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**Abstract** | The Netherlands is known as one of the pioneering countries adopting a whole-of-government approach to fighting organised crime. In 2012, the Dutch government launched a similar multi-agency approach to tackle outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs). This paper provides a brief overview of the problem of OMCGs in the Netherlands and describes the different aspects of the Dutch whole-of-government approach. After reflecting on these efforts, we conclude that little is yet known about the effectiveness of this whole-of-government approach to OMCG crime.

## The Dutch approach to outlaw motorcycle gangs

Teun van Ruitenburg and Arjan Blokland

### Introduction

Present-day approaches to organised crime incorporate a variety of strategies, often including a combination of repression and preventative administrative measures. Fighting organised crime is also believed to be the shared responsibility of both state and non-state actors (European Network on the Administrative Approach 2020). The Netherlands is well known as one of the pioneers of this whole-of-government approach (Ayling 2014; Kleemans & Huisman 2015). In this approach, the Dutch National Police and Public Prosecution Service work closely together with local governments, tax authorities and increasingly also private partners to raise barriers to organised crime. In 2012, the Dutch government launched a similar approach to tackle outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs).

In this article, we offer an overview of existing knowledge about the nature and size of the problem of OMCGs in the Netherlands. Subsequently, we describe how the whole-of-government approach to OMCGs has taken shape and reflect on the effects of this approach on OMCG crime. The aim of this article is to document the main developments and efforts of Dutch state authorities to fight OMCGs over the past 10 years. In doing so, we hope to inspire other researchers to likewise map their state's efforts to tackle OMCG crime and to contribute to a growing international body of knowledge on the various approaches to OMCGs.



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## Introducing Dutch OMCGs

The term ‘outlaw motorcycle gang’ is used by law enforcement agencies worldwide to label and criminalise a wide variety of groups. The National Police of the Netherlands define an OMCG as a group of males that conveys affinity with riding motorcycles, uses recognisable and differential group symbolism and is not freely accessible to outsiders, and which is demonstrated or assumed to have one or more members who engage in behaviours and/or activities that violate the law or societal norms, carried out in the name of or on behalf of the club or using the club’s reputation and/or structure (Landelijke Eenheid 2014). In practice, when the whole-of-government approach was initiated in 2012, this broad definition was applied to all Dutch motorcycle clubs wearing a three-piece back patch. Support clubs were subsequently defined as clubs publicly advertising their affiliation with an OMCG, for example on their website.

The first OMCG in the Netherlands was the Amsterdam charter of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (MC), established in 1978. Several other local OMCGs followed in subsequent years, with the foundation of Satudarah MC in 1990 marking the end of the first ‘decade’ of Dutch OMCG subculture. Extremely violent confrontations between rival OMCGs in Canada and Scandinavia in the mid-1990s and a growing suspicion that the Dutch Hells Angels were involved in the transnational drug trade meant that by the turn of the century Dutch law enforcement began to view OMCGs as a public threat rather than a public nuisance. In 1996, commissioned by the Dutch parliament, the research group Fijnaut extensively studied the nature of organised crime in the Netherlands. The research group’s report argued that Dutch Hells Angels were involved in drug networks around the world and described the club’s members as ‘specialists of private violence’ (Tweede Kamer 1996: 123). Not least because Angel Place, the Hells Angels’ Amsterdam clubhouse, was guarded by cameras and fences, the researchers also concluded that the clubhouse had turned into a ‘safe haven’ for deviant and criminal behaviour (Tweede Kamer 1996: 12).

Also in 1996, the eight OMCGs active in the Netherlands at the time established the Council of Eight, a consultative body aimed at preventing between-club rivalry escalating into large-scale public violence, as had happened in Scandinavia. The view of Dutch police is that the Hells Angels dominated this council until Satudarah MC left the council in 2011—an event that is believed to have resulted in the council’s disbandment in 2013 (Landelijke Eenheid 2014). The alleged hegemony of the Hells Angels in the Netherlands further crumbled when in 2013 former Satudarah and Hells Angels members founded No Surrender MC, which quickly surpassed the Dutch Hells Angels in membership. Other clubs, both local and international, soon followed, with varying degrees of success. These splits, fusions and entrants led to unrest in the Dutch outlaw biker milieu and increased the fear among law enforcement and local governments of violent confrontations. After a steep increase in the number of known OMCG members between 2014 (601 members) and 2018 (2,130 members), the number of known OMCG members in the Netherlands dropped to 1,850 in 2020 (LIEC 2021).

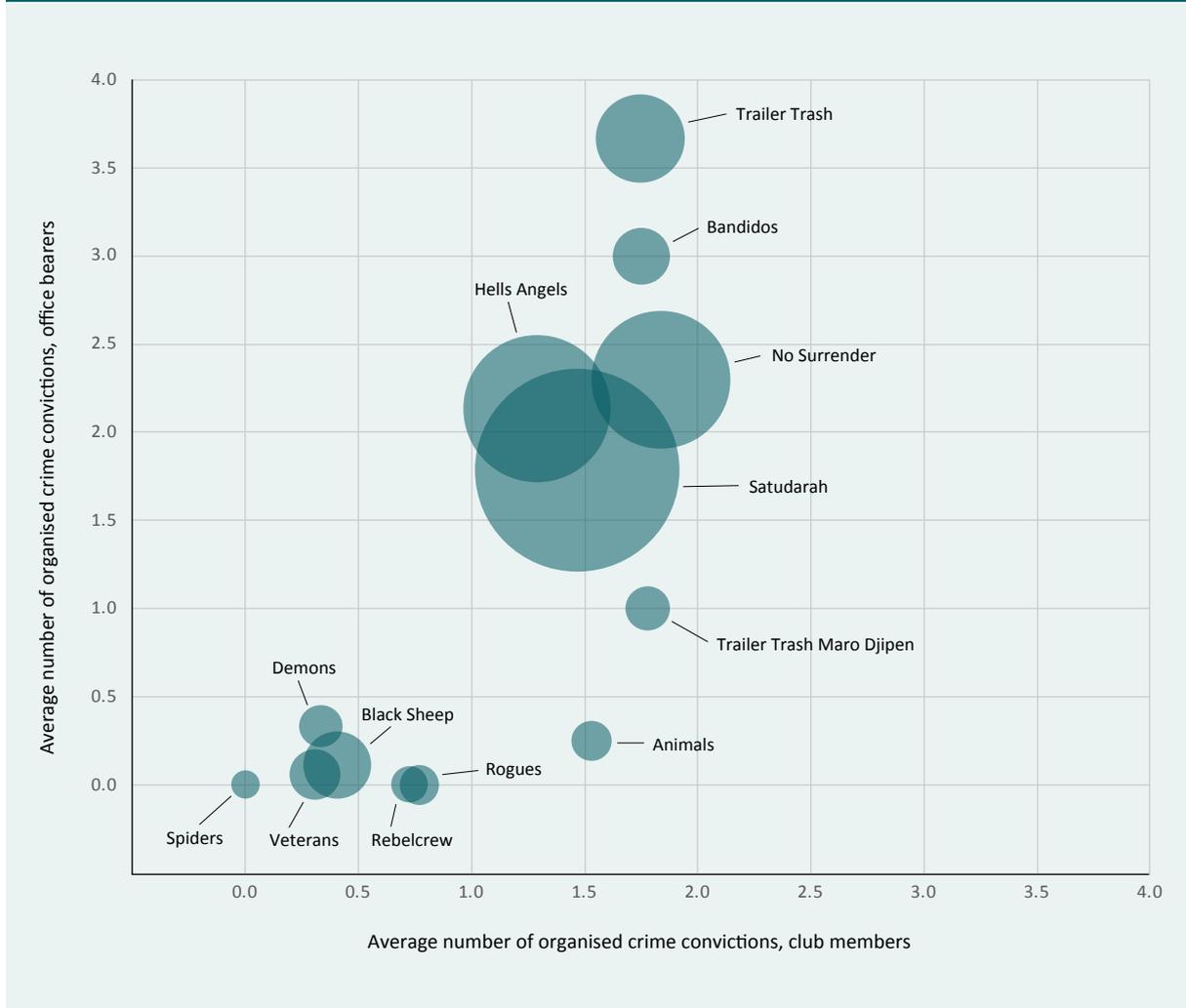
## Crimes of OMCG members

Though anecdotal evidence of OMCG members' criminal involvement continued to amass after the 1996 Fijnaut report, it was not until 2014 that a systematic study examined the criminal careers of all OMCG members known to the police at the time ( $n=601$ ). It revealed that 82 percent of OMCG members had a criminal record, and over a quarter had been convicted more than 10 times (Blokland et al. 2019). In an age-matched sample of male motorcycle owners who were not OMCG members, these proportions were 32 percent and seven percent respectively, suggesting that OMCG membership is associated with criminal involvement. A follow-up study of 1,617 OMCG members and 473 support club members found 86 percent of OMCG members and 78 percent of support club members had been convicted at least once (Blokland, Van der Leest & Soudijn 2020). Around one in three convicted OMCG and support club members had also spent time in prison, compared to less than one in 10 of the comparison group, indicating the seriousness of their crimes.

Using group-based trajectory modelling, Blokland, Van der Leest and Soudijn (2020) also distinguished seven criminal trajectories. Three of them showed a characteristic peak in offending during the early to mid-twenties (at differing levels), before reaching a plateau from the mid-thirties onwards. Three other trajectories, again differing in level, showed a more gradual build-up and decline in convictions from age 12 to the mid-fifties. In terms of the nature of offending, 57 percent of convicted OMCG members and 50 percent of convicted support club members were convicted of a violent crime at least once, while 35 and 26 percent respectively were ever convicted of a drug crime. Sensitivity analysis, which accounted for the possibility that especially criminally active OMCG and support club members were known to the police, suggested that the average Dutch OMCG or support club member was still disproportionately involved in crime compared to their non-member peers (see also Van Deuren, Blokland & Kleemans 2021). Nevertheless, it should be realised that these same figures showed that one out of six OMCG or support club members had no criminal record whatsoever.

When analysed at the club level, these same studies found much variation between Dutch OMCGs in the level of criminal involvement among their members (Blokland, Soudijn & Van der Leest 2016; Blokland, Van der Leest & Soudijn 2017). While the percentage of convicted members in some clubs was no different to that of the Dutch population as a whole, in other clubs this percentage topped 90 percent. This variation between Dutch OMCGs is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the average number of convictions for 'organised crime'—defined here as convictions for drug offences, weapons offences, extortion, kidnapping, human trafficking and money laundering. The average number of convictions for club members is displayed on the x-axis and for office bearers on the y-axis, and the size of the bubble is proportionate to the number of known members in the sample. Figure 1 reveals a divide between a number of smaller clubs in the bottom left, whose members are hardly involved in organised crime, and those placed towards the middle and top part of the figure, which include the largest Dutch OMCGs. Most actively involved in organised crime is Trailer Trash MC, a club originating from the traveller community whose members and especially its leaders appear heavily involved in organised crime. As with individual OMCG members, there appears to be substantive variation between OMCGs in the criminal involvement of their membership.

**Figure 1: Average number of organised crime convictions (from age 12 up to 2015) for OMCG members and office bearers, by club**



Source: Blokland, Van der Leest & Soudijn 2017

Still, even when a disproportionate number of club leaders and members are involved in organised crime, this does not necessarily mean that these criminal activities are carried out on behalf of the club or using the club's structure. Studying 60 police files on OMCG members, comprising 202 charges against 291 unique suspects, Van Deuren, Kleemans and Blokland (2020) found that for only 25 percent of charges (or 27% of the files) the organisation of the crime overlapped with the hierarchical structure of the OMCG. In many cases these charges concerned acts of public violence, or violence and extortion associated with fellow members being expelled from the club in 'bad standing'. Entrepreneurial crimes, like drug crimes and money laundering, typically seemed the work of single 'bad apples' or groups of members acting on their own behalf. Nevertheless, when committing their crimes these 'bad apples' were found to indirectly profit from the club's intimidating reputation.

## The whole-of-government approach

Prior to 2000, the Dutch government adopted what could be called a 'laissez-faire attitude' towards clubs like the Hells Angels MC and largely accepted the presence of OMCGs in society (Geurtjens, Nelen & Vanderhallen 2018). However, after the turn of the millennium the national government gradually adopted the position that the Hells Angels MC had no place in Dutch society. Fuelled by multiple violent incidents and the seizure of firearms and drugs in and around the Hells Angels' Amsterdam clubhouse, the Public Prosecution Service initiated a large-scale criminal investigation into the Amsterdam charter of the Hells Angels in 2003. However, by the end of 2007, the district Criminal Court declared that the Public Prosecution Service's criminal case was inadmissible after transcripts of confidential conversations between the suspects and their counsellors were found included in the case files.

The change in approach took shape fully in November 2006, when the Public Prosecution Service requested that the Civil Court ban the nine legal entities of all Hells Angels charters in the Netherlands. Yet the district Civil Court ruled that the Public Prosecution Service had failed to show that the criminal activities of individual members were part of the modus operandi of the legal entities and thus there were insufficient grounds to ban the Dutch Hells Angels MC. Though painful, these setbacks did not result in lethargy on the part of the police and local government with regard to the Hells Angels. In fact, the fear of a 'biker war' between Satudarah MC and Hells Angels MC in 2011 caused the police to widen the focus beyond the Hells Angels MC to the other OMCGs in the Netherlands (Van Ruitenburg 2020). In 2014, the Dutch National Police listed the following 15 OMCGs as outlaw motorcycle gangs: Animals MC, Bandidos MC, Black Sheep MC, Demons MC, Gringos MC, Hells Angels MC, No Surrender MC, Rebel Crew MC, Red Devils MC, Rogues MC, Satudarah MC, Spiders MC, Trailer Trash MC, Veterans MC, and Waardeloos MC (Landelijke Eenheid 2014).

The national whole-of-government approach launched in 2012 was built on a so-called 'barrier model' and attempted to 'raise barriers' to hinder both the individual OMCG members and the clubs as a whole. The Dutch Minister for Justice and Security wrote:

The starting point of this barrier model is to raise barriers wherever possible by deploying administrative, fiscal and criminal instruments. On the basis of the barrier model, integrated interventions are set on the prioritized focus areas. As regards the problem of the outlaw bikers, a specific barrier model has been developed, whereby barriers are developed on the focus areas such as the presence in the public domain, finances, and mobility and means. (Tweede Kamer 2012b: 3; translated from Dutch by the authors)

It is no coincidence that the Dutch minister chose a barrier model as the starting point for the national approach to OMCGs. By doing so, the minister followed on from an earlier process of analysing organised crime from a situational crime perspective (see, for example, Bullock, Clarke & Tilley 2010; Van de Bunt & Kleemans 2011). In short, barrier models are essentially a form of crime script analysis (Cornish & Clarke 2002) and are used to reveal (1) what steps a criminal has to take to successfully commit a crime, (2) what criminogenic opportunities facilitate this illicit process, and (3) how various state and non-state actors can 'raise barriers' to impede this process (Van de Bunt & Kleemans 2011). Because this method shows that criminals are always dependent on various opportunities in society, it also reveals that fighting crime should be a shared responsibility of the

police and the Public Prosecution Service (criminal law), local governments (administrative law), the Tax Authority (tax law), civilians and private operators in sectors such as transport, real estate and finance. In 2019 the first two European barrier models were developed: the European barrier model on Organised Property Crime and the European barrier model on Synthetic Drugs (European Network on the Administrative Approach 2020).

Interestingly, while until then barrier models were mostly used to prevent and fight specific forms of criminal activities, in the case of OMCGs it was used to fight a specific group of people involved in various types of crime. In other words, in the present case the OMCG phenomenon as such is treated as the criminal activity (Van Ruitenburg 2020). In 2012, the barrier model against OMCGs was moulded around seven 'themes' (location, employment, image, finances, presence in the public domain, mobility and means, and the recruitment of members and clubs) and listed all the available legal instruments that could be used to intervene in these areas. Under 'location', for instance, it listed the legal measures available to seize or close an OMCG clubhouse. It was noted, for example, that clubhouses must be established in accordance with the local development plan and that the *Opium Act* offers the possibility of closing a building if it is being used to store any amount or type of drugs.

The seven themes mentioned above were translated into eight focal points for fighting OMCGs:

- criminal prosecution of individual members;
- clubhouses;
- OMCG-related events;
- involvement of OMCGs in the hotel and catering industry;
- OMCG members working for the government;
- OMCG members working in the private security sector;
- the role of the Dutch Tax Authority in approaching members without a declared legal income; and
- the possible link between OMCGs and football hooliganism (Tweede Kamer 2012b).

Because the link between OMCGs and football hooliganism has since turned out to be of less importance to the Dutch government, this focal point will not be discussed in this article. The remainder of this paragraph summarises how the other focal points were translated into practice.

In order to make a clear statement that OMCG members, like anyone, must obey the law, the Public Prosecution Service and the police first of all prioritised prosecuting criminal offences committed by individual members (LIEC 2016). This zero-tolerance policy not only related to organised crime activities but also to less serious offences such as traffic violations. While this policy was generally meant to show OMCG members that they were not 'untouchable', it also served to increase knowledge about the criminal involvement of the different clubs and to inform society (including local governments) about the criminal characters of OMCGs. Moreover, in conducting both small and large investigations, the Public Prosecution Service was keen to gather information that could possibly lead to a successful civil ban in the future.

In around 2014, the police began to specifically invest in criminal investigations into 'key' members or chapters as a way to impede the 'organising capacity' of OMCGs (LIEC 2014: 6; LIEC 2016: 3). Besides criminal investigations, members were also proactively approached by the Tax Authority. In close collaboration, the police, the Public Prosecution Service and local governments investigated whether OMCG members had unpaid tax debts or had unjustly received social security benefits. To facilitate this multi-agency approach, the different state agencies worked together with the Regional Information and Expertise Centres, which were set up to collect information from different sources, and subsequently proposed targeted interventions.

It was also argued that the government should not be giving OMCGs a 'podium' and therefore should not allow clubhouses to operate or OMCG-related activities such as parties or ride-outs to occur (Tweede Kamer 2012a). Mayors were regularly invited to attend national meetings chaired by the police and the LIEC to learn about the various administrative measures available to pre-emptively disrupt OMCG activities. Research by Van Ruitenburg (2020) indeed shows that local governments generally will not issue OMCGs permits to build a clubhouse or organise an event, such as a party or ride-out. Ride-outs were problematised, not only because members would violate traffic regulations but also because OMCGs taking over the streets in intimidatingly large numbers were thought to strengthen their 'outlaw' or 'untouchable' image (Van Ruitenburg 2020).

This, however, does not mean that mayors were always able to effectively 'raise barriers' to the undertakings of OMCGs. Members of course do not need an event permit to ride their motorcycles or even a clubhouse to come together; they can have their meetings and throw parties in local bars instead. Therefore, mayors occasionally invited bar owners who were planning to rent out their place to an OMCG to the town hall. During these so-called 'stop-conversations', mayors pointed out the criminal character of OMCGs and bar owners were persuaded to stop doing business with OMCGs and their members. Mayors sometimes also invited OMCG members for a meeting. For instance, when a local government hears that an OMCG plans to establish a clubhouse, the mayor might initiate a stop-conversation to inform the club that it is not welcome within the municipal boundaries. To support local governments to hold these conversations, the Regional Information and Expertise Centres distributed special guidelines on how to prepare for and carry out these meetings (LIEC 2015: 9). To hinder the activities of OMCGs in the hotel and catering industry, one mayor sent a letter to the owners of bars and restaurants stating that 'local governments, police and the Public Prosecution Service...tolerate no activities in which outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) are involved' (cited in Van Ruitenburg 2020: 263). To prevent displacement effects, mayors also imposed new local regulations. To give one example, in 2017 the mayor of 's-Hertogenbosch altered the *Alcohol Licensing and Catering Act* by adopting a rule stating 'it is forbidden for an owner to permit a gathering of an Outlaw Motorcycle Gang in its venue' (City Council of 's-Hertogenbosch 2017). This rule was intended to prevent OMCGs from taking over bars ultimately to use these venues as their new clubhouse.

As noted, the Minister for Justice and Security also drew attention to the problem of OMCG members working for the government or for private security companies. OMCG membership was deemed to be incompatible with a position as a civil servant and was used as grounds to ban OMCG members from working in these two sectors. To do so, the Minister for Housing and Civil Service issued a letter titled *Undesirable private relations of civil servants* which stated: 'the Administration regards it as undesirable when civil servants in private situations knowingly and willingly are in a setting with

people who more or less structurally violate norms and laws' (cited in Van Ruitenburg 2020: 288). This statement was translated into a Plan of Approach for Outlaw Bikers in Civil Service, which offered guidelines on taking action against OMCG members in civil service (LIEC 2014).

In the private security sector, the police aimed to hinder criminal influences by refusing security licences to OMCG members. Those who plan to work for a private security company or as a private investigator in the Netherlands need to apply to the National Chief of the Dutch National Police for a licence. The police began turning down these applications, arguing that OMCG members do not have the 'trustworthiness and integrity' required to work in this sector. In response, the Dutch Security Organisation altered its rules of conduct by stating that a member of the organisation is not allowed to 'hire people who find themselves in a criminal environment' (Nederlandse Veiligheidsbranche 2015). Despite these guidelines, a few court cases found that it is unlawful to ban OMCG members from these sectors solely on the basis of their OMCG membership. The courts ruled that one must always take into consideration the criminal involvement of the individual in question and not judge based on assumptions about OMCGs in general. This was especially so because at that time the OMCGs in question had not yet been banned under civil law (Van Ruitenburg 2020).

Finally, the Dutch government initiated a media communication strategy to inform society about the criminal involvement of OMCGs. This strategy involved publishing details of OMCG related violent incidents or criminal activities in the media (LIEC 2017, 2014). The goal of this strategy was to alter the still somewhat romantic image of the clubs and to make sure that society at large would form a 'united front' against OMCGs.

## Banning Dutch OMCGs

A factor complicating the described attempts to 'raise barriers' to hinder OMCGs was that these clubs were legal entities whose freedom of association was protected by law. Thus, mayors were trying to find ways to restrict the activities of organisations that were, legally speaking, no different from the boy scouts. This changed when, after the failed initial attempt to ban the Hells Angels, the Public Prosecution Service became more successful in their efforts to ban OMCGs. The Dutch Civil Code gives the Public Prosecution Service the ability to request that a Civil Court ban a legal entity whose 'activities are in violation of public order' (Dutch Civil Code, Article 20). The public prosecutor can file a request to the Civil Court when the 'principles of our legal system are affected on a scale that is disruptive for society at large' (Kesteloo 2011: 81). The criteria for meeting 'activities in violation of public order' are less strict than those for constituting a 'criminal organisation'. In fact, a legal entity can be banned without actual criminal conduct being proven in court, as was the case with paedophile lobby group Vereniging Martijn, which promoted sexual relations with minors on its website (High Court Arnhem-Leeuwarden, 2 April 2013, ECLI:NL:GHARL:2013:BZ6041). Although law enforcement agencies acknowledged that banning OMCGs would likely not hinder individual members from committing crimes, it was thought to send a strong signal that OMCGs are not accepted in Dutch democratic society. Moreover, a civil ban would make it easier for local governments and other agencies to hinder OMCG-related activities.

The first OMCG successfully banned in the Netherlands was the Bandidos MC ('BMC Holland'), a relatively recent shoot on the Dutch OMCG stem. In December 2017, the Civil Court found it 'necessary in a democratic society to legally declare the activities of Bandidos MC in violation of public order' and concluded that the legal entity 'BMC Holland' must be dissolved and deprived of its assets and resources. Among other things, the court argued that members of the club operate in a 'subculture of lawlessness' that stimulates, facilitates and accepts criminal activities and large-scale violent incidents (District Court Midden-Nederland, 20 December 2017, ECLI:NL:RBMNE:2017:6241). However, after the club appealed against this verdict, the Supreme Court ruled that banning the legal entity 'BMC Holland' does not automatically ban the local chapters of the club. For the Public Prosecution Service to successfully ban all existing chapters of the Bandidos MC it must file a separate request for each and every local chapter, something the Public Prosecution Service in this case only did for the 'mother' chapter of the club (Supreme Court, 24 April 2020, ECLI:NL:HR:2020:797).

Since 2017, the District Court has also banned the brotherhood Catavarius (17 January 2018); the OMCG Satudarah MC and its support clubs, Supportcrew 999 and Saudarah (18 June 2018); Hells Angels MC (29 May 2019); and No Surrender MC (7 June 2019). On appeal, the ban of Satudarah MC and No Surrender MC were upheld by the Supreme Court on 13 November 2020 and 22 April 2022 respectively. Currently, the Hells Angels MC is awaiting the verdict of the Supreme Court, after the club was banned by the High Court on 15 December 2020. Most recently, the Public Prosecution Service filed a request to ban Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC, a club that originated from the 2016 merger of Trailer Trash MC and the urban street gang Main Triad Crips. (Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC was founded in 2016 and is therefore not included in Figure 1.) The club's national president and a number of fellow members are currently standing trial for 15 cases of murder-for-hire. The District Court banned Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC on 19 April 2021, a verdict that was upheld by the High Court on 17 May 2022.

Civil bans on OMCGs have stirred debate about the judicial consequences of these bans (Koornstra et al. 2019). Although the 'continuation of activities' of a banned organisation (after a definite verdict of the Supreme Court) is punishable under the Dutch Criminal Code (Article 140, subsection 2), it remains unclear what specific activities are considered an unlawful 'continuation of activities'. The question is to what extent members (or ex-members) of a banned OMCG are still allowed, for example, to gather for meetings, take part in ride-outs or visit a bar together. Moreover, it is largely unclear to what extent the members are allowed to establish a new club using a slightly different name and club logo. Interestingly, in a recent criminal case against a member of motorcycle club Singa 19, the Criminal Court ruled that wearing the colours of this club, which resemble those of the banned Satudarah MC, is not punishable under Article 140 of the Dutch Criminal Code (District Court Noord-Holland, 19 October 2021, ECLI:NL:RBNHO:2021:9123). Also, despite the fact that Singa 19 used a clubhouse that was formerly used by Satudarah, the court argued that the grounds on which Satudarah was banned (eg intimidation and violent behaviour) cannot simply be attributed to Singa 19—even though the club includes former members of Satudarah MC.

## Planned legislation

In 2018, members of parliament drafted legislation specifically aimed at banning OMCGs. The desire for this bill particularly stemmed from the idea that the existing civil procedure to ban an organisation was too ‘complex and time-consuming’ (LIEC 2017: 4). Local governments and law enforcement agencies in this context argued that it is important to respond to the problem of OMCGs quicker and, presumably, more effectively. Inspired by the ‘vereinsverbot’ in Germany, the bill would authorise the Minister for Legal Protection to directly ban organisations that pose a serious threat to the safety and security of civilians and the public order. After such a ministerial decision, the ban would come into force immediately, which in turn would make the ‘continuation of activities’ directly punishable under criminal law. The most important difference between this administrative ban and the civil ban is that an administrative ban will not first be judged by a court. It is the minister, advised by the police and Public Prosecution Service, who can initially decide to ban an organisation (Tweede Kamer 2020). Under this bill, limitations on the fundamental right to freedom of assembly and association (Article 8 of the Dutch Constitution Law and Article 11 of European Convention of Human Rights) turn into a political decision and it becomes the responsibility of the banned organisation to fight this decision in court, which encompasses a reversal of the burden of proof (Van Ruitenburg 2020). The bill is currently under review in the Dutch parliament, so it remains unclear if and when this bill will come into effect.

## Effects of the whole-of-government approach

Over the past 10 years, the Dutch government has put much effort in raising barriers to impede OMCGs. Based on the yearly progress reports (LIEC 2014–2021), local governments have gone to great lengths to close clubhouses or prevent them from being established (on average 20 clubhouses per year between 2016 and 2020) and have refused multiple event permits (on average 4 events per year between 2016 and 2020). To prevent other (unlicensed) events from taking place, mayors and police officers have conducted a total of 371 stop-conversations since the whole-of-government approach began in 2012. This, among other things, has led to a decrease in the number of (known) clubhouses, from 177 clubhouses in 2015 to 45 clubhouses by the end of 2020. Although the number of OMCG members in civil service remained relatively stable over time (2015: 58 members; 2017: 50 members; 2019: 52 members), the number of members licensed to work in the private security sector decreased from 66 in 2012 to 27 in 2020. Furthermore, each year between 2017 and 2020 an average of 105 custodial sentences and an average of 80 community sentences were meted out to individual OMCG members. In the same period, individual members faced a total of 417 criminal fines, amounting to €218,325.

Beyond the raw counts of barriers raised, according to the LIEC the approach frustrated the ‘leadership and organisational capacity’ of OMCGs, an effect that was particularly noted in relation to No Surrender MC (LIEC 2019: 6). The approach has also been successful in that over recent years OMCGs have become less visible in the public domain. OMCGs are less active on social media and members seem to be more hesitant to wear their colours in public, something that has seemingly led to less public disorder caused by warring OMCGs. However, as a result of the closure of clubhouses, OMCG members now come together at venues that are less public, such as members’ homes and private company buildings. This in turn means law enforcement agencies must put in more effort to collect intelligence, for instance when it comes to identifying (unofficial) clubhouses and upcoming events (LIEC 2021).

Judging by the increase in the number of OMCG members since 2012, the above measures arguably did not make OMCG membership less attractive, albeit that membership is less clearly defined than it was 10 years ago. Dutch OMCGs are much more scattered and membership has become more ‘fluid’, meaning that new clubs sometimes dissolve as quickly as they are established and less strict recruitment policies allow members to switch clubs more easily. Noteworthy in this context is the arrival of so-called ‘brotherhoods’, clubs that copy the well-known symbols, ranks and rituals of OMCGs but openly distance themselves from being a motorcycle club. New OMCGs are also established that seem to copy the insignia of the recently banned ones. For instance, the colours of the newly established Darahbaru MC closely resemble the colours of the now banned Satudarah MC, whereas the back patch of the new Hardliners MC seems to be inspired by the lettering and logo of the Hells Angels MC—which can be explained by the fact that this club was established by an ex-Hells Angels member.

Finally, over the years local OMCGs have moved outside the Dutch border and have established chapters in, for example, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Morocco. This development is understood by law enforcement agencies as a ‘waterbed effect’ resulting from the strict Dutch approach (LIEC 2021, 2019). For instance, in 2018 it was reported that 60 percent of the chapters of Satudarah MC, established in the Netherlands in 1990, were based outside the Netherlands (LIEC 2018).

Although it is acknowledged that the barriers described above made it ‘more difficult for OMCGs to commit undermining and criminal activities’ (LIEC 2016: 2), it is at the same time argued that OMCG members continue to use excessive violence and that the measures likely will not stop members from being involved in organised crime activities entirely (LIEC 2021). In a first effort to quantify the effects of the whole-of-government approach, Klement and Blokland (2021) examined changes in the three-monthly conviction rate of the 2,090 known OMCG and support club members used in previous research, applying interrupted time series analysis to control for confounding factors. Results of this analysis showed convictions for traffic violations (eg drink-driving) had increased, but primarily among support club members. This was argued to result from the increased police attention paid to outlaw bikers and the zero-tolerance stance that is inherent to the whole-of-government approach. The whole-of-government approach had no clear effect on OMCG members’ convictions for violent crimes, which were stable between 2008 and 2015. The absence of an effect on violence might be taken to signal the subcultural importance and symbolic value of physical violence in the outlaw biker milieu.

For organised crime convictions, however, a different picture emerges, with a marked decline occurring after the whole-of-government approach was implemented. While this decline took place against the background of nationally declining gun crime rates, OMCG members also showed a decline in drug crime—a trend not mirrored in the national conviction data. The observed decline in organised crime convictions among outlaw bikers is especially noticeable among OMCG members. Among support club members, organised crime conviction rates continued to increase after the whole-of-government approach began, although less steeply than before. Whether these changes reflect the success of the approach in raising barriers to OMCG members’ organised crime involvement or whether, prompted by increased law enforcement attention, OMCG members merely professionalised their organised crime involvement or delegated the riskier tasks to members of support clubs remains a question open to future research.

## Concluding remarks

In this article, we offered insight into the nature and size of the problem of OMCGs in the Netherlands and how the Dutch government has been fighting OMCGs over the last decade via a whole-of-government approach. The main driving forces behind this national multi-agency approach were the involvement of OMCG members in serious (organised) crimes and the fear of violent confrontations between warring clubs. On a more abstract level, OMCGs were considered problematic because they manifest as 'untouchable' groups that stand above the laws and norms of conventional society. The whole-of-government approach to OMCGs builds on a longstanding idea of moving beyond a criminal justice approach to a focus on raising preventative and administrative barriers to crime. In case of OMCGs, this resulted in efforts of both public and private agencies to eliminate clubhouses and biker events and, in effect, to exclude OMCGs from Dutch society. Most recently, the Public Prosecution Service has been successful in banning some of the largest Dutch OMCGs, which is thought to send a clear message that OMCGs have no place in Dutch democratic society.

Despite these efforts, at present, the long-term effects of the approach remain largely unclear, as quantitative evaluations of the whole-of-government approach are plagued by the convergence of changes in investigative attention and prosecution practices, and potentially behavioural change on the part of OMCGs and their members. If anything, the whole-of-government approach seems to have contributed to the drastic fragmentation of the Dutch OMCG landscape that was set in motion after the disbandment of the Council of Eight. During the decade the whole-of-government approach has been in effect, the Netherlands faced an upsurge in new OMCGs and support clubs, including so-called brotherhoods. Whether the notoriety of these new OMCGs will eventually rise to meet that of their now banned predecessors remains to be seen.

Though an important symbolic triumph for Dutch law enforcement, in the absence of relevant jurisprudence, the practical consequences of the recently issued civil bans are dubious. Many legal battles still likely need to be fought before the 'war' against OMCGs has a clear winner. Internationally, the extent to which the Dutch approach has resulted in a waterbed effect, in which Dutch OMCGs simply move across the border to countries where policy is less stringent, also awaits a more rigorous evaluation. Finally, because OMCGs now appear less present in the public domain, state agencies have begun to notice that the 'sense of urgency' about fighting OMCGs seems to be slowly diminishing. This is considered problematic by the Dutch government because OMCGs still constitute a 'subculture within organised crime that is attracting other criminal networks' (LIEC 2021: 8). Time will tell how long the fight against OMCGs will stay at the top of the Dutch government's agenda.

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**Dr Teun van Ruitenburg is a postdoctoral researcher at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement.**

**Dr Arjan Blokland is a Senior Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, and a Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Leiden University.**

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GPO Box 1936  
Canberra ACT 2601, Australia  
Tel: 02 6268 7166

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