

# No, Sweden isn't hiding an immigrant crime problem. This is the real story.: Paradoxically, the Swedish government's transparency and responsiveness make it appear more troubled than it is.

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## FULL TEXT

Last weekend at a Florida campaign rally, the president of the United States made vague claims intimating that Sweden has an immigrant violence problem. Research we have conducted shows that this is not true. In fact, criticism of Sweden is based on common misconceptions and mishandled information.

The president's comments were originally inspired by a Fox News report on a video propaganda piece released by Ami Horowitz

, which alleges that Sweden faces a spate of Muslim immigrant violence and that Swedish authorities are covering this up. The video misuses quotes from Swedish police to suggest that official crime statistics in Sweden are being purposely withheld. After President Trump's comments, several right-wing media outlets doubled down on these claims. This is a feedback loop based on what are now called "alternative facts."

Sweden is a global model for official transparency and accountability

Official crime statistics from Sweden actually show that the crime rate has remained steady since 2005. What's more, the Swedish police do not collect information on the ethnicity, religion, or race of perpetrators or victims of crime, which means there's no evidence for claims that Muslim immigrants are committing crimes in record numbers. Nor is there any evidence to support the claim that Swedish authorities are manipulating the statistics, as the producer of the video alleges.

[[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/23/frances-national-front-scandal-has-exposed-the-dirty-little-secret-of-europes-far-right/?utm\\_term=.d02b064ddb7b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/23/frances-national-front-scandal-has-exposed-the-dirty-little-secret-of-europes-far-right/?utm_term=.d02b064ddb7b)]France's National Front scandal has exposed the dirty little secret of Europe's far right[/[interstitial\\_link](#)]

Actually, compared to the U.S., the government of Sweden is a model in making data accessible and actions transparent. Its official statistics are some of the most complete and readily accessible in the world. Since 1766, Swedish law on freedom of the press has included a principle of public access (Offentlighetsprincipen), which grants public access to all government documents upon request unless they fall under secrecy restrictions. This law is the oldest piece of freedom of information legislation in the world.

By contrast, the Trump administration has been actively working to remove much of the U.S. government's publicly available information, from climate data to budgeting information and data gathered by the USDA, the EPA, and the

CDC.

But sometimes Sweden's crime statistics are so thorough as to be misleading

Sweden's information landscape, though a model for other countries to emulate, is not without drawbacks when the data is misunderstood or misrepresented. For example, because Sweden reports crime and abuse so thoroughly, people often assume that the state is not in great shape. Because the Swedish government reports high numbers of rape and police brutality, some rightwing observers, such as UKIP's Nigel Farage, have used this as evidence that Sweden is the "rape capital" of Europe. This is misleading.

In Sweden, the legal definition of sexual assault is much broader than it is in the U.S. and even other European countries. While the rate of rape has remained steady in Sweden over the past decade, changes to the legal definition of sexual assault in 2005 and 2013 resulted in increases in reported sexual assault -- because more acts now fall within the legal definition and are therefore officially counted. Thus, the standard of accountability has increased.

What's more, in Sweden, people are supported when reporting such violations. Women pay lower social costs for going public with a rape allegation -- and are very unlikely to be shamed, retaliated against, or put on a parallel trial, as often happens in the U.S.

[[interstitial\\_link url="https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/23/muslims-are-the-least-popular-religious-group-in-the-u-s-theyre-disliked-even-more-than-atheists/?utm\\_term=.f5a88e890424"](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/23/muslims-are-the-least-popular-religious-group-in-the-u-s-theyre-disliked-even-more-than-atheists/?utm_term=.f5a88e890424)]Muslims are the least popular religious group in the U.S. They're disliked even more than atheists.[/interstitial\_link]

These two processes are mutually reinforcing. When a victim of a crime like a rape or police brutality report allegations to the Swedish government, these allegations are collected, tracked, investigated, and ultimately adjudicated in a court of law. Swedish citizens know this. It encourages them to come forward with information. The principle of public access means that nearly every allegation of a crime or of government misconduct is recorded and made publicly available. Citizens in Sweden can use this information to hold their government accountable.

Paradoxically, Sweden's openness makes it appear more troubled than it is

Though rare in Sweden, group violence does sometimes result in injuries and property damage. One of these rare events happened just a few days after Trump's comments. However, because of the principle of public access, outside observers can assess information about this case using official records from the Swedish government and compare that information to the accounts generated by local and international media and other observers and witnesses.

Without accurate information and unfettered access to government information, such a comparison is much harder for American citizens.

In the U.S., some U.S., state, and local government agencies under-report certain abuses, like police shootings. Sometimes that underreporting is even intentional. U.S. government agencies are therefore less accountable to their citizens when information is withheld or obscured. If citizens believe this, then they might be less likely to report crimes to the government.

For U.S. activists who wish to advocate for increased governmental transparency, accessibility, and ultimately

accountability, Sweden represents an even higher standard to aim for.

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