# Dynamics of Communal Conflict Between Villages in Sigi: Triggering and Escalation Factors

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**Abstract:** Communal conflicts between villages in Indonesia are still frequent, not only triggered by interpersonal and identity issues, but also exacerbated by structural vulnerabilities and digital communication dynamics. This article analyzes the dynamics of communal conflict between Binangga and Padende Villages in Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi, focusing on the triggers and escalation processes that turn interpersonal disputes into large-scale group conflicts involving sub-ethnic identities. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The results of the study show that the conflict was triggered by incidents of teenagers who were considered to be violating local norms, then spread rapidly due to the mobilization of sub-ethnic sentiments between Topo Ledo and Topo Da'a and the dissemination of provocative messages through SMS. Structural factors, such as weak local leadership, youth unemployment, alcohol consumption, and unresolved historical problems, have also muddied the situation. The study concludes that a combination of micro-triggers, digital media influences, and structural conditions creates a vulnerable environment where small incidents can turn into sustained communal violence. The implication is that conflict resolution efforts in rural Indonesia not only require a cultural approach, but also the strengthening of local governance and digital literacy.

**Keywords:** Communal Conflict, Inter-Village Relations, Sigi Regency, Cultural Tension, Conflict Escalation

## 1. Introduction

Communal conflicts between villages are a recurring sociological phenomenon in rural Indonesia, especially in regions with characteristics of ethnocultural diversity and complex social structures (van Klinken, 2007). This kind of conflict not only results in material damage and casualties, but also erodes the social cohesion that society has built for generations (Barron et al., 2016). The conflict between Binangga Village and Padende Village in Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi, is an example of how seemingly trivial interpersonal disputes can develop into prolonged communal violence when they are linked to broader historical, cultural, and identity tensions.

Previous studies of social conflict have presented a variety of theoretical explanations. The realist conflict theory put forward by Coser (1956) associates tensions between groups with competition for limited resources. While the theory of ethnocentrism and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) emphasizes how strong group bonds and perceptions of cultural superiority can trigger hostility towards outside groups. Contemporary studies further highlight the importance of micro-level triggers,

misinformation, and the role of communication technology in accelerating the escalation of conflict (Weidmann, 2015; Fjelde & Hultman, 2014).

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature, such as van Klinken's (2007) study on communal violence and McRae's (2013) on the Poso conflict, focuses more on large-scale ethnic or religious conflicts. This leaves an academic gap regarding the interaction between micro-level interpersonal triggers and sub-ethnic identity dynamics in the context of inter-village conflicts in rural Indonesia (Smith, 2016; Warren, 2005).

The novelty of this article lies in its analysis of how small personal incidents can quickly escalate into communal violence through the intersection of sub-ethnic rivalries, particularly between the Topo Ledo (Binangga) and Topo Da'a (Padende) groups, unresolved historical issues, and the circulation of provocative messages via SMS. This analytical focus highlights how contemporary social interactions intersect with long-standing cultural cracks, creating a volatile environment in which communal conflict can quickly escalate.

Based on this context, this study examines four main issues: (1) the socio-demographic characteristics of Binangga and Padende; (2) direct triggers rooted in personal disputes; (3) the escalation process facilitated by identity mobilization and communication networks; and (4) underlying structural conditions, including weak local leadership, youth unemployment, and alcohol consumption, that reinforce conflict. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of communal conflict in rural multicultural Indonesia, especially through the integration of micro-level trigger analysis and sub-ethnic identity relations.

## 2. Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method conducted in Binangga Village and Padende Village, Marawola District, Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi. The location was chosen based on the consideration that the two villages experienced repeated communal conflicts, especially in the 2012-2013 period, so it is relevant to understand the dynamics of the escalation of inter-village conflicts.

Informants were selected through a purposive sampling approach, in which researchers deliberately identified individuals who were considered capable of providing accurate, relevant, and experience-based information about the conflict. A total of twelve informants were involved in the research, consisting of village leaders, traditional leaders, youth involved in the incident, and residents directly or indirectly affected by the conflict.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document reviews. This combination of techniques allows researchers to gain comprehensive insights into the triggers, escalation processes, and structural factors underlying conflict. The data were then analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns that were relevant to the research objectives.

## 3. The Dynamics of Communal Conflict Between Binangga and Padende

This section discusses the core dimensions that make up the communal conflict between Binangga and Padende, namely: (1) social and historical contexts, (2) micro-level triggers and escalation processes, and (3) structural factors that sustain and intensify conflicts.

### 3.1. Social and Historical Context of Two Neighboring Villages

The relationship between Binangga and Padende has long been shaped by subtle socio-cultural boundaries. Although both villages make Islam the dominant religion and belong to the broader Kaili ethnic group, their sub-ethnic differences, Topo Ledo in Binangga and Topo Da'a in Padende, are important symbolic markers (Warren, 2005). These differences are reflected in dialects, customary norms, and narratives of local identity, which influence the way each community perceives one another.

Some informants emphasized the latent tensions that preceded the 2012-2013 incident. A traditional leader from Binangga stated:

> "Actually, our relationship used to be ordinary, but since there were problems with other villages, people here have become more sensitive. There is a feeling like it is not completely safe to pass through Padende." (Kamaruddin, 67)

Differences in demographic composition and economic structure further strengthen the perception of inequality. Binangga, as the center of the sub-district, has more civil servants and a variety of jobs, while Padende is dominated by agricultural work. According to an informant from Padende:

> "The Binangga people are considered more advanced. Sometimes people here feel underestimated." (Tudu, 25)

These narratives show how historical experience and socio-economic differences generate fundamental distrust, creating fertile ground for conflict when new tensions arise (Smith, 2016).

### 3.2. Micro-Level Triggers and Escalation Processes

Conflict is triggered by seemingly trivial interpersonal disputes. In August 2012, a young man from Binangga was reprimanded by Padende youth for meeting a woman late at night in the Padende area. This action is considered to be a violation of local cultural norms regarding propriety. A young man described the incident:

> "We just reprimand carefully, because it is inappropriate. But he was angry, saying we were deliberately looking for trouble." (Rodeka, 20)

Initially in the form of a small confrontation that quickly escalated due to miscommunication and the circulation of provocative SMS messages. The informants consistently mentioned that messages exaggerating the incident, including calls for

revenge, spread widely within hours (Weidmann, 2015). A community member explained:

> "That morning there were many SMS coming in. The content said that the Binangga people wanted to attack. Even though it is not necessarily true." (Desi, 50)

During the initial mediation efforts, identity-based shouts, such as the proclamation of "Topo Da'a" and responses referring to "Topo Ledo", further crystallized group boundaries. According to the head of Binangga village:

> "When I wanted to be reconciled, suddenly someone shouted about identity. It immediately ignited people." (Aminuddin)

This mobilization of sub-ethnic identities reframes the problem from interpersonal strife, to intergroup confrontation, undermining early peace efforts (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

### 3.3. Structural Factors That Sustain and Intensify Conflict

Several underlying structural factors contribute to the continuity and scale of conflicts. Weak village leadership at critical moments allows misinformation and emotional mobilization to spread unchecked. A resident of Padende described the atmosphere at that time:

> "At that time the village chief was also new, and the rules regarding night parties were too loose. Many young people gather until they get drunk." (Informant Padende)

Youth unemployment is another important factor. Many involved in the clashes were young men with limited daily activities, increasing their exposure to high-risk social environments. Alcohol consumption was consistently highlighted in interviews as a significant booster (Fjelde & Hultman, 2014). An informant noted:

> "If there is no liquor, it may not be burned. The alcohol made them lose control." (Kamaruddin, 67)

Historical problems with other villages add to the layer of conflict. Padende's alliance with Beka and other neighboring regions, which is linked to past disputes with Binangga, expands the scale of involvement. A young Padende recalled:

> "During the storm, there were also people from other villages who came to help, because they had a long problem with Binangga." (Tudu, 25)

The impact is quite severe. Houses were burned, people were injured, and social relations were fractured. But these difficulties also generate momentum for reconciliation. The peace deal eventually facilitated by local authorities and indigenous leaders introduced

strict sanctions against conflict-fueling behavior including alcohol trafficking, rumor spread, and late-night dating. A community elder explained:

> "We agree, the customs must run. If anyone violates, they will be sanctioned immediately. That's a way to prevent conflicts from recurring." (Aminuddin)

It illustrates how communities rebuild order by reinforcing local norms and restoring trust after episodes of intense violence (Davidson & Henley, 2007).

## 4. Conclusion

The communal conflict between Binangga and Padende shows how local interpersonal tensions can develop into large-scale violence when embedded in deeper socio-cultural cracks. Although the initial trigger was a minor dispute involving youth behavior, its escalation was driven by long-standing sub-ethnic boundaries, historical issues, and structural vulnerabilities within both communities. The rapid dissemination of provocative information via SMS, combined with the mobilization of identity-based narratives, turns personal disputes into collective confrontations between the Topo Ledo and Topo Da'a groups.

The study highlights three central dynamics. First, the socio-historical context of the two villages marked by sub-ethnic differences, demographic differences, and memories of past conflicts, creates latent tensions that influence both sides to mobilize in the conflict. Second, micro-level triggers gain momentum through miscommunication and identity framing, revealing how contemporary communication technologies can amplify local tensions. Third, structural conditions such as weak leadership, youth unemployment, alcohol consumption, and inter-village alliances significantly exacerbate and prolong conflicts.

Despite the severity of violence and its material and psychosocial consequences, conflict ultimately prompts communities to reevaluate their social relations and governance mechanisms. The resulting peace agreement, facilitated through customary and government collaboration, underscores the continued relevance of local norms and customary sanctions in restoring order and preventing future escalation. These findings suggest that effective conflict mitigation in rural Indonesia requires addressing not only surface disputes, but also deeper structural and identity-based factors. Strengthening local leadership, organizing youth social spaces, and reviving indigenous dialogue mechanisms can be vital components for sustainable peace in similar multicultural rural settings.

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