

Summary

Issues concerning crime and society's response to crime have been at the centre of Swedish public debate for some time. This is not so much because crime as a whole poses a greater threat to our society than previously, but primarily because these issues have become party-political issues and consequently form part of the power struggle in our society.

The Swedish Police Authority is the core institution responsible for society's measures to combat crime. The State's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, which is largely entrusted to the police, is a necessary but insufficient requirement for a democratic society. It is hardly surprising that when law and order issues come to the fore in social discourse, many people turn their gaze to the police.

The overall purpose of this report is to establish a foundation for improving the ability of the Swedish Police to perform its duties.

The Swedish Police Authority has undergone extensive organisational reform in recent years. There is no doubt that the reform's short-term effects have included dissatisfaction among large groups of staff and reduced effectiveness in several key areas of police activity. However, the situation appears to have stabilised. In the longer term, the reform appears to have led to certain important changes to the work of the Police, primarily at local level. Despite many ongoing difficulties linked to these changes, the introduction of municipality police officers responsible for problem oriented activities in their local areas and the system of public pledges are an important step towards making police activities slightly more focused on preventing problems than on intervening when problems have already arisen to try to mitigate their effects.

The Swedish Police enjoy a great deal of respect and a largely untarnished reputation among the population, despite the extensive

criticism in the media and from the political establishment. This criticism mainly concerns the low level of police effectiveness, focusing on the fact that the police solve such a relatively small proportion of all crimes reported that few offenders can be prosecuted. Moreover, this ‘clearance rate’ has fallen slightly in recent years, despite the organisational reform of the Swedish Police and the allocation of additional resources.

This clearance rate is thus used as a key indicator of police effectiveness. However, on closer examination, the clearance rate is a very dubious measure. It includes the clearance rate of crimes that differ considerably, that have completely different prospects of being solved and that cause varying degrees of harm to the victims and society. This makes the measure unreliable and susceptible to manipulation. In other words, it is extremely important whether or not any changes in the clearance rate concern minor drug offences, robbery or murder.

Despite these obvious problems, the clearance rate is used extensively, and often very simplistically. There is a high degree of political consensus that the low crime clearance rate is due to police understaffing, and that the number of people employed in the Swedish Police Authority must increase from 30 000 to 40 000 by 2024. At present, it is uncertain whether this target can be achieved without drastic changes to the recruitment and training of police officers.

Furthermore, it is extremely uncertain whether current investments in increasing clearance rates, even though they lead to some success, are the best use of society’s limited resources. The Police’s mandate includes more duties than detecting crimes and ensuring that those responsible receive fair sanctions. The analysis of the Police Act and other relevant documents carried out in this report shows that the social mandate of the Swedish Police Authority can be summarised in four points:

1. crime prevention,
2. public security,
3. solving crimes, and
4. service to citizens.

The analysis also indicates that it is the crime prevention mandate that should come first among these four. As the Government writes: “*Crime should first and foremost be prevented*” (Government Offices 2015, p. 6). This priority is actually self-evident when considering the fundamental obligations that a democratic state has to its citizens, namely protecting them from the harm caused by crime. When crime is prevented, it never takes place and thus cannot harm society or the individual. Only when society fails to prevent crime does the need arise to minimise the harm crime causes by finding and punishing those responsible, and seek redress for the victims, etc. Despite the seemingly obvious logic of this, our study shows that the crime prevention mandate currently receives a small share of the police’s total resources, and that those who work on prevention feel they have low status relative to other police activities.

The main proposal in this report is that the focus of police activities should be shifted from reactive activities to proactive ones, i.e. crime prevention. This can be achieved by the police using problem-oriented policing (POP) to a much greater extent than is the case today. Police crime repression and criminal investigation activities should also be motivated by their preventive effects and not, as occurs in many places today, by how much punishment these activities generate. The proposed shift requires extensive changes in police attitudes in relation to their mandate and a development of new ways to measure effectiveness.

A fundamental question regarding the focus of police activities is how to measure the effects of these activities. It is common that it is not the activities’ objectives that determine how their effects are measured; rather it is what is measured that directs the activities. If the focus of activities is to change to problem-oriented policing and prevention, measures must be adapted to this focus. This will require extensive methods development. It is difficult, but by no means impossible, to measure the effects of crime prevention activities, i.e. counting crimes that were never committed. This will likely require a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. Regarding quantitative measures, the introduction of a measure similar to the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (Sherman et al. 2016) should be an important step in obtaining a better picture of which parts of police activities should be prioritised and which effects have been achieved

regarding the police's primary mandate: preventing crime and mitigating the harm caused by crime.

My proposal is thus that crime prevention and mitigating the harm caused by crime must be the Swedish Police Authority's primary objective – that methods to measure effects of these interventions are developed, and that the total clearance rate stops being used as a key measure of police effectiveness. The report also presents a number of more detailed proposals concerning, for example, the organisation of the Swedish Police Authority's R&D activities, information to the public on local and national crime issues, IT support and police training.