

# GANG WARS: BLOODBATH IN VANCOUVER

## **W** Introduction

### Focus

Although a great deal of media attention has been given to gun violence in Toronto, that city is not the only one in Canada with a gang problem. Vancouver has also seen an escalation of gangs and gang violence, and Indo-Canadian gangs have been killing each other on a grand scale. In this *News in Review* story we examine the nature of gang culture, why people join gangs, and steps that are being taken to fight gangs.

### Definition

*Indo-Canadian* refers to a Canadian born in the Indian sub-continent or descended from a person born in the Indian sub-continent.

**W** Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

Canada is still a relatively safe country, but violent crime overall is 35 per cent higher than it was 20 years ago. During the past few years, cities like Toronto and Vancouver have seen a huge increase in gun violence. Most of this gun violence has occurred at the hands of gang members, and these gangs are becoming more and more unafraid of where and when they shoot.

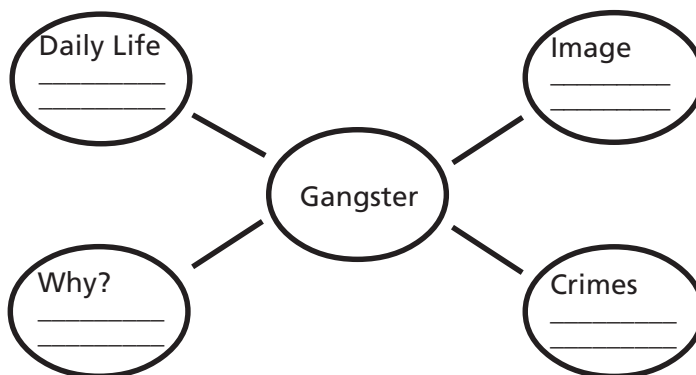
In Vancouver, police are concerned about the willingness of Indo-Canadian gang members to shoot each other over the slightest offence. This gang and gun culture has resulted in the deaths of nearly 100 Indo-Canadian men over the past 10 years. In fact, 2005 ended in a flurry of gunfire across British Columbia's lower mainland, with nine shootings reported in the last week of the year. Vancouver police say that Indo-Canadian gangs are a particular

concern because gang members want to establish a reputation for being completely fearless. As a result, they are more likely to shoot people in clubs and restaurants, or spray homes with gunfire. This increases the likelihood that innocent bystanders get caught in the crossfire.

The police believe that cracking down on guns and drugs is not enough. They say that the core issue is a criminal culture that has become deeply ingrained, with gangsters being seen as role models, and too many parents looking the other way. They believe that in order to fight Indo-Canadian gangs, programs need to be developed to get to the root of a culture that favours male children and is willing to protect those children even when they commit crimes.

### Activity

Make a mind map for the word *gangster*. Place the word in the centre of a blank piece of paper and draw a circle around it. Then draw lines out from this central circle and create a number of other circles (see example below). In each of these circles, respond to each of the following questions: What physical image comes to mind when you think of the word *gangster*? What types of crimes do you believe gangsters commit? What do you think daily life is like for gangsters? Why do you think young men become gang members? After you have watched the video, revisit your mind map and see if you need to add or change any information. Be prepared to share your views with your peers.



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## Video Review

Carefully respond to the questions while viewing the video. Make sure you have the correct responses before moving on to the next activities.

### Part I: Gathering Information

1. Over the past 10 years, how many Indo-Canadian men have been killed by gun violence? \_\_\_\_\_
2. The police say cracking down on guns and drugs is not the answer to stopping the problem of Indo-Canadian gangs. They believe the core issue is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Why did Jagdeep Sin Mangat get involved in gangs?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. List the criminal activities carried out by Mangat and his gang.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What incident eventually got Mangat out of the gang world?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. In what ways was it difficult for Mangat to leave the gang culture behind?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. According to Vancouver police, what three factors fuel the increase in gun violence among Indo-Canadian gangs?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Why did Bindy Johal become a role model for other Indo-Canadian gangsters?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How did Johal's life end?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How is the concept of "reputation" linked to violence?  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. From where do most of the guns used by gangsters in Vancouver come?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
How much does a handgun generally cost? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Why are some young Indo-Canadian males attracted to the gang lifestyle?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. How is the family and economic background of Indo-Canadian gangsters different from that of "typical" gang members?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. How are family networks linked to membership in Indo-Canadian gangs?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. How do these family networks make the job of the police even more difficult?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Identify three initiatives begun by the Vancouver police to reduce the power and influence of Indo-Canadian gangs.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. According to Jagdeep Sin Mangat, how do the majority of gang members end up?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Part II: Reflection and Discussion

Form groups to discuss and formulate a response to the following questions. Be prepared to share your views with the whole group after your discussion.

1. Harjit Singh, of Simon Fraser University, explains how families contribute to the problem of Indo-Canadian gangs: "The whole moral compass, I guess, has kind of shifted, whereas a lot of this type of activity is becoming accepted in certain parts of the community. It's just accepted as a part of everyday life. It's accepted as getting to where you want to be."

As a parent, what steps might you take if you suspected your son/daughter was becoming drawn into a gang?

- Former gangster Jagdeep Sin Mangat explained why it is difficult for gang members to leave a gang. "During your early years, I mean, those are formative years, you know? You learn the rules of the street, and it's extremely hard to operate on a psychological level, on a sociological level, in regular society, to readapt. It's just like soldiers coming out of war."

What psychological and sociological factors do you think Mangat is referring to?

- Sergeant Hal Hamilton, of the Vancouver Police Department, had this to say about the fact that Bindy Johal has become a role model for Indo-Canadian gangsters: "Was he a good guy? Absolutely not. Should he have been revered as a hero? No. Why are the young people doing this?"

Why do you think gangsters become role models?

### Notes for Quotes

Quote #	Group Comments	My Thoughts
1		
2		
3		

# GANG WARS: BLOODBATH IN VANCOUVER

## *Gang Culture*

### **Did you know . . .**

As bad as the Indo-Canadian gangs are, many police officials believe that Asian organized crime is an even bigger threat in British Columbia.

“They don’t [expletive deleted] around with me because when they [expletive deleted] around with me, guaranteed, they’ll be . . . [expletive deleted] six feet under, and they know it.” This statement, made by drug dealer Ravinderjit Kaur Puar, an Indo-Canadian woman from Vancouver, might sound extreme, but the statistics indicate it isn’t. The death toll caused by Indo-Canadian gangs in British Columbia demonstrates that gang life is brutal. Consider the following:

- In September 2005, Bicky Dosanjh, one of the leaders of the Indo-Canadian gang called the Independent Soldiers, was killed in a car accident under suspicious circumstances.
- In August 2003, Bicky’s brother, Paul Dosanjh, was shot in the head at a restaurant.
- The Dosanjh brothers are first cousins of Ron and Jimmy Dosanjh, among the original group of Indo-Canadian gangsters who were taken out in separate hits in 1994 and 1995. The high-profile murders were believed to have been arranged by Bindy Johal, their former associate-turned-rival in the cocaine trafficking world.
- Johal was then murdered on the dance floor of a Vancouver nightclub in December 1998 in a targeted hit arranged by his former associate Bal Buttar. Buttar remains a blind quadriplegic after an attempt on his life in August 2001 by members of his own crew.

This type of revenge and retribution appears to be very common among Indo-Canadian gangs and in gang culture in general. Police have difficulty

making arrests and securing convictions because gang members won’t testify against one another, and non-gang witnesses won’t testify against someone who is known to be a gang member.

This violence seems to be the price that Indo-Canadian gang members are willing to pay to be involved in a life of selling drugs, making lots of money, buying fast cars and jewelry, and being able to surround themselves with women. Vancouver police inspector Kash Heed calls the Indo-Canadian gang culture a world of “flash, cash, and women.” And it appears that young Indo-Canadian gang members have accepted they won’t live a long life, but hope to live a life of style before they meet a violent end.

### **Characteristics of Indo-Canadian Gangs**

- These gangs specialize in the transport of marijuana, and contract other crime groups to deliver their product.
- Many Indo-Canadian gang members are young men who live at home with their families.
- The cash they earn from selling drugs and committing other crimes is generally spent on cars, jewelry, electronics, parties, and women—not for rent or groceries.
- Kidnappings linked to Indo-Canadian gangs have doubled since 1999.
- Police solve fewer than 20 per cent of violent crimes associated with Indo-Canadian gangs.
- Almost all gang members carry guns, and Indo-Canadian gang members have a reputation for pulling their weapons at the slightest offence.

### Further Research

To learn more about how the Indo-Canadian community itself is fighting gangs visit A Community That Cares at [www.acommunitythatcares.com/campaigns/anti-gang.html](http://www.acommunitythatcares.com/campaigns/anti-gang.html).

- This willingness to use guns has resulted in more than 50 per cent of killings occurring in public places—which increases the chances that innocent people, not other gang members, will be shot and killed.
- Although Indo-Canadian gangs have tended to be secretive, in 2005 they began adopting names and logos like American gangs.
- The RCMP ranked Indo-Canadian gangs third on its list of organized crime in 2005.  
Vancouver police believe they need many more resources—money—to begin to fight back against Indo-Canadian gangs. And they don't believe this is going to happen overnight.

### Analysis

1. Within the Indo-Canadian community, boys idolize notorious gang leader Bindy Johal, who was gunned down while he danced in a crowded nightclub in 1998. Why do you think that gang leaders are looked up to or seen as "cool"?

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2. Within your school, do any individuals dress in ways that identify them as a member of a gang? If so, why do you think they dress in that way? How does their appearance affect what others think of them or how they treat them? Be specific.

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3. Do you think that American movies such as "New Jack City" or "Boyz in the Hood" glamorize gang culture? How do you think movies such as these affect people living in neighbourhoods plagued by gangs? Do you think it makes them proud to live there, or more fearful?

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# GANG WARS: BLOODBATH IN VANCOUVER

## Why Join

### Further Research

To learn more about issues and events in the Indo-Canadian community in B.C., consider a visit to the Indo-Canadian Voice at [www.voiceonline.com](http://www.voiceonline.com).

### Gangs in General

Most studies of gangs in Canada try to determine why young men, and to a lesser extent young women, join gangs in the first place. Robert Gordon, of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, interviewed a number of incarcerated gang members in British Columbia in 1994. The gang members he spoke to explained that joining a gang was not a sudden, conscious decision. In contrast, the gangsters said that they had just become absorbed into a gang after hanging around with gang members over a period of time. They also said that they were not recruited by other gang members, nor coerced to join a gang in any way.

It appears that there are certain factors that *pull* some kids to gangs, and other factors that *push* kids into gangs. Gordon's research showed that kids are pulled toward gang membership for two main reasons: the material and psychological rewards associated with gang membership. Material rewards include lots of cash from dealing drugs, stealing, and other assorted crimes. This cash then buys the gang members cars, clothes, music equipment, and anything else they want. The psychological rewards of gang membership include a feeling of belonging, a sense of protection or safety, and the feelings of popularity.

Push factors include school and family problems. Most kids who join gangs have been kicked out of school,

are considerably behind in schoolwork, or experience repeated failure in their classes. Since academic success is not a likely outcome, they are pushed toward gang membership as another way to make money. Gang members report drug and alcohol abuse in their families, physical and emotional abuse, and a great deal of conflict among family members. As well, most gang members are usually from single-parent families, and report no contact with their fathers.

### Indo-Canadian Gangs in Particular

Indo-Canadian gang members seem to break from the typical profile of a gang member. Some are recent immigrants but some are fourth-generation Canadians. Some have little education and come from poor backgrounds, but others are university-educated and come from affluent families.

The reasons why young men from the Indo-Canadian community join gangs are a little different from the push and pull factors listed above. Indo-Canadian youth seem to join gangs because they have a family member or members involved in a gang. In some ways, gang activities have become a family business. They do not appear to be driven out of their homes and into a gang because of violence or other problems. They seem to choose to join a gang because they want the money, fast cars, and women associated with gang membership.

## Activities

1. Read each of the following statements and identify the reason(s) why the person chose to join a gang. Classify the reason(s) as either a push factor or a pull factor by placing an X in one box. Then explain why you chose that box.

Quote	Push	Pull	My Reasoning
“I had no life, the gang was like a family.”			
“I wanted everyone to look up to me like they did my brother.”			
“I felt more powerful, I had nothing else to do and I had more friends if I joined.”			
“It felt good, I felt protected.”			
“It felt good to join, to be a member. It was fun to be in a gang.”			

2. Role-play a young person who is turning to gangs. Write a series of diary entries from the perspective of this person. In the entries, describe a number of social and economic factors that are leading you to join a gang.

# GANG WARS: BLOODBATH IN VANCOUVER

## **Fighting Gangs**

Fighting gangs is not easy. No two gangs are alike, and each gang has its own set of rules and codes that make it difficult for those outside the gang to have an influence upon members. Furthermore, every gang member has a different set of reasons for becoming involved in a gang. As a result, a wide variety of strategies and programs are needed to successfully fight back against gang violence and crime. Here is a brief overview of a number of programs from different communities.

### **Roots of Empathy Program**

This program was begun in 2004 by Ontario Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy. The program aims to reduce levels of violence by connecting students in elementary schools with a neighbourhood family that has a baby. Students interact with the baby over 27 instructor-led sessions. Some of the issues these kids learn about is how humans develop, how humans connect emotionally, and how humans respond to social inclusion. The program was expanded in 2005 and is now run across Canada.

### **UNITED Youth Group**

Amar Randhawa started UNITED because he was tired of reading headlines about Indo-Canadian kids killing each other. In 2003, he co-founded the group, which mentors kids starting in elementary school—which is where many kids meet future gang buddies. Randhawa's group gets kids involved in sports programs such as soccer tournaments, and holds seminars at Sikh temples to educate parents about getting involved in their Canadian-born kids'

lives. He is also producing a resource guide that will highlight positive Indo-Canadian role models and is creating public service announcements for television that discuss the dangers of getting involved in the drug trade.

### **Friends in Trouble Youth Initiative**

This group was formed by Jamal Clarke, a York University student who grew up in a high-crime area of Toronto. His group attempts to steer kids as young as six away from a lifestyle of drugs and gangs. Clarke says that he sees kids all the time who are lured to the quick money of gang membership because they are poor and see no way out of that existence. He involves the kids in everything from talent shows and sports to open discussions about issues facing them. He also believes that police have to stop labelling kids who live in housing projects as gang members when they are just kids hanging out. Clarke believes that those stereotypes become a self-fulfilling prophecy: "If you tell me I'm in a gang, I'll become that sooner or later."

### **Men United for a Better Philadelphia**

This group is being touted as a model of a community-based approach to fighting gangs. The Men United group was started by a group of black men who believe that violence among black male youth is largely due to the absence of fathers in the boys' lives. Ray Jones, one of the founders of the group, says: "Young men who have no direction, who are angry and misguided, and are out on the street corner with no one

**Did you know . . .**

In January 2006, a Toronto mother turned her son into the police when she found an AK47 assault rifle capable of firing 600 rounds a minute in his bedroom. The mother's actions were praised by police. What is your view of her actions?

who can teach them how to be men. All the false bravado, all the reaching for guns—it's all symptomatic of not having a father, not having direction, looking for belonging and a sense of identity in themselves."

The group operates by driving a caravan of vans and jeeps—with rap songs blasting from loudspeakers—into the toughest, most violent neighbourhoods in the city. As soon as they see a group of youth, they hop out of their vehicles and approach the boys with pamphlets and information about programs available to the kids. These men are street-wise; a number of them are ex-cons. Sometimes they spend their time listening to the boys' beefs and talking the boys out of "popping" someone. They return one night a week for two months, repeating their message of non-violence.

One of the group members, Malik Aziz, an ex-con, argues that the group is helping to remould the image of a black gangster into one of a caring activist. "We're presenting them with a concept of black men they have never even fathomed in these neighbourhoods. . . . It's black men taking control of their neighbourhood and their destiny." And they are taking control without guns. The Men United group is never armed, and in the four years they've been patrolling the city's most dangerous streets, no one has ever shot at the group members.

**To Consider**

Based on what you know about adolescent males, which of these programs do you believe will have the greatest success? Why? Make sure you record reasons for your choice and be prepared to defend your choice in a class discussion.

**VIRSA**

VIRSA means "heritage" in Punjabi. Harbans Kandola began VIRSA to tackle the problem of Indo-Canadian gangs in Vancouver. He runs an eight-week parenting course to help Indo-Canadian parents understand Canadian culture and the dangers that some of their kids are facing. He believes that because there is a preference for male children in the Indo-Canadian community, parents are more likely to protect their children if they do something wrong and—if they can afford to—lavish them with money and cars. Kandola argues that giving a 19-year-old a \$50,000 car in Vancouver is equivalent to signing the young man's death warrant. He wants parents to understand that they may be hurting rather than helping their sons by treating them in this way.

**Law Enforcement**

All major urban police forces are trying to hire police officers from more diverse backgrounds. It is believed that gang members may be more willing to co-operate with police if the officer investigating a crime is from the same ethnic background of those being questioned.

As well, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper has promised to increase mandatory jail sentences for anyone who uses a gun in the commission of a criminal offense. The government believes that this will act as a deterrent to youth thinking about purchasing or stealing a handgun.

# GANG WARS: BLOODBATH IN VANCOUVER

## *Political Platforms*

The issue of gangs and gun violence gained a great deal of attention toward the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 because a federal election was scheduled for January 23, 2006. During the election campaign, all party leaders explained their own opinion on gangs and gun violence, and the position of the party they represented. As you read the following information, highlight points you agree with in one colour, and points you disagree with in another. You will use this information for a short activity that follows the reading material.

### **The Green Party of Canada ([www.greenparty.ca](http://www.greenparty.ca))**

Although it is the smallest of the major political parties in Canada, over 650 000 Canadians voted for the Greens in the 2006 federal election. The points below provide an overview of the Green Party's position on crime.

- Gang violence and other violent crime is a reflection of deteriorating social conditions like poverty and a lack of employment.
- Violence and crime will not be reduced until governments confront the root-causes of the problems and come up with preventative solutions.
- The most vulnerable members of society—new Canadians and Aboriginal youth—are caught up in gang violence because they are excluded from opportunities at school and in the workplace; it now takes 20 years for new Canadians to reach comparable employment levels as those of Canadian-born citizens.

- Drug laws need to be reformed to reduce the huge amount of money that can be made by gangs involved in drug trafficking.
- A federal crime-prevention strategy is needed that will encourage young people to finish school, get job training, and find jobs.

### **Liberal Party of Canada ([www.liberal.ca](http://www.liberal.ca))**

Although they were defeated in the January 2006 federal election, the Liberals had a well-developed platform for dealing with violent crime and gun violence. During the campaign, the Liberals argued that the following steps need to be taken to make Canadian cities safer:

- An amendment to the Criminal Code needs to be passed that would ban all handguns (even those held in private collections.)
- An amnesty and buy-back program would be implemented to collect existing handguns (this would give collectors five years to sell or surrender their handguns)
- A national Gunstoppers Program would provide financial rewards for information leading to removing illegal guns from our city streets
- Doubling mandatory minimum sentences for key gun crimes
- Establishment of a \$50-million Gun Violence and Gangs Prevention Fund to support organizations and governments working to reduce gun violence and gang activity through programs targeted to youth at risk

## **The Conservative Party of Canada ([www.conservative.ca](http://www.conservative.ca))**

The Conservative Party won the January 2006 federal election. Of all the parties, the Conservatives are considered to have the toughest law-and-order approach for dealing with crime. Their 2006 election platform argued the following points:

- There should be mandatory prison sentences for serious drug trafficking, weapons, and violent offences.
- There should be an end to house arrests for violent, sexual, and other serious offences.
- The gun registry should be cancelled and the savings used to hire more police officers.
- Sex offenders should be forced to submit samples to a mandatory DNA data bank, the age of sexual consent should be raised from 14 to 16 years old, and all defence loopholes for child pornography should be ended.
- Border and airport security should be strengthened, and non-citizen criminals should be quickly deported.

## **New Democratic Party of Canada ([www.ndp.ca](http://www.ndp.ca))**

The New Democratic Party (NDP) is the third-largest national party in Canada. In a minority government, members of the NDP are often able to combine their votes in the House of Commons with either the Conservatives or Liberals to influence the development of legislation and get bills passed into law. This is how the NDP would like to respond to violent crime:

- There needs to be firm punishment and deterrence through legislation, regulation, and much stronger sentences for crimes involving guns.
- More money is needed for law enforcement, combined with better co-

operation between law enforcement agencies.

- More money is needed for crime prevention, to strengthen communities, and improve the lives of youth.
- Inequality and discrimination facing young people of colour needs to be reduced.
- The negative forces of gang life, exploitation, and violence are fuelled by communities where poverty and despair are rampant.
- Affordable housing, childcare, education, apprenticeships, employment and training, and youth programs are all needed to promote healthy, strong, and respected neighbourhoods and individuals.
- Handguns need to be taken off the streets, and mandatory minimum sentences for crimes involving weapons need to be increased to four years.
- Steps must be taken to combat the rise in production, sale, and use of crystal meth.

## **The Bloc Québécois Party ([www.blocquebecois.org](http://www.blocquebecois.org))**

The Bloc is a federal party focused on Quebec becoming a sovereign (independent) nation. During the 2006 election campaign, they argued that the following steps need to be taken to control violent crime in Canada:

- Decriminalize small amounts of marijuana possession.
- Impose fines for possession, no criminal record.
- Focus on rehabilitation and drug prevention/awareness programs.
- Support rehabilitation over imprisonment for young offenders.
- Maintain the gun registry program, but establish better controls on the costs of the federal registry.

## Analysis

Complete the organizer below. Under each party name, list the points with which you agree and disagree. Review the organizer and decide which of the political parties will do the best job of reducing gang and gun violence. Then join a small group and discuss your choice and reasons with your group members.

Political Party	I agree with . . .	I disagree with . . .
Green Party		
Liberal Party		
Conservative Party		
NDP		
Bloc Québécois		

### My Choice and Reasons

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# GANG WARS: BLOODBATH IN VANCOUVER

## *Activity: Stay Away*

Form small groups with your classmates and design a school-wide campaign to turn kids away from gang membership.

### **1. Figure out what you know.**

- Talk to each other about what you already know about gangs.
- Consider what you learned from this *News in Review* story, what you know from your own personal experience, and what you've learned from newspaper articles or television.
- Make a point-form list of what you know and decide if someone in your group should be assigned to conduct further research on the topic.

### **2. Decide how you want to reach others with your message.**

- Do you want to design and create a series of posters?
- Do you want to design a series of morning announcements?
- Do you want to plan an assembly for the entire school (if so, you might want to bring in an outside guest speaker)?
- Do you want to create a Web page or place your anti-gang information on your school Web site?
- Do you want to create a new student group aimed at helping kids at risk?

### **3. Design your campaign.**

- Decide on a title for your campaign.
- Select the main message and supporting points of information.
- Decide what visuals, music, or other marketing aids will help to attract people to your information.
- With help from your teacher, create a rough timeline to help you through the various tasks you need to complete.

### **4. Divide up the work.**

- Decide who will complete each of the tasks.
- Determine what materials you will need for your campaign and how you will get them (see what supplies your teacher already has before you purchase any materials).

Remember: Your campaign may stop someone from choosing to become involved with a gang. You are making a difference.