

The Story of the Gun

A Study of Media Narratives on Gun Violence
among Swedish Criminal Gangs

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Abstract

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This study examines how Swedish media reported on gun violence in criminal gangs from a brief view of the 1990s, the early 2000s, to 2023. Its goal is to see how these stories have changed over time and how they affect people's thoughts and actions. There is little research on this topic; therefore, this study fills an important gap. It examines news articles from major Swedish newspapers and uses ideas about moral panic, crisis stories, and signs and symbols to understand these media reports. The sampling initially consisted of 250 articles. However, when coding the data, this sample size was narrowed down.

The findings show several important trends. In the 1990s, news stories mostly focused on the worry of military guns being stolen and used by criminals, with calls for stricter rules. In the 2000s, the stories shifted to talk about gang wars and fights for control, showing gangs as organized and strategic. The 2010s saw more crisis stories, with reports of innocent people, especially children and young people, getting caught in gun violence. By the 2020s, the media reported that gangs were targeting innocent family members of criminals, making the situation seem even scarier. This study shows how important the media is in shaping how we understand gun violence and why we need strong plans to solve this problem. By looking at how these stories have changed, this research helps us understand how society and leaders respond to gun violence in Sweden.

Keywords: Gun Violence; Media Narratives; Criminal Gangs; Moral Panic; Moral Regulation; Crisis Narratives; Semiology; Apocalyptic Narratives

Popular Science Summary

The goal of this study was to examine how the media in Sweden discussed gun violence in criminal gangs from the early 2000s to 2023, with a brief look at the 1990s. In simple terms, how do newspapers and news channels in Sweden describe stories about gun violence involving gangs over the years? By examining these stories, we can understand how the media affects people's thoughts and reactions to this big problem.

Gun violence is a serious issue in Sweden, but not much research has been done on how the media covers it. This study analyzed news reports from major Swedish newspapers to see how the stories have changed and affected public opinion and policies.

The study found several important trends. In the 1990s, news reports focused on concerns about military guns being stolen and used by criminals, with a call for stricter rules. In the 2000s, the stories shifted to talk about gang wars and fights for control, showing how organized and violent these gangs are. The 2010s saw more stories about innocent people getting hurt in the crossfire, especially kids and young people. By the 2020s, the media started reporting that gangs were targeting innocent family members of criminals, making the situation seem even scarier.

These changes in how the media talks about gun violence show a move from asking for long-term rules to a more urgent call for action. The media's stories about gun violence strongly affect what people think and what actions are taken. This study shows how important the media is in helping us understand gun violence and why we need strong plans to solve this problem. Additionally, looking at how Swedish media reports on gun violence in gangs, this study helps us see how these stories affect people and the decisions made by leaders. It highlights the need to address both the immediate and deeper reasons for gun violence to make society safer.

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1. Introduction

According to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, the country is, at the time of writing, experiencing a quick rise in gun violence. The report claims that this rate of rise is unheard of in the rest of Europe. No similar trend concerning such a high rise within a similar timeframe has been recorded in Europe before, according to the report. (Brå, 2021a, p. 8).

Examining Sweden, we can draw from the following diagram that refers to crime statistics by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, where the data suggests that attempted murder and murder with firearms from the year 1990 have been increasing heavily until 2023. Worth noticing from this statistic is that it only touches upon gun violence that has been reported. This is relevant to consider because there likely are cases within this timeframe that have not been reported to the authorities, or in other words, hidden statistics.



Appendix 1: Reported crime (Brå statistics on reported crime, 2024a)

Moving on, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå, 2021a, pp. 7-8) further indicates that there has been a general decrease in deadly violence, including gun-related violence, across Europe. This decrease has been particularly notable in countries that initially had the highest levels of deadly violence, such as the Baltic states, the Balkan region, Finland, and Central Europe. These decreases have led to a merging in levels of deadly violence between European countries (Brå, 2021a, pp. 7-8).

However, the situation in Sweden stands out as an exception in the European context (Brå, 2021a, pp. 7-8). As we can conclude from the diagram in Appendix 1, since 2013, Sweden has

experienced an increase in deadly violence, separating from the general European trend. This increase in Sweden is mostly due to a rise in cases of deadly gun violence, which has led to the fact that Sweden now ranks high in Europe in terms of deaths from gun violence ((Brå, 2021a, pp. 7-8)

Moreover, looking beyond the statistics and focusing on the facts behind the numbers, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention reports on gun homicide trends in Sweden. The organization notes a significant increase in gun homicides since 2005, largely linked to criminal gangs in socially disadvantaged areas (Brå, 2021a, pp. 31-32). This contrasts with the general trend in Europe, where gun homicides have been decreasing. A large percentage of gun homicides in Sweden is related to criminal locations, and the increase is generally among young adults between the age of 20-29 (Brå, 2021a, pp. 31-32, 34).

The reporting on how gun violence has been evolving in Sweden makes it important to explore the topic. There are gaps in current research concerning gun violence in Sweden. This research will aim to close some of these gaps. Examining how the media has reported this development would tell us how it has generally affected the country; this will also close some of the current gaps at the time of writing. Studying the media's role is important because media stories significantly impact the general public and offer a worldwide view beyond one's own experience (Nord & Strömbäck, 2012, p. 4). With that being stated, the following section will present the research question and aim.

1.1 Research Aim & Question

This research aims to investigate the media's portrayal of firearm-related violence within criminal gangs in Sweden since the early 2000s, with a brief look at the narratives from the 1990s concerning this topic. With that being described, the research question for this study is:

- How has gang gun violence been represented in Swedish media?

This includes investigating the longitudinal aspect: What are the similarities and differences between ten years ago and twenty? How do these representations culturally and symbolically make sense in the media? This also means investigating not just the role of the perpetrator and the gun but also the victim, as well as that of the state and law enforcement.

2. Previous Research

This section will now present research and topics related to this study. Previous research will focus on media narratives concerning guns and gun violence within criminal gangs, making it easier to understand how previous research has treated these issues.

2.1 Media: A Source for Factual Information?

Before delving deeper into the media narratives in the criminal sphere, let us look at what functions media fill in society and people's daily lives. Nord and Strömbäck (2012, p. 4) argue that the media significantly impacts the general public and offers a view into the world beyond one's own experience. This perspective is specifically relevant to this study and regarding gun violence among criminals, an issue that may not be part of most people's daily experiences in Sweden but is perceived through the lens of media narrative. Furthermore, Nord & Strömbäck (2012) state that through media, people generally gather information and what is perceived as "facts" to form an opinion on matters in society (ibid.). With that being said, Nord and Strömbäck (2012, p. 2) maintain that people can consider the media's portrayal of matters as accurate, even if the reporting is incorrect (ibid.). This statement indicates that all the events that media are highlighting concerning gun violence in the criminal sphere might not be exactly as they are portrayed in the reporting, which is something to have in mind when analyzing the data for this study. Additionally, a reason for studying the media narratives on criminals and gun violence and why it is relevant is that research suggests that modern society depends on the media, whether television, radio, the internet, or magazines, to deliver the content. It is difficult to avoid the stories produced as they are everywhere to be consumed by the public (Nord & Strömbäck (2012, p. 2). Similar research has not been conducted earlier in Sweden. Therefore, this study aims to close that gap by collecting data on media narratives. Lastly, Nord and Strömbäck, in two separate studies, maintain that the general public, first and foremost, often gathers information from the media, especially when the topic is about political questions. This leads to the media and journalists having more and more power in society as actors who provide information to the public (Nord & Strömbäck, 2004, p. 4; Nord & Strömbäck, 2014, pp. 265-266).

2.2 Media and Reporting on Crime

Trying to examine media narratives in a Swedish context and trying to relate them to gun violence among criminals is difficult. It becomes evident that previous research to find studies

on the media's portrayal of gun violence or gun crime in a Swedish context is not very common. In one of his older research studies, Estrada (1999, p. 128) declared the evolution of media and their reporting on crime. The author stated that the media made it possible for the viewer, listener, or reader to follow the police when they tried to catch criminals, and people could follow these events more or less from their homes (ibid.). Further, Rostami and Sarnecki (2022, pp. 415-416) have written a piece on crime journalism and crime policy in Sweden. Looking at every type of crime in Sweden, Rostami and Sarnecki (2022) state that the Swedish media have gone through changes in their opinions and portrayals in how they look at crime and victimization. These changes are everything from the media once seeing perpetrators as victims of society and victims of their class background in the 1970s, to then in the 1990s to 2010 being blamed for their crimes as it is their responsibility (ibid.). Because this study aims to review media reporting on gun violence among gangs over a certain period, this statement is fascinating on whether the narratives concerning this study have changed similarly or not, even though the time frames from Sarnecki and Rostami's research do not exactly correlate with the time frame of this research. Further, a statement like this tells us that it is relevant to look at media narratives in several ways that touch upon different topics concerning the research aim, as there might be undiscovered narratives on gun violence among criminals to be unpacked from the media reports. Moreover, Rostami and Sarnecki (2022, pp. 415-416) state that it is worth mentioning that political and societal changes in the country can also cause these changes in opinions from the Swedish media. Reading this statement, it becomes interesting to apply that to Pollack's (Pollack, 2001, p. 32) study on media and crime, which indicates that media reports tend to affect the general citizen's perceptions of society, individuals, and social categories. Additionally, the professor clarifies that media constructions can lead to consequences for groups of people in society as they contribute to, reinforce, and maintain stereotyping about them (Pollack, 2001, p. 66).

Another angle here relates to a report from SOU, the Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU, 2005, p. 56). The organization has presented a concept called "The Blue-Yellow Glasshouse Structural Discrimination in Sweden." SOU (2005, pp. 127-129) states that how news flows influences people's perception of reality. The report further suggests that when the media constantly reports the same news, they help the consumers perceive how things might look. The report also clarifies that the Swedish media constantly creates and recreates an "us" and "them" narrative when reporting on deviance. The "them" in this scenario are the people in society who fall into the category of deviants and are stereotyped by the media as groups of

“immigrants” in cases. Further, the report implies that the media does this stereotyping by constantly relating groups as immigrants with crime and deviancy (ibid.). The study by SOU is from 2005. However, it gives us something to think about: does this form of stereotyping of relating immigrants to deviancy by the media still happen post-2005, and will it be identified in this research? If not, is there then a possibility that the media narrative is different when specifically analyzing gun violence among criminals? Does it give us other forms of themes that are similar to stereotyping?

A recent report from Rostami and Mondani (2022, p. 270) stated that it is a big societal issue when the general public perceives shootings in Sweden in a certain way that is not always correct. However, the media are constantly highlighting it repeatedly in the face of the general public, which correlates with the report from SOU (2005, pp. 127-129), as previously presented. Moreover, Rostami and Sarnecki (2022, 415-416) state that reports on crime by Swedish newspapers usually do not mirror reality. They argue that media tend to publish crime stories that look dramatic and sensational over other stories that do not (ibid.). This aligns with a study from Pollack (2022, p. 415-416), who described the media as an entity that tends to publish dramatic and sensational forms of crimes, such as violent crimes, over other types of crime, and one of the reasons for this is due to limited space for publication according to Pollack (2022). On the other hand, Hammarlund and Andersson Schwarz (2018, p. 17-18) researched how several Swedish newspapers reported on lethal violence over the period from 2001 to 2017. The study found that spectacular, violent crimes are more visible in the media and that there are also signs of a co-variation between the perceived anxiety in society and media reporting (ibid.). Reading these statements makes it attractive to analyze the quotes from the media in depth to identify hidden meanings behind the texts and how headlines and the content from the articles can raise certain feelings from a reader's point of view when reading about gun violence among criminals.

Additionally, in the context of violent and serious crimes, some studies in a non-Swedish context on murder concerning media attention have shown that the seriousness of the crime is an important factor for the crime to be noticed by the media, according to Chermak (1998, pp. 66-68) professor in criminal justice and another study by Chermak along with Nicole M. Chapman (2007, pp. 357-358) Senior Scientist in the Department of Immunology. These studies demonstrated, for example, that violent crimes received more media attention than other crimes. However, Chermak (1998, pp. 66–68), in his older study, argues that more

factors than just murder are required for the media to report a crime, as he states that the murder has to differ and be worth writing about from a journalist's point of view.

Moving on, this type of reporting from the media when publishing serious crimes has led to more reports on shootings in comparison to other categories of crime, and this is specifically the case when “ordinary people” in the lens of the media are being affected by shootings among criminals, according to Strömwall, (2021, p. 135) and Sarnecki (2022, pp. 33-34). Adding on, Strömwall (2021, p. 135) states how this can lead to the general public feeling anxious over the risk of being shot at because it is widely published and brought up in the national media. Publications from the media can also contribute to strong effects on the perception of safety when individuals can identify with the victims of crime or if the crime occurred in their local area (ibid.). Further, in another study from Pollack (2021, p. 135), she clarifies that gang crime that involves shootings has caused feelings of uncertainty, and this anxiety or fear is something that the media also highlights in their reports ever since the beginning of the 2010s when writing about crime and shootings (ibid.). Nonetheless, while researchers claim that reports on crime from the media can lead to anxiety and fear, in a study on fear of crime written by Heber (2005, 65-66), she states that while mass media depiction and highlighting of crime increase people’s awareness of criminal activities, it is difficult to prove how the media can affect the fear of crime. However, she does claim that local news reports concerning crime can affect people in terms of inciting fear (ibid.). We need to consider from Heber’s study that the research is a bit older, and the reporting from media has evolved since 2005. Nonetheless, these statements are interesting concerning this current study and suggest that an in-depth analysis is needed to examine headlines and key sentences in media reports when identifying media reporting on shootings among criminals and look at how it can affect people who consume these reports. Nonetheless, more research has been conducted on how the media reports on specific areas where crime is more common in Sweden. However, Egnell, Ph.D., and Ivert, (2019, pp. 27-28) clarify that people who live in these media-highlighted areas usually have a different view of crime and do not think that the delinquency is as bad or sensational as the media suggests that it is (ibid.).

2.3 Concluding Previous Research

With previous research being presented, this paper will look into the portrayal of gun-related violence within criminal gangs in Sweden since the early 2000s, as mentioned earlier, and also a brief look at the 1990s. Additionally, looking back in time, the reflective approach will

help this study shed light on how narratives have changed concerning this topic. Previous studies suggest that similar research has not been conducted on this matter, specifically not in a Swedish context where gun violence is the topic. However, the literature review indicates what needs to be considered when analyzing the articles from the media outlets. For this case, the literature has guided this research to be critical in analyzing the media content and identifying the narratives that the media might create regarding gun violence among criminals in Sweden. This research is crucial for societal causes. One of these reasons is that it will emphasize how concern about gun violence within criminal gangs in Sweden might have changed together with other factors, such as public safety concerns, because of the evolution of the media reporting on this topic. This is important in the sense of how media representation might be able to influence public perception, legislation, and policy discussions regarding gun control and violence within criminal gangs.

3. Theoretical Framework

The media narratives surrounding gun violence can be summarized in several ways, as presented in the previous research. However, in comparison to previous studies, this research will explore the narratives around media views on gun violence within criminal gangs in Sweden and the symbolic and cultural representation of gun violence, from a Swedish media perspective, within gangs in Sweden. The theoretical framework for this research will consist of Hier's conceptualization of moral panic and moral regulation will be used, where he refers to Stanley Cohen's explanation of moral panic and regulation. Philip Smith's narrative genres will be drawn from his work to give an overview. However, only his tragic and apocalyptic narrative genre will be used to analyze the data in this study as they align better with the collected data. Roland Barthes' study of semiology and the theory of "signs.". Lastly, Lois Presser will also be applied in her work on narratives, specifically her notion of crisis narratives. This section will now delve into the theories mentioned.

3.1 Philip Smith – Why War?

In *Why War* (2005), Philip Smith dives into the cultural narratives that create and sustain the phenomenon of war by presenting a reflective analysis through different narrative genres. These frameworks help explain how social and cultural factors cause and keep conflicts going. This part of the theoretical framework will investigate further into Smith's concepts (2005).

3.1.1 Romantic Narratives

The romantic narrative in Smith's (2005, p. 29) analysis of war helps explain how wars gain public support and moral justification. This narrative makes war seem heroic and morally right, influencing how people see and discuss it. Further, it presents soldiers and leaders as brave heroes who sacrifice everything for a good cause. This portrayal makes people feel proud and inspired, seeing these individuals as role models. Additionally, wars are depicted as necessary and just, a fight between good and evil. This makes complex issues easier to understand and supports military actions. Moreover, Smith (2005) claims that romantic narratives greatly impact how much people support war. By framing the war as heroic and morally right, leaders can win public support for actions that might otherwise be controversial. Highlighting heroism and sacrifice connects with people's emotions, creating a sense of unity and purpose. Presenting the war as necessary provides a strong reason to accept

the sacrifices of war. The narrative makes complex issues simpler, making it easier for people to understand and support the war.

3.1.2 Low Mimesis

Smith's (2005, pp. 25-24) "low mimesis" is a type of narrative that shows conflicts and events in a realistic and everyday way. Unlike romantic stories, which focus on heroism and doing what is right, low-mimesis stories focus on life's practical and normal parts. These stories highlight the everyday, practical side of life and decision-making. They do not focus on big beliefs but on realistic, often complex matters. The main characters in low mimesis stories are ordinary people like politicians, soldiers, and civilians. They deal with complicated situations without big actions or dramatic sacrifices. Decisions and actions in these stories are based on evidence, careful thinking, and practical limits. Smith (2005) explains that stories with low mimesis can make people more skeptical by showing how complicated and uncertain real-life situations can be. These stories encourage people to approach conflicts carefully and highlight the need for evidence and accurate procedures.

3.1.3 Apocalyptic Narratives

Apocalyptic narratives see the world as divided into two opposing sides, with good fighting against evil to survive. This narrative uses many religious and mythological themes, showing war as a final fight for survival and goodness. It is urgent and unavoidable, often bringing up images of ending and new beginnings through destruction (Smith, 2005, pp. 21-23). In modern conflicts, the apocalyptic narrative is seen in phrases like "war on terror" and other ideological fights, where the enemy is portrayed as less than human and a threat to the moral order. This narrative gathers public support by tapping into deep fears and ethical beliefs and justifies extreme actions to protect society's values (Smith, 2005, pp. 15, 17, 70). This study will examine specific cases where this narrative is used, studying how it affects public opinion and policy choices.

3.1.4 Tragic Narratives

Unlike the apocalyptic story, the tragic story gives a more detailed and complicated view of war. It sees war as caused by human mistakes and broken systems. This story discusses pride, fate, and how things often end badly. War is seen as sad and full of suffering for everyone involved (Smith, 2005, p. 167). Smith's (2005, p. 156) tragic story sees war as a sad but unavoidable part of the chaotic world. This perspective drives a deeper, more critical

understanding of the causes and effects of war, recognizing the flaws in human nature and political systems. This research will examine how the tragic narrative appears in today's discussions when examining the sad outcomes of gun violence among criminals.

3.2 Presser – How Narratives Drive Mass Harm

Lois Presser's work in *Inside Story: How Narratives Drive Mass Harm* (2018) explores how stories, especially crisis stories, influence and motivate people, often causing widespread harm. The idea of a crisis narrative is critical to understanding how people and groups create, see, and react to situations framed as urgent and catastrophic. In the context of this research, this aligns with the reaction that can be caused when the media frames gun violence among criminals as alarming.

3.2.1 Crisis Narrative

Presser (2017, p. 88) explains that crisis narratives are dramatic stories about sudden, dangerous events. These stories stress that action is urgent and necessary, often making it seem morally right and unavoidable. The crisis is shown as an immediate threat that needs a strong and sometimes extraordinary response. Presser (2017) says these crisis stories are powerful because they morally make the situation seem very important. Crisis narratives start with a significant change from calm to chaos, showing a situation where everyday life is disrupted by a sudden and threatening event. This change creates a feeling of instability and urgency.

Further, Presser's (2018, p. 89) exploration of crisis narratives helps us understand how these stories can lead to mass harm. These narratives motivate people by making them see their actions as necessary responses to severe threats. Crisis narratives influence public opinion and policy in social and political settings. Politicians might use these stories to gather support for their causes, presenting issues as urgent crises needing immediate regulation. This can result in policies that might otherwise seem extreme or unnecessary (Presser, 2018, p. 91).

3.2.2 Sean Hier – Conceptualizing Moral Panic

The concepts of moral panic and moral regulation, first introduced by Stanley Cohen (1972) in his important work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), have played a key role in sociological and criminological discussions. These ideas help explain how society reacts to perceived threats. Sean Hier (2002) builds on these concepts, highlighting the complex connections between societal fears, media portrayal, and regulatory actions.

3.2.3 Moral Panic

As Cohen describes in his work, moral panic refers to a situation where "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Hier, 2002, p. 313). The media often exaggerates and sensationalizes this threat, causing widespread public concern and prompting immediate societal and legal actions to address the perceived danger. Hier (2002, p. 321) builds on Cohen's ideas, saying moral panic is part of society's thinking. Hier (2002) believes moral panics are not just ridiculous reactions but are tied to how law and order are enforced. This view matches the idea of common sense, seeing moral panic as a way for the state to connect with society by addressing common fears about social order and breaking laws. Hier (2002) further emphasizes that society actively creates and spreads moral panics. Hier (2002, p. 322) argues that moral panics are effective because they blame specific people or groups for wider social or moral problems. This process helps explain why moral panics emotionally connect with individuals, making them identify with the stories they see in the media.

3.2.4 Moral Regulation

As Hier explains (2002, p. 325), moral regulation involves making certain behaviors seem normal and natural. This concept is critical to understanding how a state strengthens its power by promoting a specific moral code that citizens adopt. Hier (2002) asserts that moral panics are a form of moral regulation that appears from broader efforts to control behavior. These efforts involve long-term processes to make certain moral behaviors seem normal, aiming to improve the character of those being regulated and strengthen the identity of those enforcing the rules (Hier, 2002, p. 329). Hier (2002, p. 326) criticizes the notion that only the state controls moral behavior. He suggests that many different groups, not just the state, play a role. This means people learn to control their behavior without the state telling them what to do. He also discusses "moral capital," which is the total moral value of individuals and the nation. This concept links how the state regulates morals with how individuals act, showing how outside moral values influence personal behavior (Hier, 2002, p. 328).

Intersecting with moral regulation, Self-regulation is an important part of moral regulation. In self-regulation, individuals adopt society's norms and standards, thus controlling their own actions without needing outside enforcement. Hier (2002) explains that moral regulation efforts aim to instill these moral norms deep within a person's mind. This requires the individual to take an active role in their own moral management, often adjusting their actions

to match what society expects (Hier, 2002, p. 326). To apply Hier's idea (2002), people living in areas where gun violence among criminals is common can practice self-regulation by avoiding involvement in delinquent activities and staying away from places that might expose them to recurring dangerous situations. This means they take responsibility for their own safety by making choices that align with societal norms that discourage engaging with criminal elements.

3.3 Folk Devils & The Other

The idea of 'folk devils,' as Cohen discussed and further explored by Hier, is key to understanding moral panic. Folk devils are people or groups who are blamed for problems in society and seen as threats. They become the center of moral panic, symbolizing 'the other'—those who are viewed as against societal values. This labeling strengthens social boundaries and supports actions to control or remove the perceived threat (Hier, 2002, p. 313).

Hier points out that defining 'the other' is essential for keeping society running smoothly. By pointing out and criticizing outsiders, societies build stronger unity and clarify what behaviors are okay. These outsiders are often shown negatively, making the panic worse and justify strict measures against them (Hier, 2002, p. 322).

3.3.1 Roland Barthes – Signs & Semiology

Roland Barthes' (2012) ideas about signs and semiology help us understand how culture and communication create and interpret meaning. His theories are based on the concept of signs and semiology, a field he developed. Building on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory, semiology, which is the study of signs, is crucial for understanding how meanings are created and communicated through various forms of communication (Culler, 2002, p. 57). Barthes (2012) expands this idea to include cultural elements and the ideological effects of sign systems. This framework will examine Barthes' ideas about signs and semiology and how they are relevant to today's social and cultural studies.

Barthes (2012) thinks of semiotics as a language and a way to understand culture, where everything can be interpreted (Barthes, 2012, pp. 205-206). He expands Saussure's idea of signs, which include a signifier (the form) and a signified (the meaning), by looking at popular culture in the media. Barthes (2012) puts signs into a larger cultural context, looking at them on two levels: denotation and connotation. He explains that denotation is the actual

thing we see (like an object), while connotation is the deeper meaning or idea we associate with that object (Barthes, 2012, pp. 205-206).

Further, Barthes' (1991, p. 113) work, particularly in "Mythologies," explores how cultural myths transform signs to serve ideological purposes. He explains how everyday objects, images, and practices can be infused with meanings that reinforce and sustain dominant cultural values.

One of Barthes' important ideas (1991, pp. 129-130) is that signs are subjective. This means the connection between a sign (like a word or image) and what it represents is not natural but made up. Because of this, signs can be changed to mean different things, and we can analyze them to uncover hidden messages or ideologies. Barthes uses this idea to explain how culture creates myths that make social rules and beliefs seem like natural facts. Barthes (1991) also explores the notion of textuality and how readers create meaning. He believes texts do not have one fixed meaning but can be understood in many ways. This idea shifts the focus from what the author intended to the reader's interpretation. Barthes (1991) shows how texts can be read differently, each time revealing different layers of meaning based on how the signs in the text interact.

3.4.1 Connecting the Theories

Concluding the theoretical framework, Presser (2017) talks about crisis stories that show how urgent and right actions are needed to deal with gun violence. These stories affect how people think and act. They often point out 'folk devils,' a term from Hier (2002) and Cohen, identifying groups people see as threats to society's values, who, in the context of this study, are criminals who use firearms. Further, Smith (2005) mentions several narratives in his research; however, two will be used in this study. First, the 'folk devils,' as mentioned by Hier (2002), are shown as extremely dangerous from Smith's (2005) view, making circumstances look horrific and needing quick and strong action. The narrative here is usually presented in texts like "war on terror" and other ideological fights, where the enemy is portrayed as less than human and a threat to the moral order in society; this is identified as the apocalyptic narrative. Second, Smith (2005) mentions detailed media narratives. These stories present bigger issues and human mistakes. This can touch upon war-like scenarios caused by human mistakes and broken systems. This type of story discusses how events regularly end badly. War is seen as sad and full of suffering for everyone involved; this is recognized as a tragic narrative. Additionally, Hier (2002) explains how society reacts to these threats with two

ideas: moral panic and moral regulation. Moral panic occurs when the media presents dramatic stories that scare people and call for quick action. Moral regulation is when society makes and enforces rules to keep things in order. Lastly, Barthes' (1991; 2012) theory about signs helps us understand these media stories. He shows how cultural myths and ideas shape people's thoughts. By studying the signs and symbols in these stories, we can identify their deeper meanings and the ideas behind them.

4. Method

As mentioned previously, this paper will aim to understand the media narratives on the representations of guns within criminals and criminal gangs in Sweden since the early 2000s within gangs in Sweden from a media point of view. Additionally, this paper will also focus on how gun violence within gangs in Sweden has been portrayed in the media since the beginning of the 2000s. The section below will explain a data collection plan for conducting this research. Before moving on to the methodology, Presser (2017, pp. 3, 8, 10) conceptualizes the term "narrative" as a central idea that covers the stories we share and our experiences, influencing how we think, act, and feel. Narratives are powerful because they bring out emotions like excitement or sadness and involve people in the stories. This involvement happens because narratives make people connect with and care about the characters and situations, whether real or not. Narratives are presented as coming from social interactions that can motivate people to act in specific ways. Further, Presser (2017) highlights how narratives help us understand right and wrong in different situations, influencing how people see and respond to what happens around us. She mentions that this is specifically true in social movements and criminology, where narratives help shape how people understand conflicts, who is responsible, and who is affected.

4.1 Data Collection & Setting

Secondary data was attained from news articles to analyze this study and execute the research aim. The data consisted of news articles from the Swedish Media archive, creating a timeline of the articles. Considering the many articles on this topic, most of which only briefly mention weapons, I chose articles with titles that focus on weapons and criminal gangs. For example, I will include articles with titles such as,

Gang fired shots wildly at a gas station (Aftonbladet, 2005).

War between criminal gangs in Uppsala (Dagens Nyheter, 2004).

One potential risk of this approach is missing relevant articles that do not mention gun violence in the title but discuss it in the text. To avoid this problem, I scanned a random sample of articles to check for important information. I also regularly reviewed my selection criteria to ensure they match my research aim. By clearly defining and justifying my selection process, my aim has been to keep a focused and relevant dataset while minimizing the chance of missing crucial information (Ekström et al., 2022, pp. 760-761).

The articles went back to previous decades to the present to analyze how the development in media representations of guns over the last 23 years impacted the discussion on portrayals of gun violence among criminals in Sweden. Important to mention is that the plan from the beginning was to investigate the media discourse from 1990 until 2023. However, the sample size was minor within the 1990s, and one of the media outlets used for this study was not as active during the beginning of that period. With that being noted, a small sample size of data was still collected within the 1990s to give a view of the media discourse concerning this research. Important to mention is that around 250 articles were gathered from the 1990s until the 2020s. I carefully selected articles aligned with my theories from this large amount of data. Furthermore, the articles excluded from the analysis were rejected because they often contained similar content to those selected for the analysis. The news articles included the two most critical Swedish media outlets, Dagens Nyheter and Aftonbladet. The reason for choosing the two most prominent media outlets is that the news from these sources automatically reached the public more because of their popularity.

Dagens Nyheter is Sweden's largest morning newspaper, and Aftonbladet is Sweden's largest tabloid (Aftonbladet, 2016; Dagens Nyheter, 2008). These outlets were chosen because they have a large audience, meaning many people read their news. Dagens Nyheter is a liberal morning newspaper (Dagens Nyheter, 2008). On the other hand, Aftonbladet is a social-democratic evening newspaper (Aftonbladet, 2016). This contrast is important as similarities between the liberal morning paper and the social democratic tabloid point to established stories around gun violence. By including both newspapers, I aimed to provide a balanced analysis that reflects different political perspectives and publication times.

The search terms used when identifying these articles involved investigating the longitudinal aspect: What are the similarities and differences between ten years ago and twenty? How do these representations make sense in the media? This also means investigating not just the role of the perpetrator and the gun but also the victim and who the gun is aimed at throughout these decades, as well as that of the state and law enforcement.

At first, finding articles related to my study was a struggle when searching for media articles from Dagens Nyheter and Aftonbladet between 1990-2023. The search terms to begin with involved: "Headline:(Pistol OR vapen OR revolver OR gevär AND kriminella OR kriminell OR gäng OR organiserad brottslighet)" It did not give me much to work with. However, after reading some articles that were somehow relatable to what I was looking for, I changed and

developed the searched term to: “Headline:(Pistol OR vapen OR revolver OR automatvapen OR vapenvåld OR skjuten OR skjutning OR skottlossning OR skjutvapen OR gevär AND kriminella OR kriminell OR gäng OR organiserad brottslighet OR ligor OR kriminella ligor OR kriminell liga OR gäng liga OR gäng ligor OR falang)”. I got what I needed when tweaking the search term to the latter.

4.2 Data Analysis

Firstly, this research was conducted through a content analysis. Additionally, qualitative content analysis will be used to analyze the collected data and achieve the aim of the research. Qualitative content analysis is a standard method used to analyze empirical data from online forums and news articles within media (Bryman, 2018, p. 667). While discourse analysis could be effective in such a study, content analysis is more suitable. This method is beneficial in identifying relevant themes and discourse samples and is particularly good at identifying changes over time (Christensen & Vickery, 2023, p. 1816). This research, as mentioned, investigated changes in the media discourse regarding gun violence within gangs. A structured coding sheet helped identify the themes from the media articles within the guidelines of qualitative content analysis (ibid.). Moreover, a coding scheme belonging to the coding sheet helped analyze textual data to uncover evolving patterns, themes, and narratives (Hung et al., 2023, p. 302) relating to the representation of guns and gun violence in the context of Swedish gangs.

The process began with a thorough review of various media articles covering the last 23 years and a small sample from the 1990s, as mentioned previously. The analysis of the collected data from 2000 until 2023 (the 1990s excluded) was divided into several timeframes within five-year periods to understand differences and similarities in the reporting through the years and how the reporting might have evolved from the Swedish Media outlets, Aftonbladet, and Dagens Nyheter. Further, preliminary codes reflecting key concepts, themes, and shifts in representation were created from this primary set. These codes were then refined and collected into broader thematic categories. These categories were constantly reviewed and adjusted throughout the analysis to confirm that they correctly summarize the data and align with the research aim mentioned in the qualitative content analysis guidelines (Williams et al., 2023, p. 7). This approach is proposed to provide a general understanding of the changes in media portrayal of gun use within gangs. It contributes valuable insights into these elements' within Swedish media.

Moreover, in addition to the media articles, the analysis consists of a theoretical framework to support and contextualize the findings from the primary data analysis, the theoretical framework as seen in the previous chapter. After reading the collected data several times, I gained a deep understanding of the content. This helped me identify connections between theoretical perspectives and previous research. With this clear understanding, applying theories from Philip Smith (Tragic and Apocalyptic narratives), Sean Hier (Moral Panic and Moral Regulation), Lois Presser (How Narratives Drive Mass Harm), and Roland Barthes (Signs and Semiology), things became more straightforward because they needed a broader perspective. This analysis is similar to a general inductive approach where the researcher finds themes and theories from the data (Thomas, 2006, pp. 238-239). This means this is a qualitative research method, and conclusions were drawn directly from the data. As a researcher, I closely examined the data to identify patterns or themes. The inductive approach highlights that understanding and theories come from the data itself. I uncovered these themes through careful and systematic analysis (ibid.).

Lastly, the data (quotes) used in this research have been carefully translated into English, as they were originally quoted in Swedish when obtained from Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter.

4.1.1 Criminals & Criminal Gangs and Gun Violence

The search terms surround gun violence among criminals; therefore, it was essential to define the terms gangs and criminals within the context of this study as it can be unclear. This study aimed to investigate the media's portrayal of firearm-related violence within criminal gangs in Sweden.

Previous studies suggest that there is a tendency to define gangs as organized groups with clear structures despite that not being entirely accurate. Moreover, criminals and people in criminal gangs are reported to be situated in areas of lower socioeconomic status (Bennet & Holloway, 2004, p. 313). Looking further into a report from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå, 2016), criminal gangs are portrayed in several ways. Firstly, the article presents organized crime as groups that can be related to everything from criminal motorcycle gangs and shootings from criminals in the suburbs to threats (Brå, 2016, p. 22). The report mentions key terms to describe different types of criminal groups. Having this knowledge was essential as quotes might indicate key terms to name certain groups who commit gun violence. First, the report mentions "self-defined groups." Self-defined groups outline people who have given themselves their name, symbols, and other features that

indicate a form of uniqueness, loyalty, professionalism, internal unity, and external power (Brå, 2016, p. 33). These groups can be everything from motorcycle groups to other criminal groups with names and memberships. Self-defined groups tend to have a collective reputation for using violence as intimidation. This Intimidation capital can be charged through committed or alleged acts of violence. Besides the self-defined groups, other groups do not name themselves or use symbols and attributes. Some groups have a stable core, while others are more temporary. The police or the media have given them a name. These groups are labeled” externally defined groups” (Brå, 2016, p. 35). The article further mentions “Unnamed groups”. These groups often have a looser structure than self-defined groups, although sometimes the members are very loyal to each other. A person can belong to many unnamed groups simultaneously, as well as self-defined and externally defined groups. In this context, unnamed groups are divided into three types. These networks often overlap. This division aims to sort out different types of unnamed groups to understand the criminal environment better. The unnamed groups are based on common background, past experiences, shared neighborhoods, and family or kinship ties (Brå, 2016, p. 36). Lastly, “Project-based groups” carry out profitable criminal activities, such as drug smuggling, large-scale thefts, or significant fraud (Brå, 2016, p. 29).

Additionally, in this study, I specifically aimed to research how gun violence among criminals in Sweden has been represented. In a recent study, The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå, 2023a) conducted a study on deadly violence in Sweden. The organization presented statistical evidence on the fact that deadly violence with firearms in Sweden through criminal environments mainly occurs in bigger cities in Sweden (Brå, 2023a, p. 7). Moreover, the report states that gun violence usually is connected to organized criminal gangs. Specifically, this type of crime happens in socially vulnerable areas within the big cities in Sweden. Further, deadly gun violence within criminal gangs in these areas usually happens around nighttime, and many times, there are accomplices involved as well (ibid.).

4.2.1 Ethical Considerations

This study maintains objectivity while analyzing and interpreting the data from media sources and academic papers (Hung et al., 2023, p. 302; Luker, 2008, p. 6). Before proceeding with the analysis, I decided on categories and themes based on what I had read and my theories. This helped me avoid personal bias. I also asked other students to examine part of the data. We compared our work and discussed differences to ensure consistency and fairness (Hung et

al., 2023, p. 302). I blurred names and sources from the articles and reports during the analysis. This helped me focus only on the content without being influenced by who wrote it or where it was published (Williams et al., 2023, p. 10). I used sources like media articles and academic papers to check my findings. Comparing these sources helped reduce researcher bias and made my results more reliable (Hung et al., 2023, p. 302). Throughout the research, I got feedback from classmates and my supervisor. Their feedback gave me new perspectives and helped me identify any potential biases. Furthermore, I kept a journal where I wrote down my thoughts, decisions, and possible biases during the research. This helped me understand how my background and assumptions might affect the study (Hung et al., 2023). Moreover, analyzing media sources can be sensitive. Therefore, this study cites the sources properly concerning copyright laws (Williams et al., 2023, p. 5).

5. Analysis

Before looking at the years from 2000 to 2023, this analysis will first show how the media talked about gun violence in gangs in Sweden during the 1990s. Knowing how guns and gangs were shown in the media back then will help us understand the later years better. As mentioned in previous chapters, the analysis will consist of collected data and quotes from Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter collected through the Swedish Media Archive.

5.1.1 The 1990s Narratives – From Order to Disorder

Hier (2002, pp. 24-225-226) explains that moral regulation controls morality and keeps order in society. Unlike temporary moral panics that require immediate action, it sets up rules and systems guiding behavior to meet societal expectations. Hier (2002) stresses that this regulation makes certain behaviors and values feel natural and necessary, helping them become rooted and essential in society. For example, society aims to regulate guns in criminals' hands, with the media encouraging regulatory measures, as shown in the following quote.

Sweden is a well-equipped country. Eight million people possess two million weapons. The military has an additional one million. In addition, 30,000 illegal weapons are circulating in criminal circles. Of these, 20,000 are stolen. 90 percent are from ordinary people, the rest from the military. And it is among these 10 percent that the really dangerous weapons, the automatic weapons, are found. They are rare and used almost exclusively by serious, organized criminals. (Police officer) (Aftonbladet, 1994)

The central distinction here is between legal and illegal guns and works to form a social reality where the legality of a weapon influences its perceived danger. Drawing from Hier (2002), guns are here used to represent societal fears and anxieties, a difference between the regulated and controlled and their opposites (Hier, 2002, p. 313). This is obvious in setting the “3 million weapons linked to ordinary people and the military” apart from “30,000 illegal weapons”. In this case, the distinction labels weapons and individuals carrying them.

Following Hier (2002, 316), this distinction establishes an important part of how media narratives create social problems, in this case, framing illegal weapons and their users as the primary source of danger. Further, the quote portrays weapons among criminals as something illegal; in this scenario, the criminals who carry the stolen weapons are described as folk devils. Let us look at this quote further. The quote emphasizes the problem of how many guns

are falling into the hands of criminals. Hence, there is an indirect demand for regulation as a social demand, a moral distinction that calls for stricter regulations or action against these “folk devils.” Folk devils are society's way of identifying a scapegoat, and the folk devils here are portrayed as “serious organized criminals” (Hier, 2002, pp. 313, 324-325). The quote sets up a scenario where moral regulation is seen as necessary to protect society from this organized threat, as the threat can be eliminated by introducing long-term solutions, which is an integral part of moral regulation.

Barthes' (1991, p. 113) concept of mythologies is here essential. Barthes's idea of mythology helps describe the deeper meanings behind things that society and people usually do not notice in their everyday lives. Applying Barthes's (1991) concept makes it possible to analyze the narrative that guns are not the problem. However, it becomes a problem when out of regulated hands, the criminals or “folk devils,” as noted earlier by referring to Hier (Barthes, 1991, p. 113; Hier, 2002, p. 313), where guns spread a sense of concern in society when they are in the hands of people who are deemed as criminals or folk devils by using Hier's (2002) conceptualization.

Further, the narrative suggests that the gun as an item can be interpreted both symbolically and culturally, especially in the hands of people who are portrayed as criminals. Swedish minister of justice had this to say about the matter:

But it has also become more common for weapons to be found among young people. They are carried as a status symbol or 'to protect themselves.' Therefore, I wish that a popular movement against violence also becomes a movement against weapons. Everyone who legally possesses weapons – hunters, home guards, sport shooters, traders – should support renewed and stricter regulations that reduce the risk of weapons falling into the wrong hands. The fist can be bad enough, but when aggression leads to taking out a knife or a firearm, the consequences become so much worse. (Aftonbladet, 1994)

Barthes's (1991, p. 110) concepts of denotation and connotations are a case in point to the point that the meanings of symbols are created on two levels: Denotation is a term that explains something. However, connotation helps to describe that particular thing more profoundly and lets us find deeper, hidden messages or feelings that come with it (Ibid.). The denotative meaning of a weapon is its physical form and function, though the connotative meaning in this scenario includes “status symbol” and “means of self-protection.” These

connotations elude deeper societal values, fears, and conflicts about security, identity, and power. This aligns with Hier (2002, 328-329) and his explanation of the moral economy of harm, where he explains how people sometimes choose right or wrong, especially when preventing or deciding if a small amount of harm is acceptable for a good reason. In summary, people sometimes break the rules because it does not do too much damage and prove acceptable anyway. The Swedish minister of justice is trying to make a distinction between less harmful forms of aggression (fistfights) and the much worse consequences of using knives or firearms, suggesting a moral economy of harm. This narrative forms certain behaviors and tools as unacceptable risks, organizing societal efforts to regulate and reduce these perceived threats. What is interesting here is that the minister of justice indirectly suggests that fistfights might be acceptable.

The previous sections have drawn from moral regulation, which indicates that society aims to regulate firearms from getting into the hands of people who do not have licenses to use them; this method, drawing from Hier (2002, p. 325), is a long-term process where in this scenario military personal and civilians with gun licenses have to make sure to lock up their guns for them not to be stolen. On the other hand, moral panic emphasizes how society collectively labels individuals or groups and automatically makes them a serious threat, leading to society calling for immediate action concerning these threats (Hier, 2002, p. 312). According to Hier (2002), this labeling tends to happen through mass media.

The pursued individual has connections to a motorcycle gang. Furthermore, there are indications that the pursuers also belong to a motorcycle gang. A man was chased and shot at by people in a red car in what is believed to be a confrontation between rival motorcycle gangs (Dagens Nyheter, 1994)

Daniel Fitzpatrick, president of the Brotherhood, was murdered in Råcksta while driving on Bergslagsvägen. He was shot dead with 24 bullets, fired by men armed with a submachine gun and a revolver, caliber (Aftonbladet, 1999).

These incidents involve criminal motorcycle gangs and represent a collapse of social order, which indicates moral panic (Hier, 2002, pp. 312, 322). By this time, previous calls by police officers and politicians to restore order have not resulted in regulation of this issue. Therefore, this scenario triggers societal anxieties and fear and requires strict and immediate regulation.

Additionally, using Barthes's (2002, pp. 7, 62) concept of connotation, the detail of "24 bullets" connotes overkill, meaning that it is not just an intention to kill but also to send a

message of power and brutality which relates to moral panic as drawn from Hier (2002, pp 312, 322), where the order has broken down. Immediate reaction is required for the brutality that we are witnessing at this time. This connotation by Barthes (2002, pp. 7, 62) feeds into societal myths surrounding gang violence and the chaos it represents, further dividing the lawful society from the lawless violence.

An occurring theme from Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter throughout the 1990s is the concern about how the use of firearms affects Swedish society as a whole. Local authorities are reported to want to gain control over guns in the country, as noted earlier. However, the situation escalated gradually, increasing the moral panic and feeding the need for immediate regulation (Hier, 2002, pp. 312, 322). Articles raised concern about shootings in public spaces among civilians and also local authorities such as law enforcement.

The police patrol had just stopped a speeder when the motorcycle gang drove by. Suddenly, one of the bikers raised a weapon and fired two shots. (Aftonbladet, 1996).

According to TV 4 News, it was a 27-year-old leader within the motorcycle organization the Brotherhood and one of the suspects in the Malexander investigation who was met in Nässjö. (Aftonbladet, 1999).

The transition from reporting on general concern over firearms to specific, violent encounters involving motorcycle gangs and police does indicate a critical escalation in perceived societal disorder.

At around 5:30 on Sunday morning, five or six men broke into the current illegal club. According to reports, they started beating and shooting around them. A revolver was probably used. The confrontation might be a dispute between different motorcycle gangs, but the police point out that they have not found any evidence directly linking it to any individuals or groups. (Dagens Nyheter (1994)

Applying Hier's (2002, 328-329) moral economy of harm suggests that the details of these violent episodes contribute to a moral economy of harm by positioning the criminal motorcycle gangs as critical actors in the narrative of public insecurity and threat, which shows how the regulated society has transitioned into an irregulated one. Moreover, the fact that the event from this quote occurred at an illegal nightclub suggests that it enriches this "economy," reminding us of underground networks of criminal activity that challenge regular law and order (ibid.). Additionally, in Barthes's (2002, pp. 24-25) terms, the repeated

mentions of firearms and specific incidents involving criminal motorcycle gangs who are shooting at law enforcement or in illegal clubs help elevate these weapons/ guns from ordinary items of violence to powerful symbols of revolt, authority, and disorder. This can be seen as a semiotic shift that turns firearms into critical elements of a wider mythology about crime and lawlessness that spread through Swedish society in the 1990s, further supporting the moral panic (Hier, 2002, pp. 312, 322). Moreover, the “illegal nightclub” as a venue is represented as a dramatic environment, which contributes to intensifying the narrative of disorder. Its illegality connotes a space where standard rules do not apply, increasing the feeling that society is becoming chaotic (Barthes, 2002, pp. 45-46).

5.1.2 Concluding the media narrative

To conclude, during this time, media reports that order and control is still possible as police officers and politicians call for collective action against letting guns fall into the hands of ruthless criminals. Drawing from moral regulation (Hier, 2002), military personnel and legal gun owners only had to make sure to lock these guns up so criminals would not steal them. However, these calls for regulations did not minimize the issue as criminals are reported in shootouts among each other and against law enforcement. Drawing from the (Barthes, 2002) method of connotation, brutality has increased when referring to scenarios where guns are used not only to threaten but also to murder. This sends a message of power and brutality among criminals with illegal firearms. The media reporting in this scenario, drawing from the conceptualization of moral panic (Hier, 2002), suggests that society has reached a point of disorder and that immediate regulation is called for.

5.2.1 War among criminals – 2000-2010

5.2.2 Headlines

Lois Presser (2017) points out how narratives can drive behaviors and policies that cause harm, particularly by shaping how groups are perceived. In this chapter, I will point to how the 2000s means a shift in the narratives concerning how media frames the topic of gun violence among criminals when compared to the 1990s. So far, I have pointed to how the 1990s focused on individual criminal acts and the danger of guns falling into the hands of criminals. As we now turn to the 2000s, I will show how this shifts towards portraying these as organized, war-like conflicts, highlighting these differences in an obvious way. Drawing from Smith (2015), framing gang violence as “war” or similar to warfare, the media

constructs a narrative framework that positions criminal groups not just as law offenders but also as enemies in a battle for control, which possibly can distort public understanding but effectively dramatizes the conflict.

Gang fired shots wildly at a gas station (Aftonbladet, 2005)

War between criminal gangs in Uppsala (Dagens Nyheter, 2004)

Wild shootout in Skarpnäck (Aftonbladet, 2009)”

Criminology professor: “The situation is extremely serious” (Dagens Nyheter, 2010)

Drawing from Smith (2005, p. 4), The phrase "war" is powerful, demonstrating organized and armed conflict, not just isolated criminal activities. This makes criminal gangs seem like organized groups, triggering a more organized response from the public and authorities. This language, using phrases like "war" for criminal gangs, differs from the 1990s. In the 1990s, the media focused on how many guns were falling into criminals' hands (Hier, 2002, pp. 313, 324-325). This led to moral regulation, as society demanded stricter laws against these criminals or "folk devils." Folk devils serve as scapegoats for society. In the 1990s, they were portrayed as "serious organized criminals" (Hier, 2002, p. 313). Drawing from Smith (2005, p. 4), the term “war” in the headline sets up a scenario where moral regulation is necessary to protect society from this organized threat. The media now suggests that the issue goes beyond guns falling into criminals' hands, pointing towards a war among criminals instead. This narrative shifts public policy towards aggressive law enforcement strategies, suggesting wartime methods and possibly increasing violence (ibid.).

Furthermore, Smith (2005, p. 211) emphasizes that stories and cultural contexts influence political leaders' decisions about war and diplomacy. Smith (2005) explains that narratives shape how facts are understood and decisions are made, even in situations that appear entirely strategic or based on calculations. This connects to a larger conversation about how narratives can affect public policy and societal reactions concerning the following quote, “Wild shootout in Skarpnäck,” and how it states chaos and lack of control. Moreover, Smith (2005) highlights the significance of understanding the cultural stories that affect rational decision-making in military and political areas. Additionally, Smith (2005) notes that while physical resources are essential in military actions, how these resources are perceived and talked about culturally is equally vital in influencing policies and how the public views these actions. Specifically, when the media writes ” Wild shootout,” it automatically suggests a loss of control and

lawlessness, similar to a battlefield scenario. This form of language contributes to a story where standard societal rules do not apply, demanding special measures to restore order (Smith, 2005, pp. 168-169, 211).

Presser (2017, 46, 112-113) discusses how narratives influence societal perceptions and actions and how they can shape more positive outcomes or provoke fear and demand strict countermeasures. Presser (2017, pp. 88-89) explains that narratives are stories that frame our understanding of events in specific ways, influencing our thoughts and actions related to those events. She introduces the idea of the "crisis narrative," which often portrays a dramatic shift from peace to chaos, presenting a crisis that requires immediate action. This crisis is portrayed as an event and a call to moral action, critical to the narrative's ability to influence and mobilize people. "Criminology professor: "The situation is extremely serious" is from a criminology professor and legitimizes a degree of crisis narrative (Presser, 2017). The statement further confirms the seriousness and mobilizes public opinion to support possibly strict countermeasures, aligning with moral regulation (Hier, 2002, p. 312). This convincing endorsement can accelerate public demand for harsh responses and impact policy. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how these narratives or demands for regulation are constructed in more detail.

5.2.3 Territorial Control & Vengeance

As is somewhat evident in the headlines referred to in the 2000s, there is a shift as to where and how gang criminals' use of guns is presented in mass media reports. Another shift in stories is gang criminals who fire shots at restaurants to gain control and showcase power with guns, which are described as a threatening development. The territorial aspects here are essential. As I briefly touched upon concerning the '90s, the wild shootings in illegal nightclubs are also framed as out of control both in terms of means and goal; however, as we shall see, this changed during the 2000s when shootings were tied more closely to control of a particular space. "Revenge" becomes an important theme in the media for describing criminal gang shootings as disputes among the gangs. Specifically, the media consensus around the theme "revenge" indicates that the violence is re-occurring and connected, as seen below.

It is a matter of retaliation. The police believe it is revenge for the shooting drama on Friday when a 23-year-old man was shot dead on Munkhättegatan. (Aftonbladet, 2009).

There is a connection between Tuesday evening's shooting in Malmö and the murder of a 23-year-old man on Friday." (Dagens Nyheter, 2009).

Hier (2002, pp. 315-316) conceptualizes the media's depiction of folk devils. In this scenario, the folk devils are criminal gangs using firearms, portraying them as threats to society. The way the media highlights these threats encourages societal regulation, leading us to Hier's (2002, p. 313) notion of moral regulation, as long-term solutions are needed to regulate these folk devils. However, if these regulatory measures are not fulfilled, we will be closer to moral panic, where immediate regulations are called for.

Smith (2005, p. 211) states that stories help societies interpret complex situations, turning isolated criminal acts into parts of a wider strategy similar to military operations. Stories framing these activities as efforts to control territories make these events seem part of a larger strategic organization. This shapes public perception and influences policy. Smith (2005, p. 174) also discusses "tragic narratives" framed by the media, highlighting the vulnerability and suffering of those involved. Tragic narratives emphasize the sad outcomes of military actions, seen as failures with poor leadership and no clear end plan. This view shows the intense impacts of war or crime on individuals. In the 2000s, society struggles to manage criminals using firearms to resolve conflicts, causing anxiety and other emotional feelings in affected communities.

Barthes (1991, pp. 129-130) discusses myths and hidden meanings behind everyday objects and cultural practices. He emphasizes how ordinary things are filled with societal narratives and ideologies, often disguised as natural occurrences. These hidden meanings act as communication with significant cultural importance. Barthes's work also studies sign systems, distinguishing between the signifier (the form the sign takes) and the signified (the concept it represents). He highlights the importance of how signs are used within cultural, literary, or social frameworks and advises observing who uses terms like "signifier" and "signified." Applying Barthes's method, perceiving a place as dangerous due to criminal activity is not just an objective reality. However, it is constructed through language, symbols, and social narratives, often influenced by the media.

The recent shooting at 'Restaurant Avenyn 10' in central Gothenburg may have been carried out by a criminal gang that, in some way, wants to establish themselves at the bar, says county criminal police chief Lars Berg. According to the police, criminal gangs are interested in establishing themselves in cloakrooms and as bouncers at bars (Aftonbladet, 2004)

The shootings and attacks on the restaurant 'Avenyn 10' are interpreted as disputes between gangs and threats against restaurants and restaurant owners in a struggle for influence over drug sales, illegal gambling, and favored positions at the city's hotspots.” (Aftonbladet, 2004)

The following section will draw from Hier (2002). "criminal gang" and "to establish themselves." These phrases concerning the quote that criminals are using their guns to gain control over a public venue indicate a violation of societal norms and a threat to public safety, which causes a sense of panic among restaurant workers that are located close to the specific location, “Avenyn 10”. This leads to a situation where the perceived media narrative signals regulatory measures, as we will read in the following phrases (Hier, 2002, p. 312). The media's choice of words portrays the criminal gang as an outside threat trying to break into a typical, safe business environment, thereby enforcing a moral boundary between lawful society and criminal elements. The restaurant is the ordered environment in this scenario (Hier, 2002, pp. 315-316). Here, the media spotlight on specific roles that gangs aim to occupy within legal businesses serves as a warning. Additionally, "interested in establishing themselves in cloakrooms and as bouncers at bars." It identifies a threat and indirectly instructs the public to regulate these spaces against such criminal elements. Additionally, when the media highlights gangs infiltrating legitimate businesses, this can be viewed as an instance of the "discursive mediation of danger" that Hier (2002, p. 323) discusses.

By portraying this infiltration as a threat, the media suggests a certain level of harm associated with these criminal groups. This portrayal can increase the perceived danger, which fits Hier's (2002, p. 323) description of the media's role in shaping how safety issues are discussed and understood. This creates a narrative that suggests public safety at places such as restaurants is at risk, leading to calls for stronger regulatory actions or increased security measures to address this perceived threat. Illustrated by Smith (2005, p. 211), the term “establish themselves” is seen as a part of a broader narrative that presents gang activities not just as criminal but as strategic and organized, similar to military operations. The term “establish themselves” states that gangs, just like military forces planning to hold territory, are gaining territory by establishing themselves in a business setting, proving a level of organization and purposes beyond random acts of violence. The segment “by a criminal gang that, in some way, wants to establish themselves.” concerning public venues like restaurants signals a shift from temporary to permanent activities. This tells us that the media portrays these locations as not only scenes of crime but also strategic properties. This suggests a fear of criminal

infiltration into lawful places such as a restaurant, triggering a moral response from the public and a call for awareness and resistance. By referring to Smith (2005), this explanation aligns with Hier's (2002) notion of moral regulation, where media narratives can help define acceptable and deviant behaviors, reinforcing the public's role in upholding these norms.

These elements highlight the disruption of social order and the threat to public safety and the well-being of business owners. Drawing from Hier (2002), "disputes between gangs " and "threats against restaurants." The language used here regulates morals by explicitly distinguishing between criminal behavior where criminals are targeting each other and the expected norm of security and peaceful business operation, which is the restaurant. The specific focus on the disruption of societal norms through criminal activities, such as gang disputes and the threat to restaurants, echoes the establishment of moral panic through media narratives that delineate the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Reaching a state of moral panic would urge society to act immediately against these threats (Hier, 2002, p. 324). This emphasizes a moral stance against the perceived threat and the illegitimate use of public spaces for criminal purposes (ibid.). "struggle for influence" and "disputes between gangs." In the context of the quote, these phrases highlight internal criminal conflicts spilling into public legal settings such as venues, highlighting a societal breakdown that demands regulatory measures for these criminals not to occupy public venues. By highlighting the threat that criminal groups pose to public spaces, the media prompts for regulation; however, the transition into a widespread moral panic is not far (Hier, 2002, p. 313).

Drawing from Barthes (1991, pp. 129-130), the restaurant mentioned above - Avenyn 10 - serves as a signifier in Barthes' framework, where the restaurant's name evokes specific imagery and associations beyond just a location. It symbolizes a public space now linked with violence and criminal activity, shifting its meaning within the community. Further, drawing from Barthes (1991), the phrase "interested in establishing themselves in cloakrooms and as bouncers at bars" highlights how ordinary roles within a bar are chosen as strategic positions by criminal elements, changing the perception of these roles from being service-oriented to potentially threatening. The mention of restaurant owners portrays them as symbols of local entrepreneurship that are now at risk. This helps to change public opinion about the vulnerability of local businesses. (ibid.).

Drawing from Smith's (2005, p. 174), these quotes indicate a tragic narrative. The media narrative focuses on criminal violence, the threat it poses to public safety, and the infiltration of criminal elements into legitimate businesses, all of which emphasize societal vulnerability and disorder. Moreover, the first quote introduces a narrative of fear and instability as criminals try to establish themselves where people often gather and interact. The second quote intensifies this by directly linking criminal actions to serious threats against local businesses. It increases the sense of tragedy by detailing the broader impacts on the community, criminal gangs aiming to establish themselves in specific places such as restaurants. They do that by using their guns to shoot at the pub. In the 1990s, the demand from authorities was for citizens and military personnel to lock their guns up; in that sense, it would be harder for criminals to steal them. Tying this to Barthes's (2002, pp. 7, 62) concept of mythologies and the analysis from the 1990s, the narrative at that time was that guns were not the actual problem; however, it became an issue when out of the non-regulated hands. The non-regulated hands are described as criminals or "folk devils" if looking at it by Hier (2002, p. 313). Judging by the headlines in the 2000s, the societal urge that was signaled to the media to regulate guns did not work. Instead, we are now looking at a scenario where rehabilitation or integration is needed by society to prevent these things from happening.

Linking this to the further quotes, the narrative takes us from Avenyn 10 to Malmö. The initial set of quotes about "Avenyn 10" described criminal attempts to establish control over public spaces like restaurants. Returning to the quotes concerning revenge suggests a territorial expansion of gang conflicts. The media, by explicitly linking these events, helps to frame gang violence not just as isolated incidents but as part of a larger pattern of criminal control that has expanded over public spaces. This narrative strategy mobilizes public reaction against gang intrusion and supports interventions that protect collective areas and ensure public safety.

The phrase "There is a connection" in the context of the shooting in Malmö suggests a pattern or trend, indicating that these events are not isolated but part of a larger general issue that calls for a regulatory response, and if regulatory measures do not occur. The risk is that it causes a broad sense of moral panic among the citizens, especially those in Malmö. This perspective points to the need to address the root causes, not just the symptoms of such incidents (Hier, 2002, p. 315). The specific mention of "Tuesday evening's shooting in Malmö" localizes the incident, making it more relevant and urgent for the local community. This detail can mobilize local action and responses to prevent future occurrences by

addressing community-specific issues. Hier (2002, p. 322) explains how narratives and discourses can ideologically shape public perceptions and behaviors by focusing on mobilizing collective actions, such as local initiatives and reactions, by pinpointing specific incidents. Therefore, when the media mentions an incident occurring in Malmö, the threat feels more immediate and relevant to the people and sparks a discourse centered around safety and security. This encourages the local community to take preventive actions and tailor responses specific to their needs, increasing the urgency and importance of addressing the issue directly within the affected community.

Furthermore, “shooting drama on Friday when a 23-year-old man was shot dead on Munkhätteatan.” The specific localization of the act and the mention of the death of a young man talk directly to the community to bring about a sense of anxiety among the residents close to that area, gathering emotional and moral support against such acts of violence, possibly strengthening community-led initiatives to combat and prevent such tragedies. This aligns with Hier’s (2002, p. 312) discussion on strengthening societal anxieties, wherein individual tragedies can lead to broader social actions as communities seek to redefine and strengthen their sense of collective safety and security. By mentioning the specific location of the shooting, “Munkhätteatan,” the media ties the violence to a particular community within the city, making the issue more critical for those living there. This specific mention of location urges residents around that area to back efforts that aim to increase safety and stop further violence in their neighborhood before the situation escalates. This can increase their emotional connection to the issue. This idea aligns with Hier's (2002, 323-324) explanation of how individuals engage with certain topics through exposure to specific debates, particularly when they have visible effects in the real world.

Moreover, violence is reactive, according to the media narrative. It shows a pattern that goes against society's expectations and needs to be stopped through regulations and law changes (Hier, 2002, p. 321). This highlights the need to end the ongoing cycle of violence affecting communities.

Signaling uncertainty in how the police understand or manage violent situations can reduce public trust in these institutions, highlighting the importance of how messages are communicated to the public and their impact on societal trust and cohesion. This connects to Hier's (2002, p. 314) analysis of how certain dialogues, such as those about police capabilities, can become ideological. These narratives influence public sentiment and shape

perceptions of the validity or effectiveness of social institutions. When the public senses that law enforcement may not be competent, it can lead to a broader questioning of their effectiveness and reduce the overall trust in their ability to guarantee safety, thus affecting the organization and stability of society.

Philip Smith (2005) emphasizes the construction of conflict narratives and their reception by the public, which provides a valuable lens for analyzing criminal shootings as reported by Swedish media. Smith's (2005) analysis of the Iraq War delves into how narratives are constructed to justify conflicts, focusing on their legitimacy and public perception (Smith, 2005, pp. 155–156). Similarly, the criminal violence in Malmö, as reported, can be seen through a similar framework of narrative construction, which lacks public legitimacy and is perceived negatively. The shootings are framed as a response to previous violence, surrounding these events within a tragic narrative of endless retaliation devoid of any broader social or moral legitimacy. As Smith (2005) notes, public reaction to such narratives is crucial in understanding their acceptance or rejection (Smith, 2005, p. 160). The tragic narrative of criminal shootings, continually framing new acts of violence as revenge for past offenses, likely meets with public horror and opposition rather than sympathy or support. This reaction aligns with Smith's (2005) analysis of opposition to the Iraq War, where the legitimacy of the war's narrative was increasingly questioned over time, leading to widespread conflict.

5.2.4 Bystanders and Civilians in Danger

In the context of criminals shooting at each other, the media outlets began to write about civilians and bystanders being affected by the criminal gangs shooting at each other in public spaces. This concern was not usual in the 1990s as it began in the 2000s.

Throughout this decade, drawing from Hier (2002,) the call for regulation has been a common theme when the media narrative creates anxiety about firearm use by criminals. This prompts regulatory responses, as previously discussed. Media stories often highlight gun violence in public or semi-public locations, like parks or residential areas (Hier, 2002, p. 324). The quotes below and the common theme throughout this decade emphasize a tragic narrative (Smith, 2005, pp. 174, 211) from a media perspective. Bystanders are reported to be at risk from bullets aimed at criminals and gangs. The media aims to evoke sadness and concern, mainly when violence occurs in places like children's parks. These tragic events highlight that communities face significant problems, as efforts to stop gun violence have not been enough (ibid.).

Moreover, Hier (2002) introduces self-regulation (Hier, 2002, pp. 324-326). Self-regulation means people manage their behavior and work on becoming morally better without needing authority to guide them. Unlike long-term regulation imposed by the government, it focuses on individuals taking responsibility to improve their ethical habits and character. This approach involves people looking after themselves and enhancing their moral values, helping not only themselves but also contributing to societal goodness. Through self-regulation, people help set and maintain moral standards in their communities, working independently but within societal and governmental rules. In the context of gun violence among criminals, residents in affected communities can self-regulate by avoiding delinquency and staying away from potentially dangerous places, as discussed earlier.

Shot dead at a playground. Many families with children live in the area, and several were outside when the murder occurred (Stockholm) (Aftonbladet, 2001).

The police now suspect that the shots are part of a gang feud - which this time targeted the wrong person (Aftonbladet, 2007).

Several innocent people may be affected. The police fear more violent crimes between motorcycle gangs (Stockholm) (Aftonbladet, 2002).

But what we can state now is that they are not shooting at ordinary people. However, there is probably concern among the public (Uppsala police: Christer Nordström) (Dagens Nyheter, 2004).

The fact that the shooting occurred on a playground a space typically associated with safety and children, emphasizes the violation of societal norms and the purity of child-friendly spaces. This framing urges a moral outcry and calls on a regulatory response to protect these vulnerable areas (Hier, 2002, p. 312). Recognizing that many families with children lived in the area and were present increases a sense of anxiety among the residents. It calls for protective measures in residential communities, stressing the potential risk to innocent bystanders. This situation demonstrates the informal linkage between the representation of danger and the collective desire for safety, as the public's reaction to the playground shooting is mediated through narratives that highlight the risk to innocent children and families (Hier, 2002, p. 328).

The police suspicion about gang involvement separates the violence from the civilian population, delineating a clear 'us' versus 'them' scenario. It regulates public perception to see

this as a criminal rather than a general societal problem. By framing the incident as a targeted attack among criminal elements rather than a random act of violence, the narrative seeks to regulate public fear, highlighting a collective safety method that ideally protects the innocent (Hier, 2002, p. 314). This approach helps maintain public order and trust in law enforcement's capability to manage and contain such threats. Further, this story indicates a tragic mistake and reinforces the need for law enforcement to intervene in gang conflicts to prevent innocent casualties, as seen here (ibid).

The emphasis that innocent people could be affected further warns of the potential danger to innocents and refers to a moral obligation to protect the public and prevent further violence. This phrase also relates to self-regulation, meaning people manage their behavior without the authority to guide them. Additionally, the alleged fear of the police highlights a sense of the seriousness of the threat and the ongoing nature of gang violence, which demands more strict regulatory measures. This demonstrates Hier's (2002, p. 323) argument on the problematization of 'the other' and how danger is narratively constructed to justify the expansion of threats. This fear, acknowledged by authorities, highlights the drive for regulatory actions, similar to what Hier (2002) explains about the regulation of suspected child molesters. Hier (2002) discusses how society redefines safety measures to protect against such threats. In this scenario, regulation focuses on controlling and preventing harm within a specific, risky part of society (criminals). This involves establishing rules and measures to restrain dangerous behaviors before they can cause harm.

The final quote attempts to reassure the public that the violence is targeted and not random, aiming to regulate fear and maintain public order. In other words, the police officer is signaling to civilians that they are not at risk as long as they are not involved in delinquency. This approach aligns with the discursive practices that Hier (2002, p. 323) talks about by distinguishing 'the Other' (criminal elements) from the general public (ordinary people). This way of speaking reassures the public that the threat is managed and that following societal norms keeps them safe. It reflects Hier's (2002) ideas on how we talk about things to help separate those seen as 'dangerous' from the general population. This separation redefines the threat, helping maintain a feeling of safety for the general community. By emphasizing that ordinary people are not the targets in this criminal war, the narrative encourages individuals to distance themselves from criminal activities and environments. It advises the public to stay safe by not engaging with or supporting criminal elements, thereby supporting self-regulatory behavior within the community (Hier, 2002, pp. 324-325-326). The recognition of public

anxiety is key in moral regulation, as discussed by Hier (2002, p. 312). By supporting community fears, the narrative helps to set a widely accepted common sense that focuses on supporting victims. Acknowledging these public concerns triggers the community and law enforcement to take more active steps toward safety and regulation. This reflects Hier's (2002, p. 312-313) explanation of how worries and causes are shaped within discussions to encourage people to come together and act.

The tragic narrative framework, as discussed by Smith (2005), illustrates the depth of hopelessness and trouble caused by violence occurring in places traditionally seen as safe, such as playgrounds where children and families gather. The total contrast between the innocence of such settings and the brutal act of violence summarizes a critical aspect of the tragic narrative: the corruption of what is meant to be pure and secure (Smith, 2005, p. 155). On the other hand, this corruption shocks the community and challenges the sense of safety and normality that forms the root of societal functioning. Furthermore, the factor of mistaken identity and misdirected violence in these incidents adds to the tragic narrative by introducing fatal errors and the randomness of the violence. Such mistakes in the pending criminal war among criminals lead to unnecessary suffering, emphasizing the category of acceptance, where the intended logic of even criminal codes cannot prevent tragic outcomes (Smith, 2005, p. 157). This unpredictability fuels a public perception of extensive threats and violence that could strike randomly. This sense of randomness is crucial in tragic narratives, as Smith (2005, 160-161) highlights the vulnerability of all individuals within society. The ongoing threat to innocents, as mentioned in concerns about further violence between motorcycle gangs, and the general anxiety expressed by the police even when the public is not the direct target speak to a broader societal tragedy. These narratives are about the individuals directly involved and reflect a larger societal and collective breakdown story. The public's fear, even in the absence of direct threats, highlights the impact of these narratives, affecting the psyche and daily lives within the community, affecting trust and a sense of security (Smith, 2005, p. 160).

Drawing from Hier (2002) and Smith (2005) provides a broad view of how media narratives influence public perceptions and responses to urban violence. Analyzing the narrative through Hier's framework tells us that media coverage highlighting violence in typically safe environments, like playgrounds, triggers a community call for better security measures. This reaction is established by violating societal norms and the need to protect vulnerable spaces. Smith's (2005) approach highlights the emotional and psychological impact of such events,

suggesting that the portrayal of violence in these safe spaces disrupts the community's sense of security, perpetuating a cycle of fear and vulnerability. Both theories suggest that media narratives serve to reassure the public by categorizing violence as a problem mostly among criminals, therefore encouraging the public to maintain distance from criminal elements to guarantee their safety. This observation reassures the public that they are safe as long as they are not involved in criminal activities, effectively minimizing the perceived broader social implications of the violence.

5.3.1 Increased Panic – 2011-2023

Sweden entered an era in the 1990s where the use of firearms among criminal gangs raised media concern, escalating between 2000 and 2010. The media focused on criminal gangs using guns for territorial control and the increasing risk to civilians caught in gang wars. "Revenge" shootings and gun violence causing civilian fear were frequently mentioned from the 2010s until 2023. However, media narratives in the 2010s suggest criminal networks no longer aim to control clubs and restaurants.

5.3.2 Criminals Involved in Weapon Export

In the 1990s, media outlets expressed significant societal concern over military firearms falling into the hands of criminal gangs. From the 2000s, the issue of criminals shooting at each other was described as a deep-rooted problem needing regulatory measures. However, in the 2010s, media outlets highlighted a new perspective on firearms among criminal gangs. As Hier (2002, pp. 314-316) noted, the 2000s media narrative called for regulatory measures to address gun violence among criminals at war with each other. These shootings often occurred at specific locations, and bystanders were urged not to panic because the firearms were not aimed at them.

The following chapter will prove how the moral panic in the media increased to what now is portrayed as an escalation of the gang war from the 2000s. Hier (2002) conceptualizes moral panic as a deep form of everyday rules about right and wrong. These rules aim to guide acceptable behavior by highlighting problems with specific actions, choices, and things, such as using drugs, skipping school, or carrying weapons. In this research, the media points out criminals using firearms. Hier (2002) suggests that people engaging in risky behaviors need guidance. The goal is not to punish but to help them align with the right way to live and act. Those being corrected are encouraged to adopt the views of those setting the rules,

internalizing these values, and changing their behavior. Hier (2002) describes this as an interaction where the guided person steadily adopts the guide's perspectives. However, regulatory measures have been unsuccessful in the past decades in controlling gun violence among criminals, leading to a scenario where moral panic is highlighted more intensely. According to Hier (2002), moral panics become noticeable when regular attempts at guiding behavior fail. If people do not seem interested in changing, or if change seems impossible, there is a more urgent demand for control. In these cases, the perceived threat is highlighted as much more severe. With gun violence among criminals not being successfully regulated, authorities and the media push for quick action to address this immediate danger. This shows how moral panics build on usual rules by adding fear and urgency, connecting these intense reactions to broader stories of risk and harm. By drawing from Hier (2002), the urgency of moral panic in this decade (the 2010s) links us to Presser's (2017, pp. 88-89) discussion on crisis narratives, as presented earlier in the previous chapter. Crisis narrative by Presser (2017) explains that narratives are stories that frame our understanding of events in specific ways, influencing our thoughts and actions related to those events, often portraying a dramatic shift from peace to chaos, presenting a crisis that requires immediate action. This crisis calls for moral action, critical to the narrative's ability to influence and mobilize people. Compared to when the crisis narrative was introduced with long-term regulation in the previous decade, we can now sense an increase in this crisis by drawing from the following quotes and chapters.

So far this year, eight people have died in 48 shootings in Greater Gothenburg. Another 23 have been injured, and Västra Götaland police's seizures of weapons are increasing. A large part of the weapons on the black market come from the Balkans. (Aftonbladet, 2012)

Two thin metal pins in the barrel allow the weapons to be purchased without a license in Slovakia. There, they are classified as toys and used with blanks. A 26-year-old criminal in Malmö bought 150 pistols from Slovakia and is feared to have sold them to other criminals. (Dagens Nyheter, 2015)

Identifying the Balkans and Slovakia as sources of the weapons introduces an element of foreign influence, significantly heightening moral panic by drawing on Hier's view (2002). This aspect hits into fears about external, uncontrollable forces affecting local safety. Unlike domestic issues, which might be managed with better internal security and measures, the international source of these weapons points to a more complicated and less controllable

threat. Discussing this within Hier's (2002, p. 329) framework, mentioning an external location like the Balkans or Slovakia could be seen as a breakdown of society or a failure of societal controls over criminal elements, making people feel helpless or out of control. This raises concerns about how globalization negatively impacts crime and safety, suggesting that regulatory measures within the country might be ineffective if guns are coming from abroad.

The reported high number of violent incidents concentrated in one geographical area adds to the expectation that the public should conceive of this as a severe crisis. The high incidence of shootings in a specific area could lead to the discursive linkage of this violence with broader societal fears (Hier, 2002, p. 323), such as the illegal importation of weapons and their impact on local communities, emphasizing the construction and rise of societal threats through media. The idea that external factors are contributing to local violence can deeply worry people, leading to general fear and concern. Mentioning that an additional 23 people have been injured highlights the urgency and seriousness of the situation, which deepens the fear and awareness of human costs. Reporting injuries has a visible, immediate impact on how the public perceives and feels about the situation. Once again, drawing on Hier's ideas (2002, p. 323) about how stories are linked, such reports can trigger anxiety and urge for action by connecting different aspects of the event, strengthening people's perceived threat and danger. This occurs as discussions about safety, risk, and harm combine the specific incident with broader societal fears, triggering a reaction to restore control and safety. The police seizing more weapons highlights their response to a growing concern. However, this also points to a larger issue, which is the increasing invasion of foreign weapons into local communities. This situation increases moral panic, suggesting that despite law enforcement's efforts, the problem continues due to the scale of weapon imports. Hier (2002, p. 312) discusses this scenario as part of the ideological-discursive formation of moral panic, where, in this case, the fear of foreign weapon infiltration feeds into a larger conversation about safety, security, and the effectiveness of regulations. By linking these incidents to a larger safety and harm prevention narrative, it becomes evident how societal actions and reactions extend beyond just solving the immediate problem.

Furthermore, the description of the ease with which a legal gun can be turned into an illegal one - "Two thin metal pins in the barrel" highlights a simple alteration to guns that allows them to be classified differently when attaining them from another country. The story is urgent, informing the public of the ease with which potentially dangerous weapons are manipulated and classified under less strict regulations. This again aligns with Hier (2002, p.

323), who explains how society's worries, especially about danger and harm, get bigger and shape how we talk and write about them. He mentions how we view significant events portrayed in the media and the discussions around them, leading to general anxiety. In this scenario, panic increases when the public realizes that there are loopholes in the legal system from external sources (Slovakia) that generate gun import into the country. The classification of these altered firearms as toys is particularly alarming. This will create public fear and will call for quick regulatory actions, as guns are seen as plays from an external location and are easily turned into potential crime instruments when delivered to Sweden (Hier, 2002, pp. 313-314). The large amount of firearms purchased highlights the scale of criminal involvement, heightening concerns about the capabilities of such individuals. The fear that these weapons have been distributed further within the criminal community suggests an expanding threat. This not only increases the initial problem but also fuels more significant anxiety about the production of these weapons among various criminal elements, complicating law enforcement efforts and potentially increasing the incidence of gun-related crimes (Hier, 2002, p. 312). These narratives contribute to the construction of 'the Other.' The criminal elements buying and distributing firearms are dangerous entities (people) that must be restricted or removed from society to warrant collective safety (Hier, 2002, p. 329).

To conclude the narrative, it is possible to draw from the first quote by referring to Hier (pp. 316–317), where the author discusses the role of the media in increasing concerns, sometimes in ways that might not entirely reflect the observed reality but help to mobilize public sentiment and policy responses. Nonetheless, by drawing from Presser (2017, pp. 88-89), both quotes suggest that this decade introduces us to a crisis narrative where society has gone from the age of somehow peace but with the indication of regulations to a decade of chaos, or at least a certain degree of chaos, where the narrative describes gun export and the number of murders and injuries along with articles that involve exported guns into the country, which is why it is crucial to identify moral panic, and how it increases, in the following sections concerning this decade.

5.3.3 Recruitment of Children and Youths

Criminal gangs recruiting people are heard of. However, recruiting children and young teenagers and making them commit gun violence is a new phenomenon that has become more and more common since the 2010s. The use of gun violence among younger individuals can be a result of the increase in guns that are imported into the country through external sources.

Moreover, young teenagers and children involved in criminal gangs also fell victim to the brutal gang war.

Alarm: The boy was associating with serious criminals as early as 13 years old (Aftonbladet, 2023).

Sources: Missing 13-year-old boy found shot to death in Haninge. The disappearance is believed to be linked to the gang environment. The police launched a murder investigation to determine the cause of death. - That the murder victim was so young is in itself utterly horrific and shows yet another dimension of the ruthless, severe violence (Aftonbladet, 2023)

The 16-year-old comes from Kalmar, and on a mobile phone, the police secured a chat where the 16-year-old, according to the prosecutor, wrote about doing a job, earning 'crazy amounts' in one night, and buying a pistol with an extended magazine. - It gives the impression that he is up here to carry out a murder and get paid for it, says Alexandra Bittner. The messages also state that he plans to quit when he turns 18 'because you can get life' and instead 'will recruit cool kids.' The prosecutor interprets this as him planning to hire younger individuals. (Aftonbladet, 2022)

These quotes fall under the category of children and youths' involvement in delinquency, with many highlighting gun violence. This suggests a continuation of the severe violence by criminals emphasized in previous decades. Despite calls for long-term regulatory measures (Hier, 2002, p. 324), societal order has not been restored, and the criminal war persists. It could be that societal regulations, such as legislative changes, have not effectively guided these individuals, leading to the current scenario. This has increased moral panic and further calls for crisis management and immediate moral governance with short-lived, targeted interventions (Hier, 2002, pp. 313-314).

The first quote starts with the phrase "Alarm." Using this opening sets a tone of urgency and crisis. According to Hier (2002, p. 312), specific media languages can significantly impact the perception of a situation, increasing societal responses when framed as alarming or critical. By presenting the information as troubling, the media is signaling a situation that calls for immediate attention, which can trigger a moral panic as the community reacts to protect its moral values and societal norms.

More so, the association of “boy” with "serious criminals" adds a severe negative connotation, indicating that the individuals are not just criminals but are deeply involved in serious crimes. As mentioned earlier, moral panics often involve identifying a folk devil or a scapegoat that symbolizes the threat to societal norms (Hier, 2002, p. 313). In this case, the boy’s association with such individuals positions him and, in addition, the environment that allows such links as potential threats to social order. Adding the boy’s young age- 13 years old - highlights his vulnerability. It suggests a deviation in societal norms where children, expected to be in safe, nurturing environments, are instead depicted in contexts of serious delinquency. This element plays into the societal fears regarding the corruption of youth, an aspect of moral panics where the community's future (its youth) is perceived to be at risk (Hier, 2002, p. 317). The phrase, therefore, increases the emotional impact of the statement and the moral charge against the situation that allows such associations to occur.

Expanding on this, Smith (2005, p. 223) explores how media reports and official statements shape our understanding of violence, pointing out that there are usually unspoken rules about who is involved in the violence and who is not, similar to rules in warfare. His research shows that these stories help create a structured way of seeing violence, even in chaotic situations. Smith (2005) argues that how violence is portrayed in society influences how we think about and respond to it in different contexts, highlighting the importance of narratives in shaping our views on violence. Describing a young boy as blending with serious criminals affects how society sees juvenile crime and influences laws on handling young offenders. Smith (2005) would specifically identify the underlying message that once young people are exposed to criminal environments, they are likely to continue on a criminal path. This idea can lead to stigma and negative attitudes about these young individuals' futures, affecting both public perception and their treatment in the justice system in the country. The second quote starts by using the phrase "sources," which signals the spreading of critical and possibly important news, supporting Hier's (2002, p. 312) discussion on how media framing can contribute to a heightened public response. The mention of the boy's age and the violent nature of his death immediately raises a strong emotional reaction, indicating a violation of what is socially acceptable, specifically regarding the safety of children. This tragic incident directly feeds into moral panic by presenting a sense of violation of societal norms of youth violence, which leads to triggering a sudden societal and regulatory response aimed at addressing the perceived escalation of violence.

By linking the incident to gang activity, the narrative not only identifies a potential folk devil (the gangs) but also increases the public's fear of the frequency and influence of organized crime on youth (Hier, 2002, pp. 313-314). This connection describes clear links between perceived societal dangers and their impact on community safety. The police response highlights the seriousness of the incident, which affects the role of restoring order and addressing public anxiety. Such investigations serve a legal and symbolic function, highlighting the rule of law and society's moral boundaries (Hier, 2002, p. 324). The community's need for answers in such cases is critical to moral regulation, as it encourages the public that regulatory measures are being taken to prevent future occurrences (ibid.). The second quote - the young age of the victim adding to the horror - highlights the scary nature of the crime and its broader effects on societal violence. It further adds, "another dimension of the ruthless, severe violence," which increases the threat and helps intensify public outrage and fear. This portrayal can intensify moral panic, organizing the community and authorities to take more strict actions to reduce the escalation of violence, primarily as it affects young individuals (Hier, 2002, p. 314).

By specifying the age and the method of evidence collection by law enforcement, the narrative immediately associates youth with criminal activities. This strengthens societal fears about juvenile delinquency and the access to technology in simplifying such activities. Such explanations can add to societal responses, as they affect societal values about protecting young people and preventing their transition into crime (Hier, 2002, p. 317, 321). The use of "crazy amounts" and the mention of buying a weapon heightens the sense of scare even more. Hier (2002, pp. 313-314) notes that specific and vivid descriptions of incidents, such as criminal behavior in this scenario, can lead to moral panics as they represent clear threats to public safety and societal moral standards.

Interviewing a prosecutor adds credibility to the threat assessment. It states strategic involvement in severe crimes linked to an assassination. Such statements from a legitimate source, such as a prosecutor, can add to the moral panic by assessing the perceived threat and calling for public demand for immediate and strict regulatory reactions (Hier, 2002, p. 319). The final part of the quote indicates the intentional and forward-thinking planning of the teenager's criminal activities. Talking about stepping back from direct involvement to avoid harsh punishment and plans to bring in younger people shows a troubling use of young individuals in crime. This aspect increases moral panic by showing not just individual

deviance but a potentially growing criminal network involving youth, boosting public fears about criminal manipulation methods of younger children (Hier, 2002, p. 324).

Further, Smith (2005, p. 223) studies how media and official statements shape our views on violence, showing that even in chaotic situations, there are clear rules about who is involved in the violence and who is not. By analyzing reports and statements, Smith uncovers these hidden rules. His findings suggest that the portrayal of violence helps organize our understanding of it, even in unusual conflicts. Smith (2005) emphasizes that these narratives are crucial in shaping how we perceive violence in different situations. The portrayal of a young person involved in a possible contract killing affects public views on youth crime. This paints the teenager as not just a delinquent but a calculated criminal, influencing how society sees young offenders, which correlates with increasing societal fear and calls for urgent regulations by relating to Hier's (2002, p. 319) conceptualization of moral panic. This idea reinforces public fears and stereotypes about crime passing from one generation to the next, emphasizing the influential role of narratives in shaping perceptions of youth crime.

5.3.4 “this feels like war”

The war narrative and societal disorder have been emphasized from the 2000s until 2023. However, citizens' voices are highlighted more dramatically in discussions of criminals shooting at each other. This indicates that past calls for regulatory measures through media narratives have been ineffective. Additionally, previous sections highlight the struggle with regulating weapon importation and the increasing involvement of youths in serious criminal activities. We can draw from Hier (2002) and analyze media narratives to understand the degree of moral panic. The importation of firearms suggests that media narratives could shift into more widespread panic as shootings among criminals escalate. Additionally, the recruitment of young and vulnerable youths into gang wars aligns with Presser's analysis (88-89), where society moves toward a crisis narrative. Hier's (2002) conceptualization of moral panic is relevant here, as a society now seeks only short-term regulatory responses to the crisis, given that previous calls, in past decades, for long-term regulation have not restored order. As explained earlier, there is a difference between moral panic and moral regulation: moral regulation seeks long-term solutions, while moral panic calls for immediate action (Hier, 2002, pp. 313-314, 324). Therefore, apart from identifying moral panic, we will transition from Smith's (2005) tragic narrative to an apocalyptic one, as the current and

forthcoming sections signal that society is heading toward chaos concerning the war between criminals.

As Smith (2005, pp. 27, 30, 34) described, Apocalyptic narratives present situations as extreme and critical, often likening them to scenarios suggesting the world is ending. These narratives depict circumstances worsening rapidly, leading to catastrophic outcomes. Smith (2005) explores how apocalyptic narratives shape societal attitudes toward war and sacrifice, making large-scale sacrifices seem necessary. They are one of the few narrative types that can culturally justify war. These stories paint situations as urgent moral battles between extreme evil and absolute good, sometimes in exaggerated or mystical settings. This storytelling style evokes strong emotional responses that can justify significant actions, including going to war.

It doesn't feel like living in Sweden anymore; this feels like war," says witness Maj-Britt Franzén to DN (Dagens Nyheter, 2015)

My street. I'm not a target, but the risk of getting caught in the crossfire has increased (Dagens Nyheter, 2011)

It becomes so clear that shootings have become a disturbingly regular part of everyday life here in Malmö. The man was shot on Ystadvägen, a major street south of Möllevången, in the middle of rush hour. A mother was distraught because she couldn't get through to pick up her child from preschool. Many shook their heads, but few seemed surprised. The feeling among many Malmö residents is more: 'Damn. Again.' (Dagens Nyheter, 2017)

Drawing from Hier (2002, p. 312), this indicates a shift in the social and moral structure of the community. The changes in the environment due to criminal activities are so drastic that they make the familiar surroundings feel foreign. This highlights a sense of decline in societal safety. It is an intense process of moral panic, where the community feels a loss of control over their once-recognizable living environment. The phrase "this feels like war" dramatically escalates the perceived seriousness of the situation. By comparing criminal violence to war, the witness details the collective perception of a society that views war as a form of chaos and damage. Hier (2002, 312-313) discusses how moral panics are often characterized by conventionally and stereotypically portraying a condition or group as a threat by the media, which increases the societal anxiety surrounding these incidents. Such comparisons lead the public emotionally and psychologically to a heightened response, often resulting in calls for immediate and strict regulatory actions to reclaim the societal order. Including the ordinary

citizen highlights the personal statement aspect of the narrative. When individual testimonies are highlighted in the media, they add a layer of authenticity and urgency to the issue, making it more relatable and immediate to the general public (Hier, 2002, p. 317, 319). This personalized description further mobilizes the community and lawmakers, changing hypothetical risks into concrete fears and anxieties that immediately demand regulation.

Starting the statement with a personal reference to “my street” in the context of shootings among criminals immediately localizes the issue, emphasizing that violence is not a distant problem but one that occurs in the personal, everyday spaces of individuals. Individualizing broader social issues in this scenario can increase the perception of the threat, making the public feel a direct impact and urgency. It frames the issue in a way people can relate to, leading us toward a more personalized and emotionally charged response (Hier, 2002, p. 312). The speaker clarifies through the media that although they are not the intended target of violence, the random nature of the violence has increased the likelihood that they could become an accidental victim. This statement heightens the insecurity felt by ordinary people, increasing moral panic (Hier, 2002, pp. 312-313). Hier (2002, p. 313) further discusses how moral panics often involve the description of a scapegoat or “folk devil.” In this case, the criminals become folk devils, threatening everyday life. The phrase captures a critical shift from perceiving violence as a problem for “others” (criminals) to recognizing it as a personal risk, extending the scale of concern and increasing moral panic. Continuing from the previous analysis, this phrase increases the sense of personal danger. This statement aligns with Hier’s (2002, pp. 313, 322-323) idea that moral panics can significantly change how society forms and responds to perceived threats. It points out an escalation in the seriousness and unpredictability of public spaces, suggesting that no one is safe, thus increasing anxiety and fear among the public. This fear, once escalated, can lead to significant societal and regulatory changes or suggestions as the community demands safety and support from authorities.

More so, these quotes illustrate a perception of violence as normalized – a “part of everyday life,” which Hier (2002 p. 313, 322) discusses in terms of how repeated exposure to specific threats can lead to a resigned acceptance by the public. The use of “disturbingly” intensifies the emotional impact of the statement, highlighting the disturbing reality that what once might have been unusual has been leaned into the foundation of daily life. Such normalization can either numb the public or escalate into demands for urgent regulatory action to restore a sense of safety and normality. By highlighting a shooting during a time when many are out in public, the risk is portrayed as random and might happen anywhere. This heightens the fear

and potential for moral panic as people feel less safe in their community (Hier, 2002, p. 312). The mentions of mothers, children, and preschools capture a deeply personal and emotional response to the violence, emphasizing the direct impact on individuals' everyday lives, particularly vulnerable populations like children. As in this scenario, personal and emotional accounts are decisive in developing moral panics, as they resonate deeply with the public and can lead to a solid, empathetic response (Hier, 2002, p. 313, 322). The distress of a mother unable to reach her child because of violence powerfully demonstrates the breakdown of societal norms of safety and security, urging community calls for legislative changes. This reflects a community's resignation from recurring violence, indicating a disturbing level of familiarization with such events. The phrase "Damn. Again." reveals frustration and exhaustion with the ongoing situation, suggesting a repeated response where initial shock gives way to a dire acceptance. This sequence can be a critical moment for moral regulation (Hier, 2002, p. 319), as it may signal a limit at which the community either demands significant change or becomes increasingly emotionless.

Further, by drawing from Smith's (2005) apocalyptic framework. The first quote, "It doesn't feel like living in Sweden anymore; this feels like war," reflects a deep sense of dislocation and change. The media suggests that Swedish life's typical peace and order has been disordered. This aligns with Smith's (2005) depiction of apocalyptic narratives that dramatize the loss of familiar societal structures, indicating a devastating shift that calls into question the country's identity and stability (Smith, 2005, pp. 80-82). Furthered by references to the own neighborhood, the preschools, and the own street increase the sense of a broader threat. Smith (2005, p. 80) discusses how apocalyptic narratives often stress the closeness of danger, linking to personal security and highlighting the potential for general disaster unless significant actions such as regulatory procedures are taken. The normalization of violence aligns with Smith's (2005, pp. 80-84) observation on how apocalyptic narratives can transform the perception of reality, making what was once considered exceptional or unthinkable into a disturbing new ordinary in everyday life.

Moral panic leads to quick regulatory changes, while apocalyptic narratives reshape societal norms. Hier's (2002) approach helps us see how immediate reactions and actions are taken in response to heightened fears, often fueled by sensational media portrayals. In contrast, Smith's (2005) framework provides insight into the longer-term narrative and cultural shifts that may occur after the initial panic has faded. In the context of Malmö, while Hier (2002) might focus on the immediate societal calls for action driven by the fear of violence, Smith (2005) would

likely explore how the ongoing presence of this violence changes the cultural landscape of the city, leading to a new normal where what was once seen as extraordinary violence becomes a more regular occurrence. This distinction highlights how short-term responses and long-term cultural changes work together to shape the community's experience and response to persistent threats.

5.4.1 Terrorism-like Tactics - 2020 and Onwards

Even though the media narrative does not differ much from the 2010s to 2023, one aspect stands out in the 2020s that could become a trend if it continues beyond 2023. According to media narratives, criminal gangs and networks are now targeting innocent individuals related to criminals, such as family members and relatives. In this sense, guns are now used by criminals to target innocent people, not just other criminals. This escalation of gun violence reinforces Hier's (2002) notion of moral panic and strengthens Smith's (2005) description of an apocalyptic narrative in society.

Relative of the Kurdish Fox likely target in shooting (Dagens Nyheter, 2023).

In addition to the murders, a number of relatives have had their homes blown up and shots fired at their residences. Several media outlets have reported how relatives of serious criminals have fled the country out of fear of being next (Aftonbladet, 2023).

The mention of "Kurdish fox" refers to a known figure, a nickname for someone significant. By stating "relative of," the quote immediately highlights a relative with close association with the person of interest (Kurdish fox), contextualizing the threat as not just random but a targeted one. It connects innocent family members or contacts who may not be involved in criminal activities. This introduces a big societal concern about the impact of violent crimes on innocent people, supporting Hier's (2002, p. 312-313-314) discussions on how moral panics often arise from threats to societal values and interests. In this scenario, the safety and security of uninvolved family members or close ones of a person of interest. "likely target in shooting." The term "likely target" increases the understanding that the shooting was not random but had a specific focus, which intensifies the public's perception of the threat. This exactness will increase the fear among the public that violence is targeted, which can increase a broader concern that anyone connected to certain individuals or groups with involvement in delinquency might be at risk. Portraying incidents where individuals are targeted because of their associations will lead to moral panic, especially when it suggests a breakdown in the social order where even innocent people are not safe (Hier, 2002, p. 313, 329).

The second quote immediately sets a tone of escalated violence. The violence is pointed beyond individuals involved in crime and instead pointed to affect their families. The mention of homes being "blown up" and "shots fired" at residences indicates a serious violation of individual and societal safety norms, showing that violence can happen anywhere, even in the private homes of families. Such representations of threats can lead to increased moral panic, particularly when they involve innocent people and violate universally held values of safety and security in one's home (Hier, 2002, p. 323). Describing the attacks in detail can increase public fear, which will lead to demands for stricter safety measures and new policies to prevent such violence. Nevertheless, it also captures the fear and desperation that force families to leave their country to survive. It highlights the brutality of the threat and shows how the violence is disrupting society, displacing families, and weakening social harmony. The media's role in reporting these instances is critical in shaping the public's perception of the crisis, often leading to a heightened state of alert and anxiety among the wider community (Hier, 2002, p. 317).

The media's focus on the fear driving families to emigrate highlights the belief that more violence is expected. This reinforces the widespread panic about the safety of anyone connected to individuals involved in serious crimes.

The first quote states that a family member of a criminal individual, "Kurdish fox," was likely targeted in a shooting. "likely target" suggests a planned and intentional action, reinforcing the feeling of widespread danger and targeted violence within specific places. This aligns with an apocalyptic framework as it is part of a story in which violence is a targeted threat that disrupts the basic agreement of safety and security in society. These stories often focus on the breakdown of social and moral order, predicting severe damage to unity in a community (Smith, 2005, pp. 80, 83-84). The second quote describes violent attacks on families of serious criminals, including bombings and shootings at homes. The report notes that several relatives of these criminals have fled the country out of fear of being targeted next. This spread of violence into homes is a usual part of the apocalyptic narrative, as discussed by Smith (2005, p. 80), where the threat becomes widespread and affects even those indirectly connected to the main perpetrators. This narrative highlights a society descending into chaos, where no one is safe, and families must flee to escape the violence.

6. Concluding discussion

This research set out to explore how the media in Sweden has shown gun violence within gangs, focusing on the changes in these stories from the 1990s to 2023. By looking at how the media talks about gang violence, using ideas like moral regulation and moral panic, this study aimed to understand how these stories have shaped how civil society is affected and how the government reacts.

In the 1990s, the media focused on the difference between legal and illegal guns. They talked a lot about the dangers of illegal guns in the hands of criminals. The media urged society to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Theories by Hier (2002) and Barthes (1991) helped explain how guns symbolized fear in society. Criminals with illegal guns were shown as a significant threat, which led to calls for stricter gun control. During this time by drawing from Hier (2002), the media portrayed criminals with illegal guns as "folk devils," creating a clear divide between lawful citizens and dangerous criminals. This distinction created a sense of moral panic, where society felt an urgent need to take action to prevent chaos and maintain order.

In the 2000s, the media's stories changed. They started to describe gang violence as organized and similar to war. Headlines in newspapers made these conflicts sound like battles for control. This change made people see gang violence not just as random crimes but as serious, organized fights. Smith's (2005) ideas about war stories help explain how the media made gang violence seem like a significant, organized threat that needed a strong response. The language used, such as "war" and "battle," intensified public fear and called for more severe law enforcement measures. This shift also led to the portrayal of gang members as not just criminals but as combatants in a war. Drawing from moral regulation (Hier, 2002), this decade leaned towards moral panic, although not entirely there, as calls for regulatory measures were still the focus. Something that was noted when comments from law enforcement were calming citizens down and stating that as long as people stay away from crime-prone areas, they should be fine, aligning with Hier's (2002) notion of self-regulation. The stories further provided us with individuals in their young 20s being victims of the gang war, leading to tragic narratives where citizens would see this as young lives with potential had their existence taken from them (Smith, 2005)

In the 2010s, the focus shifted again. There was more talk about young people joining gangs and guns being brought into Sweden from other countries. The media showed that previous

attempts to control the problem had not worked, leading to even more panic (Hier, 2002). Stories about children being recruited into gangs and foreign guns causing violence made the media portray the situation as getting worse and needing urgent action. This period highlighted the failures of past regulations and the need for new urgent strategies. The involvement of youths in gang activities and the arrival of foreign weapons added complexity to the issue, making it harder to control and increasing public fear. The media's emphasis on these aspects highlighted the need for more comprehensive and organized efforts to address the root causes of gang violence. Additionally, anxiety rose among civilians and bystanders who addressed the situation as chaos and that it had become a part of everyday life, aligning with an apocalyptic narrative (2005) and an increased sense of moral panic (Hier, 2002)

Lastly, From 2020 onwards, the media's stories have become even more alarming in this current decade. Reports prove that gang violence is now targeting innocent family members of criminals. This demonstrates a big escalation, making people feel like no one is safe. Smith's (2005) ideas about apocalyptic stories help explain this, showing how the media made the situation seem extremely dire as if society was breaking down. These stories made people fearful and called for strong measures to restore safety. The targeting of family members and the use of terrorism-like tactics by gangs represented a new level of brutality. This further blurred the lines between criminals and innocent civilians, intensifying the sense of moral panic (Hier, 2002). The media's portrayal of these incidents contributes to a narrative of escalating chaos and urgency, demanding immediate and drastic actions from authorities.

In conclusion, the way media stories have changed from the 1990s to 2023 shows a shift from trying to control guns to a state of intense panic. At first, the focus was on keeping guns away from criminals. Over time, this changed to showing gang violence as a big, organized fight that put everyone at risk, especially innocent people. By the 2020s, the stories are even more frightening, suggesting that violence could affect anyone. This study shows how powerful the media is in shaping how people think about gang violence and how the government reacts. The media's evolving narratives have significantly shaped public perceptions, influenced policy decisions, and driven societal responses. The transition from moral regulation to moral panic highlights the increasing urgency and complexity of addressing gang violence in Sweden.

A recommendation for future research is to investigate how the full-blown moral panic and apocalyptic scenario through the media narratives in the early 2020s affected policy and

legislation in Sweden. A further recommendation is also to examine if the violence kept on escalating where innocent relatives to delinquents kept getting targeted.

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