toward urban areas for many reasons including education and employment. Currently more than 39% are classified as urban dwellers. The largest portion of this group still lives in peri-urban or semi-rural environments (Alam et al. 2025).

In the swiftly urbanizing environments of the Bangladeshi metropolises of Dhaka and Chittagong, juvenile gangs originating from Generation Z encompass individuals who are currently in the stages of adolescence and post-adolescence in the year 2025. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z gangs in 2025 operate in a hybrid space where physical urban decay meets digital connectivity. This study argues that their 'deviance' is actually a rational survival strategy within a disorganized social structure.

A subset of these individuals is frequently regarded as mere manifestations of deviance by the older generations. They engage in interactive activities either online or collectively outside the home. While they should not be seen solely as divergence; rather, they can be understood as complex social groups that emerge in response to systemic issues (Islam et al., 2024). The issues may be uncommon because social disorganization theory and social strain theory discuss a pattern of delinquency among teens and adolescents that is not the same as the pattern in the post-adolescents of Gen Z in 2025.

This is a complex outcome because Islam et al. (2024) argue that Juveniles often diverge from societal norms and engage in delinquent behavior due to a complex interplay of socioeconomic, familial, community, peer, and educational challenges. These factors create environments that can push young individuals towards criminal activities. In this introduction, we presented a pivotal question that serves as the foundation for our exploration of gang affiliation and its underlying dynamics. We seek to understand the role of push factors in influencing an individual's decision to affiliate with a gang. What external pressures or enticing opportunities drive youth toward gang involvement?

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Bangladesh, urban centers such as Dhaka and Chittagong have witnessed an alarming increase in juvenile gang activities over the past decade. These gangs, predominantly composed of young males under the age of 18, are involved in crimes ranging from theft to creating fear among residents, harassing school-going girls, threatening businessmen, motorcycle racing, loud horn use, extortion, drug trafficking, and violent assaults (Hossain & Arifuzzaman, 2022). This phenomenon not only disrupts public order but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion for gang-involved youths and their families. Many of the gangs are abused and further recruited by several local political leaders who are running for votes in local or national elections (Higginson et al, 2018). This symbiotic relationship between systemic urban neglect and political exploitation suggests that gang involvement is not merely a choice of deviance, but a survival-driven response to the structural strains of the Bangladeshi metropolis.

Strain and Stress as 'Push' Factors

Economic deprivation, stemming from poverty, limits access to education, healthcare, and basic amenities, causing feelings of hopelessness and frustration among youth (Kappoor 2025). Teenagers from lower socioeconomic classes are more likely to experience frustration because they perceive dominant societal values as hindrances to achieving their goals. This frustration can 'push' them towards delinquent behaviors as an outlet or a means to cope (Nye et al., 1958).

Aggression is a typical response to feelings of frustration and deprivation. Strain theory suggests that crime results from the challenges faced by individuals in poverty who

struggle to achieve socially desirable goals through legal means. Those with low educational attainment, facing difficulties in securing well-compensated employment, are more likely to resort to criminal methods to achieve their objectives. This internal pressure and the inability to achieve success through conventional means 'push' them towards illicit activities and potentially gang involvement (Baron, 2008).

In essence, while social disorganization creates an environment where gangs can offer a sense of community and a path to resources (pull factors), the personal stress, frustration, and perceived lack of legitimate opportunities arising from economic hardship (push factors) compel youth to seek out this alternative, often delinquent, groups. This dual dynamic explains how youth may diverge from societal norms but converge with new identity groups like gangs (Vito 2021).

Current Study and our Assumption

While previous literature focuses on the socio-economic push factors of delinquency, there remains a significant gap in understanding the dependency of Gen Z gang identity on the political patronage. Current applications of Social Disorganization and Strain theories often overlook how political 'Big Brothers' institutionalize gang activities in urban Bangladesh. This study fills that gap by qualitatively exploring how juvenile delinquency are not merely a result of poverty, but a negotiated survival strategy within a politically charged subculture. This research aims to illuminate the intricate relationship between socio-economic factors and political influences in shaping the identity and delinquency of Gen Z gangs in urban Bangladesh. The study is conducted based on the assumptions that Gen Z are supposed to be optimism and they usually wants to be "socially responsible". But the Problem is the city is "disorganized" and "politically exploited". Hence this gap between their desire and their reality creates "anger". At the end, some of them join a gang to get the respect and money they want. Through the lens of the following theoretical framework, this study answers how the interplay between social disorganization and general strain shapes the formation of survivalist gang subcultures among Gen Z youth in urban Bangladesh.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of optimistic cognition within Generation Z does not necessarily lead to an increased likelihood of gang affiliation as a strategy for motivation or achieving goals. In fact, many members of Generation Z exhibit a strong sense of individualism and social responsibility, often seeking alternative avenues for personal and communal growth. This generation is more likely to engage in positive community-building activities, social entrepreneurship, or activism rather than resorting to gang involvement. Their optimism can drive them to pursue education, creative endeavors, and collaborative projects that align with their values, ultimately fostering a sense of purpose without the need for negative affiliations. Thus, while optimistic cognition may influence their aspirations, it does not inherently correlate with gang association as a motivational tool.

Does the phenomenon of optimistic cognition within Generation Z engender a propensity toward gang affiliation as a means of generating impetus for undertaking specific tasks or achieving the affirmative objectives they perceive as beneficial?

Social Disorganization Theory in Juvenile Gang Dynamics

Social Disorganization, is a criminological theory that links crime rates to the ecological characteristics of a community, emphasizing the breakdown of social institutions and informal social controls. This theory as a framework to understand how the breakdown of urban institutions and a 'political vacuum' in cities like Dhaka and Chittagong create an environment conducive to the formation of juvenile gangs. The theory's origins trace back to Shaw and McKay (1942), who established a link between the characteristics of neighborhoods and the prevalence of juvenile delinquency. Their work suggested that certain urban environments,

marked by instability and lack of social cohesion, were breeding grounds for criminal behavior.

Sampson and Groves (1989) expanded on this by introducing the concept of 'collective efficacy'. This refers to a community's ability to realize common goals and maintain public order, particularly in supervising youth. When neighborhoods lack this collective efficacy, they fail to adequately control and guide their young residents, contributing to delinquency.

In the specific case of urban Bangladesh (Dhaka and Chittagong), the theory is applied to explain how a 'political vacuum'—a lack of effective formal governance and rule of law—allows gangs to flourish. Atkinson-Sheppard's (2019) research is crucial here, as it discusses how these gangs are 'organized' by political figures, indicating that the 'disorganization' isn't just chaos but a structured system of political exploitation. This suggests that in such contexts, gangs may not merely be spontaneous formations but rather entities that arise and are sustained due to political patronage filling the institutional void.

General Strain Theory in Juvenile Gang Dynamics

General Strain Theory (GST) explains the 'push' factors that motivate individuals, particularly youth, towards delinquency. It centers on internal frustration and anger arising from a disparity between aspirations and reality, especially concerning economic and social opportunities. For Gen Z in Bangladesh, this theory highlights how the pressure of economic hardship and unmet lifestyle expectations can lead to gang involvement as a coping mechanism.

Robert Agnew's foundational work (1992) broadened the understanding of 'strain' beyond just financial deprivation. He argued that strain can also stem from negative relationships, the loss of positive stimuli, or the presentation of negative stimuli, leading to feelings of frustration, anger, and hopelessness that can push individuals towards crime and delinquency.

Agnew further refined his theory (2001) by specifying the types of strain most likely to result in criminal behavior. This expansion helps to identify specific stressors that are particularly potent in driving individuals to engage in illicit activities as a means of coping or retaliation.

In Bangladesh, particularly among Gen Z youth, the theory is applied to explain how the 'push' towards gangs is driven by the stress of being economically 'stuck' while being exposed to global digital connectivity and consumer culture. This creates a significant gap between their aspirations and their economic reality. Islam's (2023) study in Dhaka discusses how the quest for identity and protection acts as a 'coping mechanism' for this strain, leading youth to seek alternative 'success' within gang structures. This theory is critical for understanding the internal motivations of youth who join gangs, especially when traditional avenues for success are blocked and external pressures are high. The goals and desires of individuals born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, often influenced by digital media and global consumer culture.

Subculture Theory in Juvenile Gang Dynamics

Subculture is a sociological theory that examines how groups develop distinct norms, values, and practices that differentiate them from the broader society, often in response to perceived societal failures or exclusions. This theory explains how juvenile gangs form as a 'new social family' for youth, providing an alternative identity and a means of survival when mainstream society fails to offer status or opportunities. It examines how these groups develop their own norms, values, and status symbols, which can include everything from motorcycle races and social media presence to political ties.

Albert K. Cohen's seminal work (1955) introduced the concept of 'status frustration'. It is a concept where individuals, typically youth, experience frustration due to their inability to achieve success or recognition through conventional societal means, leading them to seek status within alternative subcultures. He argued that when youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds are unable to achieve status through conventional means (e.g., academic success, legitimate employment), they may experience frustration. This leads them to reject mainstream values and create their own subcultures where they can achieve status through delinquent acts. In these subcultures, 'deviant' behaviors are often re-evaluated and deemed acceptable or even desirable within the group's new value system.

Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) further developed the theory by focusing on the 'subculture of violence'. Their work explains how violence can become a normalized and expected response within certain groups, serving as a means of resolving disputes, asserting dominance, or defending honor. In such subcultures, aggressive behavior is not only tolerated but often rewarded, becoming an integral part of the group's identity and interaction.

Elijah Anderson's (1999) 'Code of the Street' provides a modern perspective, highlighting how 'respect' becomes the primary currency in street subcultures. For Gen Z, this extends to new forms of status symbols. The gang offers a collective identity and a sense of belonging, shielding members from the shame of poverty and providing a form of 'political protection' that mainstream institutions might deny. This allows the gang to function as a 'new social family' that offers status and survival mechanisms.

The transition of Gen Z youth into juvenile gangs in urban Bangladesh is not a simple act of deviance; it is a complex social trajectory explained by the interplay of environment, motivation, and identity.

I. The Environmental Vacuum (Social Disorganization Theory)

Shaw and McKay (1942) established that crime is a product of neighborhood ecological characteristics rather than individual pathology. In the metropolises of Dhaka and Chittagong, the breakdown of informal social controls creates a "political vacuum." While Sampson and Groves (1989) argue that a lack of "collective efficacy" prevents communities from supervising youth, the Bangladeshi context adds a layer of "organized disorganization." As Atkinson-Sheppard (2019) notes, this vacuum is filled by political patronage. Here, the "disorganization" is actually a structured system where political figures recruit youth, turning neighborhoods into breeding grounds for gangs under the guise of political protection.

II. The Aspirational Gap (General Strain Theory)

This structural environment acts upon the unique psychology of Generation Z. While Gen Z often possesses "optimistic cognition"—a desire for individualism and communal growth—this optimism becomes a source of Strain when faced with economic stagnation. Robert Agnew (1992, 2001) posits that strain arises when individuals are prevented from achieving positively valued goals. For Bangladeshi youth, the gap between the "digital success" they see online and the "economic stuckness" of urban poverty creates intense frustration. As Hossain et. al, (2023) suggests, the "push" towards gangs is a coping mechanism to resolve this strain; the gang becomes the only accessible vehicle to achieve the "affirmative objectives" and "status" that mainstream society denies them.

III. The Survivalist Identity (Subculture Theory)

When the environment is disorganized and the internal strain is high, youth gravitate toward a "new social family." Albert Cohen (1955) describes this as "status frustration," where youth reject mainstream values to create a subculture where they can finally "win." In the Gen Z context, this subculture is defined by a "Code of the Street" (Anderson, 1999) adapted for 2025: it includes motorcycle racing, social media dominance, and political ties. Following Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967), violence becomes a normalized currency within this group.

This subculture offers a "survivalist identity," transforming the youth's optimistic drive into a delinquent pursuit of respect, protection, and political belonging.

RESEARCH GAP AND RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the interplay between social disorganization and general strain shape the formation of survivalist gang subcultures among Gen Z youth in urban Bangladesh? The answer to this question will be explored with the following three sub questions related to environment, motivation and identity:

1. **On Political Environment:** How does the "political vacuum" and the lack of collective efficacy in Dhaka and Chittagong facilitate the transition from social disorganization to organized political patronage of juvenile gangs?
2. **On Optimistic Motivation:** How does "optimistic cognition" among Gen Z interact with economic deprivation to create a specific form of "strain" that pushes youth toward gang affiliation?
3. **On Status Identity:** In what ways do Gen Z gang members utilize digital media, status symbols (like motorcycles), and political "Big Brother" ties to construct a subcultural identity that serves as a survival strategy?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilizes a Qualitative Case Study design with an Ethnographic lens. This approach is most suitable because the research aims to understand the "subtle dynamics" and "lived experiences" of gang members in their natural urban environment. A case study allows for an in-depth exploration of the unique socio-political landscape of Dhaka and Chittagong, focusing on the *how* and *why* of gang formation rather than just the *how many*.

Sample Size and Characteristics

Due to the "hidden" nature of the population, Non-probability Purposive Sampling and Snowball Sampling was used. In qualitative research, a total of 17 participants is generally sufficient (Creswell, 2018) to reach "thematic saturation" (where no new information is being discovered). This group included 7 key informants who were selected for obtaining hidden gang members and validating the obtained data. Based on their interview and source 10 active or former juvenile gang members (Gen Z, aged 15-20 years) were recruited from selected "hotspots" in Dhaka and Chittagong. Besides Participants must have been involved in a "gang" (defined as a peer group involved in collective delinquency) and reside in urban areas exhibiting social disorganization. The entire protocol was supported by the study of Sanders et al. (2010).

Data Collection Tools

The Multi-Method Approach

For this specific study, a combination of Semi-Structured Interviews and Non-Participant Observation were used. Non-participant observation in public "hangout" spots (e.g., specific tea stalls, street corners, or parks) was also made.

Apart from semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation, Digital Ethnographic data which is new for Gen Z was collected. Since Gen Z operates in a "hybrid space," a brief analysis of public social media profiles (TikTok/Facebook) of these groups can provide data on their "subcultural identity."

Interview Questions

Category A: Environmental Vacuum (Social Disorganization)

1. Tell me about your neighborhood. When things go wrong or someone is in trouble, who do people go to for help?

2. How do you feel about the local police or formal authorities in your area?

3. How did you first meet the "Bhai" (Big Brother) or the group you hang out with? What kind of support do they provide that you couldn't find elsewhere?

Category B: The Aspirational Gap (General Strain)

4. What are your biggest dreams for the future (education, job, lifestyle)?

5. When you see successful people on social media (TikTok/Facebook), how does that make you feel about your current situation?

6. Do you ever feel "stuck" or angry that you can't get the things you want through a normal job or school? How do you handle that feeling?

Category C: The Survivalist Identity (Subculture)

7. Why is having a "name" or "respect" in the street so important for someone your age?

8. Tell me about the motorcycles or the way your group dresses. What do these symbols mean to you?

9. How does being part of this group help you "survive" or get ahead in the city?

Data Analysis Method

The study employed Thematic Analysis (TA) using the framework established by Braun & Clarke This process involves:

1. **Familiarization:** Transcribing interviews and reading field notes.
2. **Coding:** Labeling segments of text (e.g., coding mentions of "frustration" as *Strain* or "political help" as *Patronage*).
3. **Generating Themes:** Grouping codes into broader patterns like "The Political Survival Strategy" or "Digital Status Seeking."
4. **Thematic Mapping:** Creating a visual map to show how *Social Disorganization* leads to *Subculture* through the codes identified.

Ethical Considerations

The research followed ethical guidelines for studies involving human participants:

Informed Consent: Obtained from all participants, with parental consent for minors.

Confidentiality: Identities of juvenile participants and other informants were anonymized using pseudonyms.

Special attention was given to interviewing vulnerable groups (juvenile participants), ensuring interviews were conducted in safe and neutral environments.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved six phases: familiarization with data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the findings. NVivo 12 software supported the organization and coding of qualitative data. The analysis produced four major themes aligned with the study objectives.

Findings of Research Question One

The findings for Research Question 1—which examines how the "political vacuum" and lack of collective efficacy in Dhaka and Chittagong facilitate the transition to organized political patronage—are synthesized below:

1.The Institutional Vacuum and Failure of Formal Social Control

The data consistently highlights a profound breakdown in trust and functionality of formal state institutions, which creates the initial "vacuum."

Police Ineffectiveness and Corruption: Participants across the spectrum describe the police as inaccessible to the poor. P01 notes that you need "money in your pocket just to talk" to them, while P06 (Police SI) admits that law enforcement is paralyzed by political interference.

Absence of Rule of Law: Formal legal processes are replaced by informal "phone calls." P06 explains that when a gang member is caught, a "Boro Bhai" calls to secure their release, meaning the "Social Order is not run by the Penal Code; it is run by political phone calls."

Collapse of Community Efficacy: Traditional neighborhood watch and elder authority have vanished. P04 (Resident) laments that he can no longer discipline local boys because they listen only to the person who gives them a "motorcycle and a political flag." **P07 (Researcher)** labels this as a loss of "Social Glue."

2. The Shift to "Informal Governance" (Organized Disorganization)

The research finds that the "disorganization" of the city is actually highly organized through political patronage.

Political Offices as Community Hubs: Because the state is perceived as "far away," the political party office becomes the primary institution. P03 argues that the "office is stronger than the police station," and youth join the only "government" that works for them.

Functional Replacement: P05 (Political Patron) views his role as "Local Management," filling the state's absence in providing safety and mentorship. He claims that without him, the boys would be "lost to drugs or militancy."

The "Big Brother" (Boro Bhai) as Guardian: P08 (Mother) observes that in a household where parents work 14 hours a day, the "street becomes the father," and the Boro Bhai provides the discipline and support the family cannot.

3. The Symbiotic Patron-Client Relationship

The transition from a disorganized neighborhood to a political gang is a rational survival strategy for both the youth and the leaders.

Political Morphology: P03 and P09 (Ward Leader) describe a clear career path: youth start in a "Kishore Gang" to provide street-level "muscles" and visibility for rallies; in exchange, they receive "Identity" and "Line" (political connections).

Negotiated Survival: For the youth, this is not just deviance but a necessity. P10 (Reformed Member) explains that the "Big Brother" protects them from other gangs. Without the "Line," a young man in the slum is merely a "target."

Institutionalization of Delinquency: P09 admits that street politics requires "Muscles" to survive. He justifies the gang dynamics as a "Social Contract" where the youth provide street-level control and he provides them with a "Subcultural Shield" of power and status.

Findings of Research Question Two

The findings for Research Question 2—which explores how "optimistic cognition" among Gen Z interacts with economic deprivation to create "strain"—are as follows:

1. The Digital-Material Conflict

The research identifies a unique Gen Z phenomenon where digital connectivity acts as a catalyst for psychological strain.

Globalized Aspirations: Unlike previous generations, Gen Z participants are highly influenced by global digital wealth. They describe dreams of being "graphic designers," "gaming stars," or "IT professionals," fueled by seeing influencers on TikTok and Facebook (P02, P03).

Optimism as a Stressor: Paradoxically, their "optimistic cognition"—the belief that they *should* be successful and communal—becomes a source of pain when it hits the "structural wall" of the Bangladeshi economy. This creates an "internal fire" or anger (P01).

The Clash of Realities: A mother (P08) describes this as the "gap between his phone and his bed." The youth see a digital world of luxury but live in a physical reality of leaking tin roofs and poverty.

2. Frustration with Legitimate Pathways

The transcripts show a deep disillusionment with traditional methods of advancement.

Education-Job Mismatch: Even participants with higher education degrees (P03) express extreme frustration with the low wages of the "straight path." A monthly salary of 10,000–12,000 Taka is seen as an insult compared to the lifestyle seen online.

The "Dead End" Perception: For many, the formal economy is perceived as a "cage" or a "trap" (P02). They feel "stuck" while the rest of the world moves forward, leading to a rejection of mainstream labor in favor of high-risk, high-reward delinquency.

Optimism Reframed as Shortcuts: Because they want success "instantly," the gang is viewed not as a criminal choice, but as a rational "shortcut" to achieving the status they feel they deserve (P05).

3. Anger and Ego-Defensive Coping

The "Strain" manifests as a defensive aggression used to mask feelings of economic inferiority.

Seeking Visibility: Anger is directed toward being "invisible." One participant (P02) noted, "I prefer fear over being invisible." The gang provides a way to be seen and respected in a city that otherwise ignores them.

Reclaiming Agency: Joining the gang allows youth to transform from a "victim" of poverty into a "king" of the street (P01). The "optimistic drive" is redirected into "political programs" where they feel they are finally making an impact.

Coping through "Subcultural Success": When traditional success (wealth/education) is blocked, youth seek "alternative success" through motorcycle racing, group dominance, and political ties. This acts as an ego-shield against the shame of poverty (P10).

FINDINGS OF RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

The findings for Research Question 3—which investigates how Gen Z gang members utilize digital media, status symbols (motorcycles), and political "Big Brother" ties to construct a subcultural identity as a survival strategy—are synthesized below:

1. The "Code of the Street" in a Digital Age

The research identifies a "Subculture of Visibility" where digital and physical presence are inextricably linked.

Digital Resumes: For Gen Z, the gang subculture is projected through social media. P02 (15 yrs) explains that they use the "Boro Bhai's" motorcycle to film TikToks to look successful. This digital "fame" acts as a status symbol that offsets their physical poverty.

Visibility as Protection: In a dense city like Dhaka, being "invisible" is dangerous. P02 explicitly states, "I prefer fear over being invisible." The subculture provides a recognizable identity that deters bullies and rival groups.

The Hybrid Identity: P07 (Researcher) notes that the "Survivalist Identity" is a brand. The motorcycle is the masculinity, and the TikTok is the resume. This identity shields them from the "shame" of their socioeconomic background.

2. Material Symbols of Power (Motorcycles and "Heroism")

Physical status symbols are used to claim ownership of public spaces and assert dominance.

The Motorcycle as a Shield: P01 (20 yrs) describes the bike as a "uniform" that signals he is protected. P04 (Resident) observes that groups of 10–20 bikes blowing loud hydraulic horns is a way of saying, "We own this road."

Signaling Political "Line": The ability to ride recklessly or use loud horns without police interference is a visible sign of having a "Line" (connection). P01 notes that a bike is a sign of "Power" because it proves a "Boro Bhai" is backing you.

Masculinity and Respect: P10 (Reformed Member) reflects that without the bike and the "Name," a man becomes "Invisible" again and loses the respect he previously commanded through fear.

3. The "New Family" and Negotiated Survival

The gang subculture functions as a surrogate social structure that provides the security the state and family cannot.

The Boro Bhai as a Father Figure: P08 (Mother) describes how her son views the gang as his "New Family" because the "Boro Bhai" provides the sense of belonging and "Tiger" identity he craves.

Trading Muscle for Identity: P05 (Political Patron) admits that he provides the "Subcultural Shield"—flags, bikes, and protection—in exchange for the youth's "Muscles." The youth negotiate their survival by becoming a political commodity.

The Career Path (Political Morphology): P03 (Graduate) and P09 (Leader) explain that the subculture is a training ground. What starts as "Kishore Gang" (juvenile) behavior matures into "Political Activism." The subculture is the entry point into a lifelong survival network.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of juvenile gang dynamics among Gen Z in urban Bangladesh, illustrating that gang affiliation is not merely an act of random deviance but a negotiated survival strategy occurring at the intersection of environmental failure, psychological strain, and subcultural identity.

The "Organized Disorganization" and the Political Vacuum

Traditional Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) posits that delinquency flourishes where community institutions fail to exert informal social control. The data from Dhaka and Chittagong confirms this, but with a contemporary, localized twist that Atkinson-Sheppard (2019) describes as "illicit political morphologies."

The participants (P01, P06) consistently highlighted an "Institutional Vacuum" where the formal state—represented by a perceived corrupt and ineffective police force—is replaced by the "Boro Bhai" (Big Brother) system. Unlike the chaotic disorganization described in early Chicago School literature, urban Bangladesh exhibits "Organized Disorganization." As noted by P05 and P09, the political office has become the functional replacement for the police station and the family unit. This shift in collective efficacy (Sampson & Groves, 1989) suggests that in the metropolises of Bangladesh, social order is not absent; it is simply repurposed by political patrons who institutionalize gangs as a street-level wing of political power.

The Aspirational Gap: Digital Optimism and Physical Strain

A pivotal contribution of this study is the integration of General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) with the unique psychology of Generation Z. The study's assumption that Gen Z possesses "optimistic cognition" was validated by participants (P02, P03) who expressed globalized aspirations of becoming gaming stars or IT professionals. However, as Agnew (2001) suggests, the inability to achieve these positively valued goals through legal means leads to profound frustration.

This creates a "Digital-Material Conflict." The "Strain" in 2025 is not just about absolute poverty, but the relative deprivation felt when comparing a "leaking tin roof" to the "luxury SUVs" seen on TikTok (P08). The data suggests that for Bangladeshi Gen Z, optimism acts as a stressor; it raises the ceiling of their desires while the floor of their economic reality

remains stagnant. Consequently, the gang is framed as a "Rational Career Shortcut" (P05, P10)—the only vehicle accessible enough to bridge the gap between their $50 reality and their $1,000 digital dreams.

The Subculture of Visibility as Survival

Finally, Subculture Theory (Cohen, 1955) and the "Code of the Street" (Anderson, 1999) explain the formation of a "Survivalist Identity." The findings indicate that the Gen Z gang subculture is built on a currency of Visibility. In a hyper-populated urban environment, being "invisible" is equated with being a "victim" (P01, P02).

The use of motorcycles, loud hydraulic horns, and TikTok "resumes" represents a rejection of mainstream status markers that are unattainable (like high-paying corporate jobs) in favor of subcultural status markers. As P07 noted, the motorcycle represents masculinity while the TikTok video serves as a resume of power. This subculture provides a "New Family" that shields members from the "shame" of poverty (P08). However, as P10 (the desister) pointed out, this survival is "negotiated" and temporary; the youth trade their "muscles" for a "subcultural shield" of protection, only to find themselves discarded by political patrons once their utility expires.

A Trapped Generation

The synthesis of these theories reveals a "Trapped Generation." The Environmental Vacuum (Social Disorganization) pulls them in, the Aspirational Gap (Strain) pushes them forward, and the Survivalist Identity (Subculture) keeps them locked in a cycle of political exploitation. The "optimism" inherent in Gen Z is not lost but rather redirected into a delinquent pursuit of respect and protection within a system where deviance is the most logical path to survival.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of juvenile gangs in the rapidly urbanizing metropolises of Dhaka and Chittagong represents a transformative shift in the landscape of urban delinquency. This study concludes that the "Kishore Gang" phenomenon among Generation Z is not a simple manifestation of adolescent rebellion, but a sophisticated, negotiated survival strategy necessitated by a systemic failure of formal institutions.

The research confirms that Gen Z youth in 2025 operate in a unique "hybrid space." While the physical reality of urban Bangladesh remains characterized by Social Disorganization—where the rule of law is often replaced by the informal authority of political "Big Brothers"—the digital connectivity of this generation has introduced a new layer of General Strain. The "Optimistic Cognition" inherent in Gen Z, which drives a desire for status, individualism, and communal growth, ironically acts as a catalyst for delinquency. When these globalized aspirations collide with the "structural wall" of economic stagnation and political exploitation, the resulting frustration creates a psychological "push" toward alternative social groups.

This study further concludes that these gangs function as a Survivalist Subculture. In a disorganized social structure where the state is perceived as distant or inaccessible, the gang provides a "New Social Family" that offers identity, visibility, and protection. However, this survival is conditional. The findings illustrate a "Political Morphology" where juvenile energy is harvested by political patrons in exchange for a "Subcultural Shield." The motorcycles, the TikTok fame, and the "Code of the Street" are the currencies through which Gen Z youth negotiate their existence in an environment that offers them no legitimate pathways to the success they see on their screens.

Ultimately, the dynamics of Gen Z gangs in urban Bangladesh underscore a broader crisis of urban governance and social exclusion. Addressing this issue requires moving beyond punitive measures and acknowledging the rational motivations of these youth. Only by bridging the "Aspirational Gap" through digital inclusion and replacing the "Political

Vacuum" with genuine community efficacy can the cycle of survival-driven delinquency be broken. Without structural change, the "subculture of survival" will remain the only logical choice for a generation trapped between a digital dream and a disorganized reality.

Limitations & Future Research

• Missing Section: There is no distinct "Limitations" section. You should acknowledge the limitations of the small sample size, the snowball sampling method (potential bias), and the specific geographic focus (Dhaka/Chittagong) which may not apply to rural Bangladesh.

• Future Research: Future research directions are implied in the conclusion but should be explicitly stated (e.g., quantitative testing of the "optimism-strain" hypothesis).

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