

Sweden's Brutal Gang Problem: Here's What Officials Blame It On

Lisa Kim Forbes Staff

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TOPLINE The gun death of a popular Swedish teen rapper Einar has reportedly heightened “outrage” over gang violence in Sweden where organized criminal gangs have intensified shootings and even bombings, **mostly** in predominantly immigrant suburbs of large cities.



People lay flowers and candles near a crime scene in the Hammarby Sjostad district in Stockholm on ... [+] TT NEWS AGENCY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

KEY FACTS

- Eight in 10 shootings in Sweden happened in a “**criminal environment**” in disadvantaged neighborhoods, according to a study by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention published in May, **Reuters** reported, which cited disputes between gangs as one of the **reasons** behind the phenomenon as well as drugs trade and lack of trust in police.
- Last year, Sweden’s National Police Commissioner Anders Thornberg told the **Financial Times** rising gang violence in that country could potentially be a “threat” to its democracy if “certain groups” continue to “stand outside” of society, referring to immigrants in disadvantaged neighborhoods.
- The three areas most often mentioned as having high rates of gang activities are the suburbs of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmo.
- Thornberg said the emergence of “vulnerable areas” was a result of Sweden’s “**failure**,” citing “failing schools, feelings of exclusion, unemployment, a lack of adult role models” that hinder “these young men” from integrating into that country, according to the **Financial Times**.

- Klara Hradilova Selin, researcher at the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention said one gun death often leads to another, calling it a “[social contagion](#),” Reuters said.
- Gunnar Appelgren, police superintendent in Stockholm, told AFP, “many” gang-related shootings are associated with “[honor](#)” and that “the level justifying a retaliation is quite low” when it comes to conflicts between gangs or “fights over girlfriends,” according to a 2019 article by *The Local*, an English-language digital news publisher that covers Sweden and eight other countries.

SURPRISING FACT

The chances of men between the ages 15 and 29 in Sweden getting shot were [ten times](#) higher than their counterparts in Germany, a 2018 study found, according to *The Economist*.

TANGENT

Even though Sweden has some of the “world’s strictest” gun control laws, it is faced with increasing gun-related violence because of illegal firearms [smuggled](#) in from countries in the western Balkans, according to a [2019 paper](#) in the journal *Forensic Sciences Research*. The Swedish government [licenses](#) guns and requires owners to receive a year-long training that encompasses writing and shooting tests. [Stronger penalties](#) for possessing firearms and gun killings have been imposed under the current government led by the Social Democrats, while opposition parties insist on giving the law enforcement greater authority to tackle the issue.

KEY BACKGROUND

Eight in 10 shootings in Sweden were connected to [organized crime](#), a study by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention said. That ratio was “[significantly](#)” higher compared to other countries in Europe, the *Guardian* reported. In 2018, Sweden had the [highest](#) gun deaths in Europe, surpassing Italy and eastern Europe, due to increased criminal gang activities, the *Guardian* said. Deaths involving guns tripled in that country between 2012 and 2020, [Bloomberg](#) said. Nearly 260 crimes in Sweden involved [explosives](#) in 2019, up 60% from a year earlier, Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention data showed. Linda Staaf, intelligence service chief of Swedish National Police, told the *Observer* that bombings in public spaces are “[specific](#)” to that country. Staaf added, “It’s [not normal](#) to see these kinds of explosions in a country without a war.”

FURTHER READING

[Popular Swedish Teen Rapper Einar Shot Dead Amid Surge In Country’s Gang Violence Intensifies](#) (*Forbes*)

[Swedish Teenage Rapper Einar Killed in Stockholm Shooting](#) (*Bloomberg*)

[Sweden’s gun violence rate has soared due to gangs, report says](#) (*Guardian*)

[Why Sweden struggles to curb gang violence](#) (*The Economist*)

[Bombs and blood feuds: the wave of explosions rocking Sweden’s cities](#) (*Guardian*)

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Lisa Kim

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