

COUNTRY SURVEY

Sweden

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Background

Sweden is a sparsely populated country of nine million people, geographically located on the margins of the EU. Approximately one-third of the population lives in the three metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, and around fourteen percent of Sweden's population are born overseas. Sweden is often described, together with Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, as a welfare country characterised by low levels of income inequality (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry 2011). Prior to an election defeat in 1976, the Social Democrats had been in government since 1933, and Sweden had constructed what has been referred to as a welfare state *par excellence* (Tham 1995). Although the Social Democrats quickly regained power, and governed until 2006 (with the exception of the period 1991-1994), the Swedish political climate was influenced from the 1980s onwards by the international shift towards neoliberal ideas. The Social Democrats introduced changes to welfare policy, including, notably, gradually deregulating the economy. Today Sweden has a centre-right coalition government led by the conservative New Moderates. The consistent post-war 'party of government', the Social Democrats, are facing a serious challenge in the area of agenda-setting, and Sweden has become less different from the rest of western Europe.

Criminologists have also often described the Scandinavian countries as distinct from the rest of Europe, being characterised by low prison populations, knowledge-based crime policy and an absence of punitivity in the public debate (Lappi-Seppälä & Tonry 2011). In his description of "Scandinavian exceptionalism" in an era of penal excess', however, Pratt (2008) sees dark clouds on the Swedish horizon. In the early 1990s, Sweden suffered an economic crisis that tripled the unemployment rate (from around three to nine percent) and produced major welfare-policy cutbacks. Effects on living conditions were particularly negative for society's most disadvantaged groups (youths, single parents and immigrants). The recession intensified differences in both living conditions and experiences of crime (Nilsson & Estrada 2006). Unemployment, particularly among young people and those with an immigrant background, today remains at significantly higher levels than prior to the 1990s. Income differentials have also increased, a trend which began at the start of the 1980s but has been accentuated over recent years. The level of residential segregation has also been rising, with those on high and low incomes increasingly living apart from one another. There is thus a general tendency towards greater social inequality (Fritzell, Bäckman and Ritakallio 2011).

In the 2010 general election, a further form of 'Swedish exceptionalism' disappeared, as the Sweden Democrats, a party with roots in openly xenophobic, right-wing extremist politics, entered Parliament. Like similar political groupings in many European countries, the party has a major focus on crime, punishment and migration (Rydgren 2007). Crime, and particularly violence, is depicted as increasing sharply, and sanctioning practices are described as inadequate. The Sweden Democrats are not, however, alone in this description of the Swedish crime problem. Besides the fact that large segments of the population perceive crime to be increasing and sanctions to be too lenient (Jerre & Tham 2010), such views are also disseminated by the traditional parties of both the right and the left (Tham 2001).

Criminological research in Sweden

In his review of quantitative criminological research in Sweden up until the mid-1990s, Wikström (1996) distinguished a number of fields that constituted a focus at the time: longitudinal studies of individual criminal development, crime trends, ecological studies of urban crime, crime prevention and responses to crime. Swedish criminology has grown to be a much broader field since then. There is now a significantly larger number of centres of research and teaching in the country. Swedish research has also developed a significantly wider methodological base, and qualitative studies have become common, although the strong quantitative tradition has also continued.

The three centres of criminological research with the longest traditions are the Department of Criminology at Stockholm University, the Department of Sociology at Göteborg University, and the Network for Research in Criminology and Deviant Behaviour at Lund University. Over recent years, however, an increasing number of universities and colleges have become involved in criminological research and teaching. Outside the educational sector, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention also has a strong criminological research tradition.

University research

With a total of approximately 30 researchers and research students, Stockholm University's Department of Criminology is the largest Swedish university department for criminological research and teaching. Its research has a broad focus both methodologically and in its subject matter. Key areas of research have included the crime structure (e.g. Sarnecki 2001; von Hofer 2011), crime policy (Tham 2001; Flyghed 2003; Hörnqvist 2010), and victimology (Estrada & Nilsson 2004; Tiby 2009). Two other areas in which several researchers have recently been active are gender and crime (Pettersson, T. 2005; Pettersson, L. 2006) and longitudinal studies of crime and life-chances (Carlsson 2011; Nilsson & Estrada 2011).

Göteborg University's Sociology Department has produced a substantial amount of research in two main areas, economic crime (e.g., Lindgren 2002; Larsson 2003; Engdahl 2008) and police-related research (Björk 2005; Peterson 2010; Wahlström 2011), although studies have also focused on homelessness (Sahlin 2004), violent crime, and crime victims and victim support (Hansen-Löfstrand 2009). Research in Göteborg is dominated by qualitative studies. The Network for Research in Criminology and Deviant Behaviour at Lund University primarily attracts researchers from the fields of sociology and social work. The network's research is dominated by qualitative studies that focus on such themes as economic crime (Jacobsson 2006), definitions of violence (Åkerström 2003), youth care (Wästerfors 2011), and crime victims and fear of crime (Burcar, Wästerfors and Åkerström 2011).

Criminological research at Malmö University is relatively new. Here research is primarily quantitative, and is focused on the links between individual factors and crime (e.g., Smith & Torstensson 2001; Wikström & Svensson 2008), as well as on crime prevention. These foci are even stronger at Mid Sweden University (e.g., Belfrage & Strand 2009; Laurell et al. 2010) and the Centre for Research on Criminological Psychology at Örebro University (e.g., Andershed 2002; Forsman et al. 2008; Degner et al. 2007). Finally, the Sociology Department at Umeå University represents a smaller centre whose criminological research has primarily focused on economic crime and trafficking (Alalehto & Larsson 2009; Alalehto 2002).

Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention

The Swedish National Council for Crime prevention was established in 1974 with the objective of strengthening the research base for crime policy in Sweden. Over time, the Council's focus has shifted increasingly towards becoming the government's expert body on crime policy issues, and since 1994 the Council has been responsible for compiling Sweden's official statistics on crime and the criminal

justice system. The Council currently has three research divisions, which together account for one-third of around 100 staff which it employs. The focus is on applied research, much of which is directly commissioned by the government. The *Evaluations and Police Research Division* focuses on both a range of police-related issues and large-scale evaluations of criminal justice system initiatives, while the *Economic and Organised Crime Division* represents perhaps the single most productive Swedish research centre focused on these areas. The focus of the *Research and Development Division* is more varied, but includes crime trends, criminal justice system case-flows, and public contacts with the criminal justice system. The Council's research is published in Swedish, but often with a separate English summary. The Council is also responsible for the Stockholm Criminology Symposium, arranged annually in connection with the Stockholm Prize in Criminology.

Main topics and controversies

Crime trends have constituted a much debated issue within the Swedish research community. Over recent decades, this debate has touched upon both whether the increasing crime trend has slowed down and on changes in different categories of crime. From early on, von Hofer and Tham (1989) noted that the powerful post-war increase in crime started to slow down during the 1980s, although it took time for this view to become widely accepted. Similarly, youth crime was long assumed to be following a more or less linear upward trend (Estrada 2001). More recently, it is perhaps trends in violent crime that have attracted most attention. Similar to other European countries (on which see e.g. Muchielli 2010), the debate in Sweden has focused on whether possible changes in perceptions of violent crime have affected how registered crime should be interpreted (von Hofer 2000a, 2011).

Drug-related issues represent another area of heated debate in Sweden. Swedish drug policy has long been influenced by its close ties to the NGO-led movement for 'a drug-free society', which has resulted in a strong policy focus on legislative interventions and social control. Sanctions for drug-related crime have become much more severe since the 1980s, and personal consumption was criminalised in 1989. For a long time, it was almost impossible to talk about control-related harms and substitution treatment without being labeled a 'drug liberal' (Lenke & Olsson 2002; Tham 2009). Opinion has been shifting over recent years, however, at least regarding attitudes to substitution treatment. Such forms of treatment are now increasingly in use and have come to be viewed more as a humanitarian measure than as sending the 'wrong signals' on the acceptability of drug use. No reductions in sanctioning levels have been introduced, however. Nor is there any real discussion of decriminalising personal consumption. Sweden also has a tradition of restrictive alcohol-related policy (Lenke 1990, von Hofer 2011), although this has been relaxing more recently, particularly since Sweden joined the EU. Amongst other things, Sweden has been forced to accept the cross-border import of large quantities of alcohol.

Prostitution has also been a subject of controversy, with Sweden being first in the world to criminalise the purchase of sexual services in 1999, while the sale of such services remains legal (Pettersson & Tiby 2002; Skilbrei & Holmström 2011). The legislation was preceded by significant political debate, with the Women's Section of the Social Democrats providing much of the momentum behind the reform, framing it as a matter of gender equality (Skilbrei & Holmström 2011; Waltman 2001a). More recently, and as elsewhere in Europe, trafficking has become increasingly central to the Swedish debate on prostitution (Brå 2011a). The difficulty of measuring the extent of prostitution is widely acknowledged, and attempts to establish the legislation's effects in this area are beset with problems. It nonetheless appears fairly certain that the law has had a preventive effect on heterosexual street prostitution (Waltman 2011a, 2011b).

Sex crime legislation has repeatedly been a subject of debate in Sweden. In the 1970s, the decriminalisation of a number of sex offences was proposed, triggering powerful protests from women's groups and public figures. Criticisms were directed *inter alia* against the legislation's focus

on the victim's conduct rather than on that of the offender, with certain victims being viewed as 'having only themselves to blame'. As a result, the legislation was not passed. Recent years have seen further debates, and legislation was introduced in 2005 to broaden the definition of rape to include acts perpetrated against victims in a 'helpless state' such as being intoxicated (Brå 2008).

Since the early 2000s, a great deal of political attention has also been focused on men's violence against women. In 2001, researchers from Uppsala University's Sociology Department published a victim survey showing women's exposure to victimisation to be much greater than earlier criminological studies had found (Lundgren et al. 2001). Since violence against women was found to be so widespread, the report also rejected traditional criminological explanations. Its conclusions led to a lively debate on methodology and the published interpretations. Estrada and Nilsson (2004:178) argued, for example, that the study's definition of violence concealed the substantial differences that exist in the victimisation experienced by women with varying welfare resources.

A further topic of recurrent debate is the criminality of immigrants. One common argument, primarily expressed by right-wing populist parties, is that immigrants' over-representation in crime has not been examined because the question is viewed as too sensitive politically. In fact, however, since the issue arose in the 1970s, studies have regularly shown that immigrants comprise a larger proportion of registered offenders compared to the population at large (von Hofer, Sarnecki & Tham 1997; Martens 1997). More recently, research has moved away from purely descriptive studies to analyses of what might explain immigrants' over-representation in registered crime (Hällsten, Sarnecki and Szulkin 2011), including, crucially, studies of discrimination in the justice system (Shannon and Törnqvist 2008).

Crime and crime trends in Sweden

Good access to indicators

From an international perspective, Sweden has very good access to indicators of crime trends. The National Council for Crime Prevention has an open-access online database providing data on reported offences (since 1975), suspected offenders by age, sex and offence type (since 1995), and convicted offenders by principal offence and sanction and by sex and age (since 1975). Since all Swedish residents have a unique personal identity number, data from population registers (e.g., socio-economic data) can be linked to individual crime data for research purposes (Lyngstad and Skardhamar 2011). Statistics Sweden's Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) provides time-series data on residents' exposure to, and fear of, crime since 1978 based on standard questions commonly found in victim surveys. Each year, around 6,000 people are interviewed, with a non-response rate of approximately twenty per cent. A major change to the data-collection procedure was implemented in 2006, which means comparisons are best limited to the period 1978-2005. Another important source of information is the annual Swedish Crime Survey (SCS), which began in 2006, employs a sample of 14,000 individuals, and covers several offences as well as collecting data on public confidence in the justice system. Its non-response rate, as with the Survey of Living Conditions, is around 20 percent. In 1995, a national self-report survey of youths' experiences of crime, both as offenders and victims, was initiated (Svensson and Ring 2007). The non-response rate is substantially lower than in the above-mentioned victim surveys. There are also two time-series datasets on lethal violence. Given that police-recorded homicides commonly include a significant number of cases that are later shown to have been deaths from other causes, police statistics overestimate levels of lethal violence. Researchers therefore prefer the cause-of-death statistics produced by the National Board of Health and Welfare (but see also Brå 2011b), whilst useful information can also be found in violence-related hospital admissions (see Estrada 2006). In summary, Sweden provides better opportunities than most countries for using different data sources to assess crime trends.

Swedish crime trends

Figure 1 presents trends in offences reported to the police during the period 1950-2010, both in terms of the annual total of offences and the respective totals of the three types of crime that were most prevalent in 2010. Reported offences increased substantially between 1950 and 1990, primarily as a result of an upward trend in thefts. The upward trend in thefts slowed down in the mid-1980s, and declined more sharply from 1990 onwards. Over recent years, the total number of reported offences has increased despite continued declines in theft. Besides vandalism, a substantial increase is visible in fraud, largely associated with the expansion of the internet marketplace. Of the offences not presented in Figure 1, there has been a substantial increase since 2000 in drug offences (from 365 per 100,000 to 937 in 2010), although this may have been the outcome of intensified police controls. Generally speaking, Swedish crime trends appear similar to those of other Nordic and West European countries (Aebi & Linde 2010; von Hofer 2011).

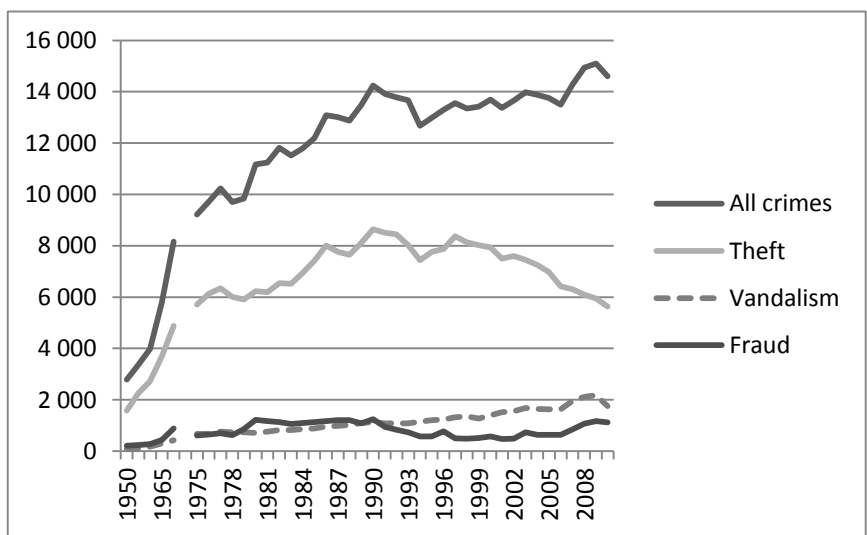


Figure 1. Volume of main offences reported to the police per 100,000 of population, 1950–2010

As concerns violent offences, the total annual volume of assaults reported to the police has increased substantially over the last thirty years (see Figure 2), especially among school-age victims (7-14 years old). But this increase is linked to heightened public sensitivity towards violence in general and youth violence in particular, which has led to more violence being reported to the police (Estrada 2001). Alternative indicators show a more stable trend (see below). The trend in reported sex offences is similar to that for assaults, having been increasing dramatically since the mid-1970s (from 33 per 100,000 of population in 1975 to 188 in 2010). But here it should be noted that the legal definition of rape has shifted over time, exemplifying how difficult it is to assess crime levels on the basis of official statistics (von Hofer 2000b). Indeed, research on rapes reported to the police has concluded that there has been an increase, yet this is primarily due to changes in the definition of rape and higher propensity among the public to report rapes to the police (Brå 2008:175). Swedish victim surveys only provide data on sexual victimisation for the years 2006-2010. During this period, the number of respondents who reported sexual victimisation remained unchanged (Brå 2011c).

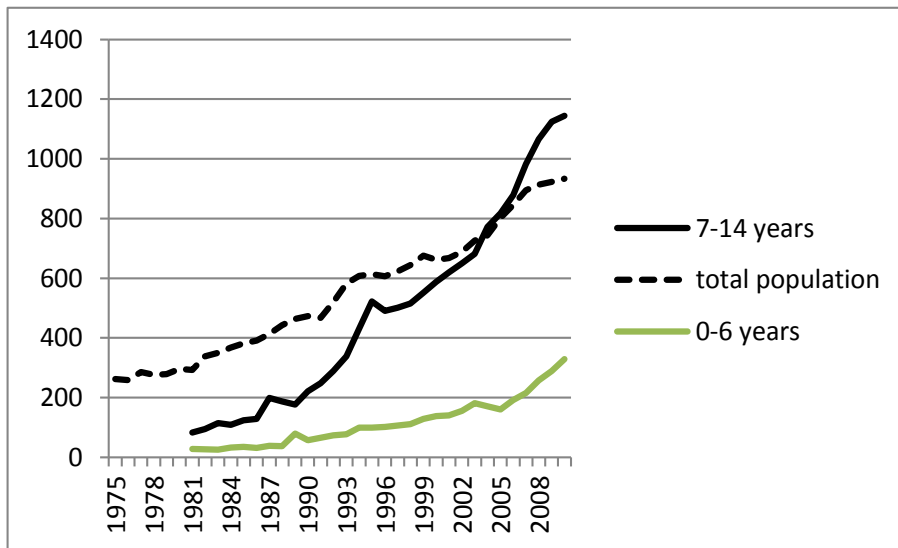


Figure 2. Volume of violent offences reported to the police per 100,000 population, according to age group of victim, 1975-2010

In Sweden, the trend shown by police-recorded crime statistics can be supplemented with several alternative indicators, particularly in relation to violence. As in many other western countries, lethal violence has declined over the past 20 years. In Sweden, the decline is linked to emphatic reductions in lethal violence against children and women, although the most common cases of lethal violence, i.e., those involving knife-violence among socially marginalised, substance-abusing men, have also dropped (Brå 2011d). Furthermore, the trend cannot simply be associated with a corresponding increase in hospital admissions resulting from serious violence (see Figure 3). The number of admissions with knife or gunshot wounds (the injuries that dominate lethal violence) have neither increased nor decreased over recent years. This suggests that the decline in lethal violence is not merely due to improvements in the way serious injuries are treated in hospital (Estrada 2006).

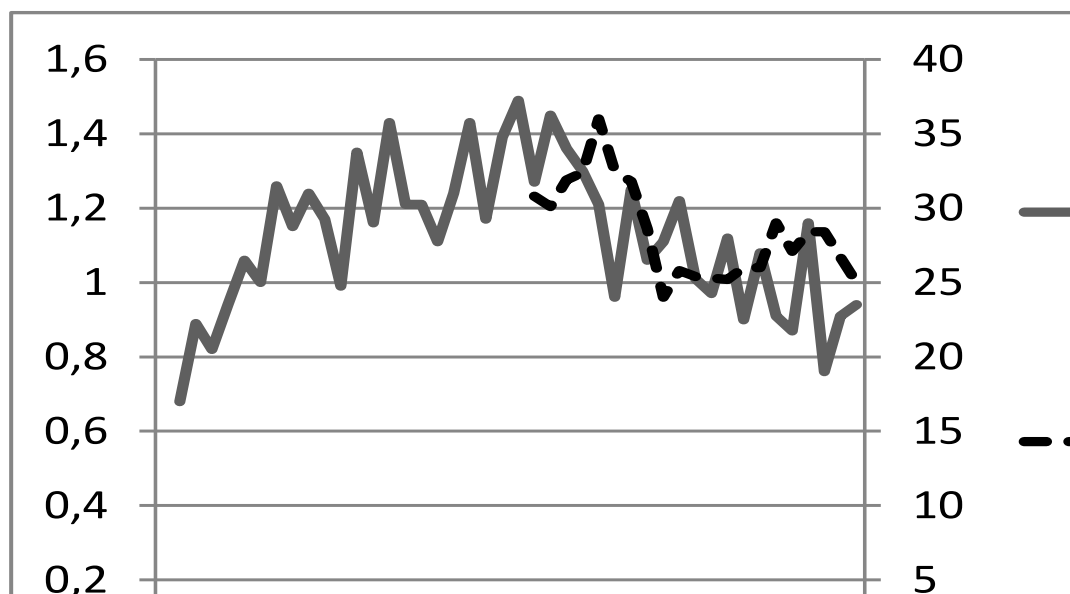


Figure 3. Victims of lethal violence per 100,000 of population according to cause-of-death statistics of the National Board of Health and Welfare (1967-2010), and number of hospital admissions per 100,000 of population due to violence (1990-2010).

Figure 4 presents data on the proportions of men and women reporting exposure within the past year to any form of violence and to serious violence (i.e., requiring medical treatment). The overall proportion reporting exposure to serious violence has not increased since 1980. The proportion of women reporting exposure to any form of violence has increased, however, with the increase being primarily linked to violence at work (Estrada et al. 2010). Altogether, the alternative indicators, which are less sensitive to changes in perceptions of, and reactions to, violence, show relatively stable levels. Given an increased focus on violence in western societies, the Swedish example provides an important reminder of the need to avoid interpreting increases in reported offences as confirmation of a continuous rise in levels of societal violence (compare the conclusions of Mucchielli 2010 and Aebi & Linde 2010).

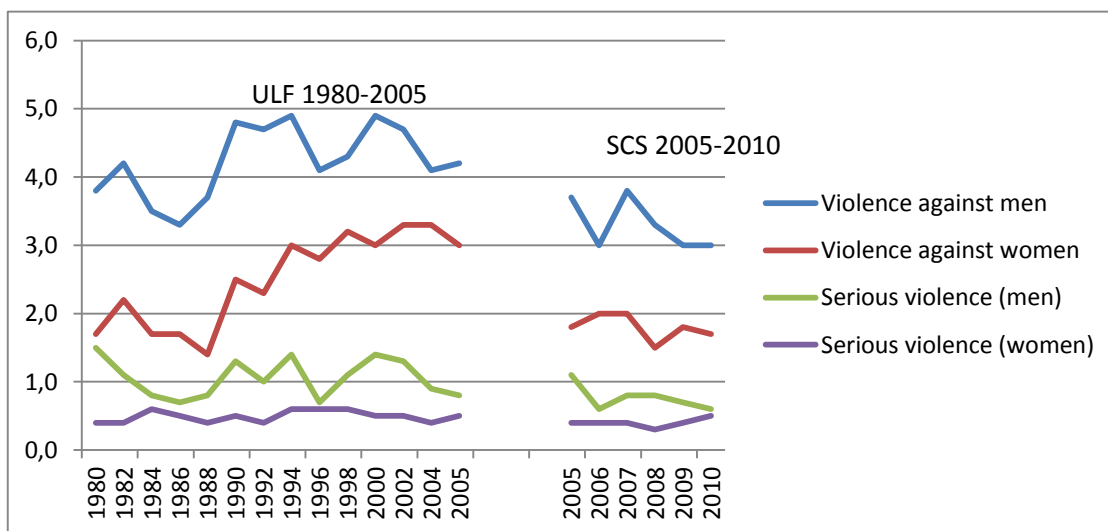


Figure 4. Proportions of men and women reporting past-year exposure to any form of violence and to serious violence (i.e., requiring medical treatment). Survey of Living Conditions, ULF (1980-2005, 16-84 years old) and Swedish Crime Survey, SCS (2005-2010, 16-79 years old).

Youth crime trends

Self-report surveys conducted in Swedish schools since 1995 allow for analyzing trends in young people's engagement in crime in the country. As expected, during the period 1995-2008, more boys than girls reported having committed an offence such as vandalism, shoplifting, burglary and assault (see Figure 5). The proportion of 15-year-olds who report having committed an offence has declined overall. This downward trend is found both among boys and girls, and also among youths from different social backgrounds. High-frequency offenders, meanwhile, have neither grown in numbers nor have they increased the frequency of their offending (Svensson & Ring 2007). As concerns alcohol intoxication and drug use, self-report survey research has shown no increase among young people over the last forty years (CAN 2012). The overall picture is similar to other Scandinavian countries with long-term time-series data on self-reported youth crime (Svensson & Ring 2007, Salmi 2009).

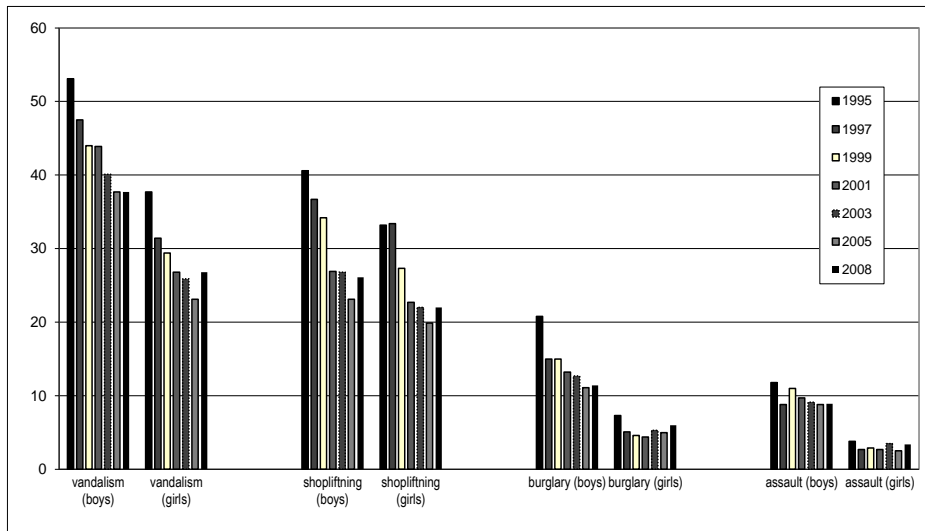


Figure 5. Rates of self-reported past-year involvement in vandalism, shoplifting, burglary and assault, 1995–2008, according to gender

Findings from self-report survey research are generally confirmed by police-recorded data, as the annual volume of young offenders has declined rather than increased over recent decades, mainly as a result of a fall in youth theft. It should be noted, however, that police-recorded youth involvement in violent and drug offences has undergone a substantial increase, which contrasts with the findings of self-report survey research and is probably linked to an increasing focus of the criminal justice system on these offences (Estrada 2001).

The criminal justice system

The justice system in Sweden currently accounts for around 4.5 percent of total government expenditure, and inflation-adjusted justice system spending increased by one-third between 2000 and 2010. Approximately half of this funding is allocated to the police, with just under fifteen percent going to the court system and twenty percent to the prison and probation system.

The police

The Swedish police service comprises 21 county police authorities, each with a Chief Commissioner, and a National Police Board, under a National Police Commissioner. In 2010, the police service had 28,000 employees, of whom just over 20,000 were qualified police officers. These figures represent an increase of around 25 percent since the year 2000, the majority of which has been due to an election promise, in 2006, by the centre-right parties to increase the size of the service by 3,000 qualified officers. From a European perspective, however, the number of police officers in Sweden remains low, at approximately 215 per 100,000 of population (Aebi et al. 2010).

The prosecution service

The prosecution service in Sweden accounts for only three percent of justice system spending. The service is headed by the Prosecutor-General and currently comprises a total of approximately 950 prosecutors. Besides prosecuting offences through the courts, the prosecutor also often heads the criminal investigation, *inter alia*, in cases involving juvenile suspects, victims under the age of eighteen, and where the suspect is to be detained on remand.

Applications to detain a suspect on remand must be made to the court within three days of an arrest, and may be granted if the offence is associated with a prison term of at least a year and there is a risk that the suspect may abscond, attempt to impede an investigation, or continue to commit offences. If there is a risk of the suspect impeding the investigation, the prosecutor may also apply to restrict the detainee's contacts with the outside world. Such restrictions may then, at the discretion of the prosecutor, be applied to visits, letters, telephone calls and access to newspapers, radio and television. Sweden has been criticised in relation to this last point by both the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, not least because the courts tend to systematically accept the prosecutor's evaluation of the need for restrictions without examining the circumstances in individual cases (CAT 2008, CPT 2009). Sweden has also been criticised for placing persons detained under aliens legislation in remand centres when these individuals have neither been suspected or convicted of criminal offences (CPT 2009).

The courts

Criminal cases in Sweden are dealt with by the general courts, which also deal with civil disputes, but not disputes involving public sector agencies. The court of first instance is the district court, and there are currently 48 such courts located throughout the country. While the number of courts has declined, their caseload has increased, by approximately 40 percent since 2000,¹ which has led to a substantial increase in the backlog of cases awaiting trial (Domstolsverket 2002, 2010).

The work of Swedish criminal courts falls somewhere between the strongly inquisitorial model employed, for instance, in France and the adversarial model employed in the UK (Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights 2009). Trials are conducted according to the principles of orality and immediacy, whereby the court's judgement is based only on material that has been presented in the courtroom. Juries play no part in criminal cases and the court is instead comprised of one legally qualified judge and (typically) three lay judges. Lay judges are political appointees, selected for a period of four years by the members of Sweden's municipal assemblies on a party-proportionate basis. Each lay judge has a vote equal to that of the professional judge in relation not only to the issue of guilt, but also the severity of the sanction. If the vote is deadlocked, however, the professional judge in effect has a casting vote.

Prosecutors rarely take a case to court unless they are convinced the court will convict, and over 90 percent of criminal court cases result in a conviction. District court verdicts and sentences may be appealed to the regional court of appeal, which in criminal cases typically comprises three professional and two lay judges. Appeal court judgements may only be appealed to the Supreme Court in exceptional cases, primarily when a case may be expected to result in a legal precedent.

Sentencing policy and trends

For the first four decades of the post-war period, the dominant point of departure for Swedish sentencing policy was the so-called 'treatment ideology', and until 1989 the penal code stated explicitly that the central goal for sentencing practice was to ensure that the sanction would promote the

¹ The number of cases submitted to district courts increased from just under 130,000 in 2000 to just over 180,000 in 2010. Approximately half of these were criminal cases at both the beginning and the end of the decade.

convicted individual's adjustment to society. During the 1980s, however, the treatment ideology was replaced by a just-deserts approach—not least with the introduction in 1989 of a new provision in the penal code stating explicitly that the penal weight of the offences committed should thereafter constitute the basis of sentencing decisions (Tham 1995).

Sanctioning scales for criminal offences are specified in the relevant piece of penal legislation. These range from a fine to six months imprisonment for a minor offence such as petty theft, a prison term of between four and ten years for aggravated rape, and a prison term of between ten and eighteen years or life imprisonment (an indeterminate sentence) for murder. After a minimum of ten years, individuals given a life sentence may apply to have the sentence commuted to a determinate prison term.

Changes to the penal code since the mid-1990s have indicated two central lines of penal legislation policy, both of which suggest a shift towards increased sanctioning severity for crimes against the person. The first line reflects an intention to extend the utilization of criminal law as a means of 'protecting', at least symbolically, groups viewed as particularly vulnerable. Examples include the broadening of the legal definition of rape and the specification of hate crime motives as an aggravating circumstance. Legislation has also been passed requiring that courts view any intent to 'damage the security and trust of a child in relation to an intimate' as an aggravating circumstance. The second line of policy is more recent and is expressed in several additions made to the penal code in 2010. These increased the minimum sentences for serious cases of aggravated assault, aggravated cases of negligent homicide and aggravated extortion. While the provisions did not extend the maximum prison terms for these offences, the intent was nonetheless to restrict the courts' ability to award sentences in the lower ranges of the sentencing scale. The same piece of legislation also added provisions to the penal code requiring that courts view all cases involving serious violence with greater severity, and also that they give greater weight to the 'severity value' of previous criminality. By contrast, no substantive additions have been made since 1994 to the section of penal code that specifies the mitigating factors to be considered in relation to sentencing.

Sentencing in practice

In practice, around half of the criminal cases that result in a conviction never make it to court. Here convictions primarily take the form of waivers of prosecution and summary sanction orders (most often involving a fine) issued by the prosecutor, which have together consistently accounted for around 50 percent of convictions for most of the period since the mid-1990s (see Figure 6a-b). Among cases prosecuted through the courts, the single most common sanction is a fine. Between 1996 and 2005, the proportion of court convictions resulting in a fine remained stable at around 40 percent, but has since risen to 48 percent in 2010. In cases where a fine alone is not considered appropriate, the court may decide to award a suspended sentence, a probationary sentence or a prison term. Both suspended sentences and probationary sentences may be combined with a fine or community service.

The total number of convictions has increased since the early 2000s. The nature of the sanctions awarded, however, has changed somewhat. Particularly given the political efforts to encourage more severe sentencing, the changes suggest a disproportionate increase in the number of minor offences being dealt with by the justice system. This can be seen both in a slight increase in the number of waivers of prosecution relative to the number of summary sanction orders, and also in an increasing proportion of court convictions resulting in a fine rather than the more severe forms of sanction (see Figure 6a-c). Thus, the number of prison sentences awarded per 100,000 of population actually decreased over the past few years, from 170 in 2005 to 135 in 2010, while the total number of convictions per 100,000 has increased (from approximately 1,300 to 1,500).

The system of sanctions for young offenders differs from that for adults. The age of criminal responsibility in Sweden is fifteen years, and prior to this age young offenders are referred to the social

services. For youths aged 15-20, the most common court sanction until 2006 was placement into social services care, whereby local Social Welfare Committees determined the most suitable measure for the individual concerned. In 2007, a new youth service sanction (community service for young people) was introduced. As can be seen from Figure 6d, youth service appears thereafter to have been awarded in many cases instead of either social services care or a fine. As concerns youths whose offence is deemed to require a custodial sentence, Sweden has long had a tradition whereby young offenders are incarcerated separately from adults. For 18- to 20-year-olds, a special cause is at present still required to sentence a youth to a term in adult prison. For 15- to 17-year-olds, an exceptional cause is required to sentence youths to a prison term. The 1999 Youth Custody Act requires courts to sentence offenders under the age of 18, whose offences would otherwise have resulted in a prison sentence, to *youth custody*, unless there are special reasons for not doing so. Youth custody is served at secure youth institutions (Pettersson 2010).

Interpreting the sanctioning trend for young offenders is difficult as a result of the introduction of youth service, for which there is no point of comparison prior to 2007. However, a recent decline in the number of custodial sentences, combined with an increase in the number of waivers of prosecution, again indicates a trend towards a greater proportion of minor offences being dealt with by the justice system (Figures 6b and 6d). Perhaps the most striking trend in the response to youth offenders, however, is the sharp decline since 2006 in the use of social services care provision as a reaction to youth crime. It seems likely that this final bastion of the treatment ideology's influence on Swedish sanctioning practice is finally in the process of crumbling.

Figure 6a: Types of conviction decisions per 100,000 population, 1995-2010 (all age groups)

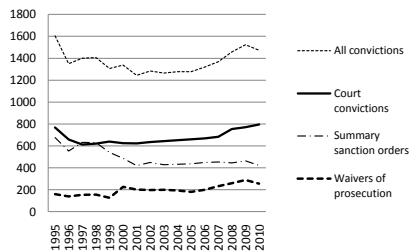


Figure 6b: Types of conviction decisions per 100,000 population, 1995-2010 (aged 15-20)

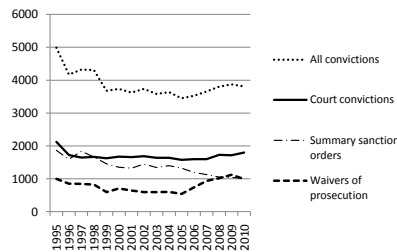
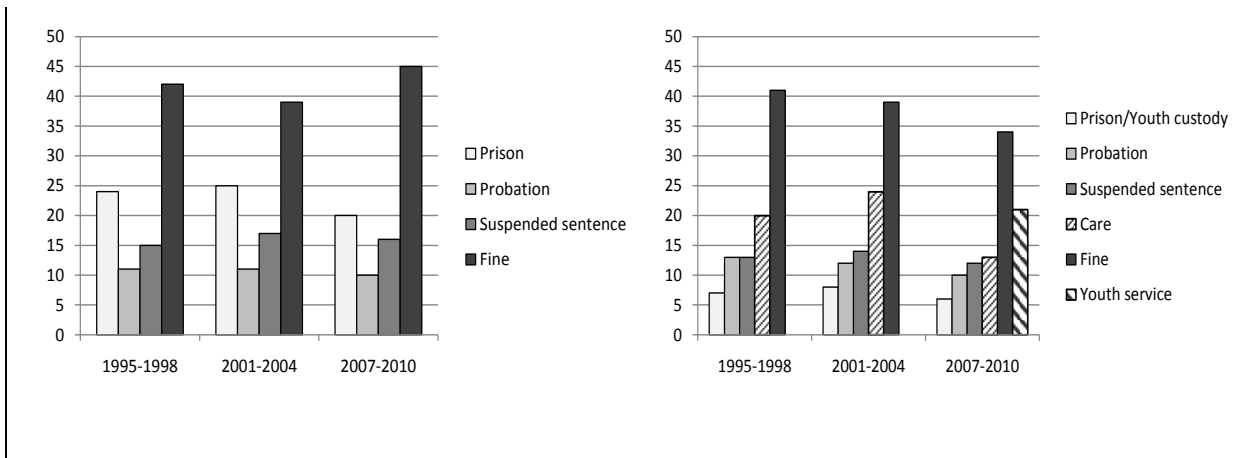


Figure 6c: Types of court sanctions (%), 1995-2010 (all age groups)

Figure 6d: Types of court sanctions (%), 1995-2010 (aged 15-20)



The prison and probation system

Responsibility for the Swedish correctional system lies with the National Prison and Probation Administration, which is also responsible for the operation of the country's remand centres. There are currently 52 prisons in Sweden, grouped into five security categories. Their total operational capacity is just under 5,000 places. Recent international inspections of Swedish prisons have generally reported positively on prison conditions. In 2009, for example, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) commented positively on the adequacy of the size of cells, on generous out-of-cell time, and on the arrangements for prisoners' visits. Concerns were raised, however, in relation to such matters as staffing levels at night, access to telephones, healthcare provision and the provision of information to foreign national prisoners (CPT 2009).

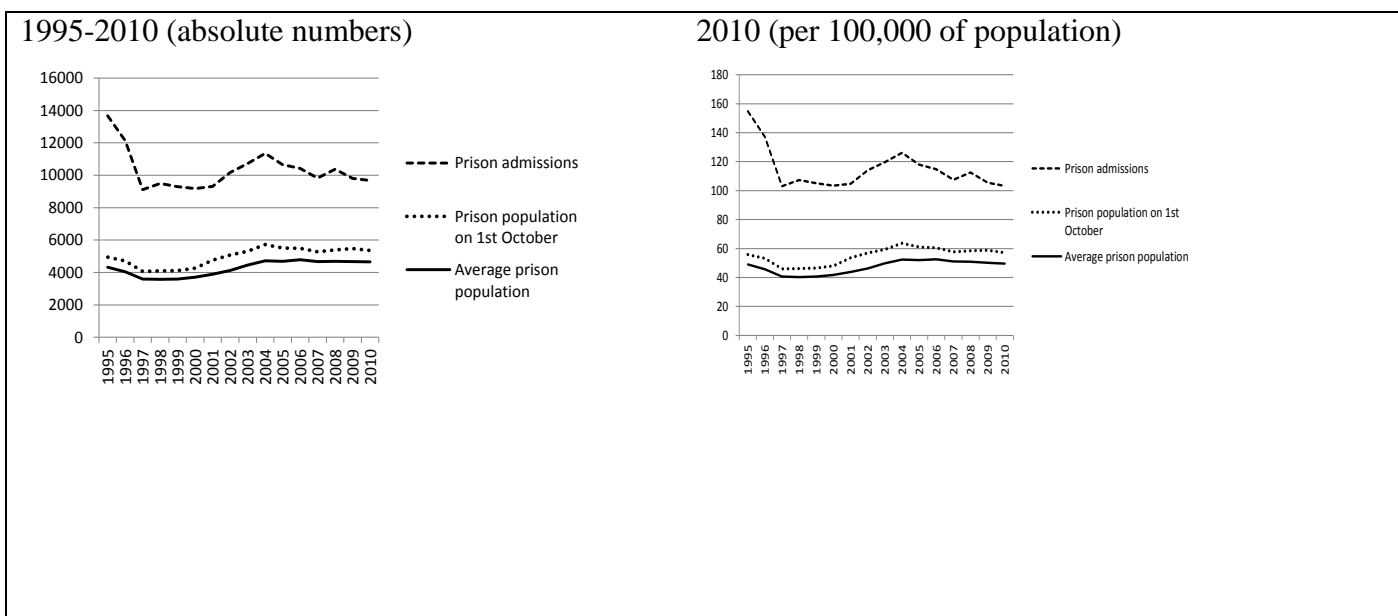
Over the past decade, the Swedish prison service has focused major efforts on tightening security, primarily as a result of a number of spectacular and highly publicised escapes in 2004, which produced substantial political debate. A new chief was recruited to the prison service from the National Police board, and the appointment was clearly marketed as being part of an intensified security drive. The Justice Minister also promised that new, 'escape proof' prisons would be built. The emphasis on security has been criticised both in terms of expenditure and for its negative effects on treatment and rehabilitation work. It does appear to have been successful in preventing escapes, however, which have declined substantially since 2004 from both secure and open prisons.

Prison statistics

Since 1950, Sweden's average incarceration rate per 100,000 of population (including individuals on remand) has ranged from a low of 35 in 1950 to a peak of 79 in 2006. Restricting the focus to those incarcerated following a conviction during the period 1995-2010, Figure 7a-b presents trends in the total annual volume of convicted offenders admitted to prison, the annual average number of prisoners and one-day snapshot measurements of the prison population (on 1st October each year). There was a large drop in the number of prison admissions immediately prior to 1997, partly due to a drop in the number of court convictions and partly due to the introduction in 1997 of home detention curfew as an alternative to prison terms of up to three months (extended to six months in 2006).

Figure 7a: Prison admissions, Prison population on 1st October, and Average prison population,

Figure 7b: Prison admissions, Prison population on 1st October, and Average prison population, 1995-



Of nearly 5,400 inmates held in Swedish prisons on 1st October 2010, just over 30 percent had been convicted for drug or smuggling offences, a further 35 percent for robbery and violent crimes, and eight percent for sex offences. There were a total of 159 prisoners serving life sentences, up from a mere 15 in 1983, and there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of prisoners serving long prison terms. Indeed, following the introduction of home detention curfew as an alternative to short prison terms, the proportion of prisoners (as measured on 1st October) serving a sentence of at least two years increased from 45 percent in 1997 to 60 percent in 2010. Studies have also shown that levels of social disadvantage have increased among Swedish prisoners (Nilsson 2005). Over the past decade, the proportion of women among those admitted to prison has ranged between six and seven percent. Their sentences are on average somewhat shorter than those awarded to men, however, and thus they constitute a slightly smaller proportion of those present in prisons on a given day (approximately 5.5 percent during the 2000s).

Release programmes

Prisoners become eligible for release on parole once they have served two-thirds of their sentence. Following their release, the majority of former prisoners are placed under probationary supervision for one year, although this period may be reduced for good behaviour if the risk of recidivism is assessed to be small. There are four main forms of re-entry programmes in Sweden: placement in a social services treatment facility, placement in a half-way house, work release and extended work release. Work release involves prisoners leaving the establishment during the day to participate in work, education/training or treatment, whereas extended work release involves electronic monitoring at home.

Recidivism statistics

Available recidivism statistics in Sweden focus on the proportion of individuals reconvicted within one and three years of a given conviction. The most recently published statistics on recidivism (from 2010) relate to reoffending following a conviction in 2005. Between 1991 and 2005, the proportion of individuals who were reconvicted within three years increased slightly, from 34 to 39 percent. An increase can be noted in relation to all age groups, with the exception of those aged 15-17 at the time of their conviction, among whom the reconviction rate has instead declined. Recidivism statistics show,

unsurprisingly, that the reconviction rate varies substantially with the level of prior involvement in crime (Brå 2011e).

Concluding remarks

As regards crime trends, Sweden appears to be a fairly average West-European country. Despite a focus in the public debate on apparently continuously increasing and evermore serious crime, our analysis shows that crime has not increased over recent decades. This is true even for the constantly debated areas of youth offending and violent crime. A clear increase is, however, visible in the work of the Swedish justice system, particularly in relation to crimes against the person. Besides substantially increasing policing resources, politicians have also encouraged more severe sanctioning practices. The proportion of prisoners serving long sentences has increased, and while the prison service's focus on security has born fruit in that fewer prisoners than ever are escaping, there is little to indicate that life-chances have improved for those released from prison; recidivism rates are at least as high as previously. Currently, it is in principle only criminologists who are publicly criticising this shift away from Scandinavian 'exceptionalism' (Pratt 2008) and towards a more punitive future.

In light of this last fact, it may be of comfort to certain politicians that criminology remains one of the smaller social science disciplines in Sweden. Our brief review of Swedish criminology nonetheless shows that the discipline has expanded rapidly over recent years. More universities now house criminological research centres, and the increased political significance of the crime problem has also led academics from other disciplines to interest themselves in criminological research. Although the focus of Swedish criminological research centres varies, it is our belief that the majority of academics would share our choice of central topics and controversies in this article. There are, of course, other areas that could have been discussed in more detail, such as organised crime, which has assumed much more significance in the crime policy debate over recent years (Korsell and Larsson 2011). The same is true of the issue of legal safeguards and extended controls of the public as a result of the perceived threat of international terrorism. Time will tell whether these or other issues come to constitute central questions for Swedish criminology in the future.

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