

Homicide planning by organized crime groups in Sweden.

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Abstract

Homicides linked to organised criminal groups (OCGs) in Sweden have increased sharply in recent years, coinciding with changes in their modus operandi. Despite growing concern about the spread of lethal violence in both Sweden and its neighbouring Scandinavian countries, the processes through which such homicides are organised and executed remain underexplored. This study aims to examine how homicides are planned within OCG contexts. Drawing on 39 Swedish court cases containing evidence from encrypted communication platforms (EncroChat, SkyECC, and ANOM), the study codes the behaviour of individual actors in each case based on chat data to capture organisational dynamics using a crime script analysis. The cases are compared to identify recurring patterns in planning processes. The findings reveal increasingly compartmentalised forms of organisation employing risk mitigation strategies and using external actors to facilitate violence. These results point to broader transformations in organised crime in the Nordic region, including the increasing marketisation and specialisation of criminal activities.

Under senaste åren har mord kopplade till organiserade kriminella grupper (OCG) i Sverige ökat kraftigt, vilket sammanfaller med förändringar i modus operandi. Trots växande oro i Sverige och i grannländerna i Skandinavien över spridningen av dödligt våld, är de organiseringen och genomförande av mord kopplade till OCGs fortfarande otillräckligt utforskade. Studien syftar till att undersöka hur mord kopplade till OCGs planeras. Med utgångspunkt i 39 svenska rättsfall som innehåller bevis från krypterade kommunikationsplattformar (EncroChat, SkyECC och ANOM) kodas i studien enskilda aktörers agerande i respektive rättsfall för att studera organiseringen genom en crime script analysis. Fallen jämförs för att identifiera återkommande mönster i planeringsprocesserna. Resultaten visar på kompartmentaliserade former av organisering, som innefattar strategier för att minimera risk och användandet av externa aktörer för att möjliggöra våld. Resultaten pekar på förändringar inom organiserad brottslighet i den nordiska regionen med ett ökat marknadsförhållande till utförandet av brott och specialisering av kriminella aktiviteter.

Keywords

Encrypted Chats; Homicide Planning; Organized Crime Groups; Crime-Script Analysis; Sweden

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Introduction

Sweden's increasing rate of Organized Crime Group (OCG) related homicides, commonly referred to as the "Swedish condition", has raised concerns among neighbouring Nordic countries about potential cross-border spillover. Simultaneously, the increase has coincided with changes in how homicides are carried out within organized crime settings, for instance though the practice of recruiting others to perform the crime, as denominated *violence-as-a-service* (Granath, 2024; Selin, 2021). However, understanding of how OCGs operate remains challenging, primarily due to limited access to relevant empirical material (von Lampe, 2016; Rostami, 2016). This limitation extends to understanding how various forms of crime are organized, including homicides.

Only a limited number of studies have examined the initial planning and setup processes through which contemporary homicides are carried out within OCG environments. de Korte & Kleemans (2022) analysed six police investigations to detail procedural stages of contract killings in the Netherlands. Providing a broad commission model, they show how vehicles, automatic rifles, and security shops facilitate contract killings. Their analysis positions the contract killer as one component within a broader commission structure. The other study, by Warburton (2025), examines subcontracted violence among drug gangs in London. Drawing on court documents, news reports, and interviews with prosecutors and police officers, the study examines three planned contract killings and identifies four key logistical components: victim selection, recruitment of a contract killer, equipment acquisition, and surveillance.

This study examines specifically the homicide planning using data from the OMEGA database (Ursing et al., 2024) to uncover how OCG-connected homicides are facilitated in Sweden. The database contains court-documents and associated encrypted chat communications from EncroChat, SkyECC, and ANOM. The encrypted chat communications enable a detailed reconstruction of planning processes within OCGs. Crime Script Analysis (CSA) is applied to 39 court cases to structure the analysis. CSA deconstructs a criminal event into discrete activities, enabling a systematic examination of its components. The aim is to examine OCG-related homicide planning in Sweden and provide knowledge that can inform targeted law-enforcement interventions. The article proceeds as follows. First, it outlines current state of OCG-related lethal violence in Sweden and research linked to the phenomena. Next, it introduces the OMEGA database. It then presents the CSA methodology and its operationalization, followed by the results.

Finally, the article discusses potential intervention points before concluding with a discussion of the broader implications.

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Background: Understanding Homicides

OCGs adopt structured and strategic methods when engaging in criminal activity (von Lampe, 2016; Rostami et al., 2018). In this setting, violence serves broader organizational goals, including enforcing discipline, maintaining territorial control, and deterring rivals (Moeller & Hesse, 2013; Rahman, 2019). This takes place in a constant evaluation of the need to organize efficiently against the need to maintain operational security according to Morselli et al. (2007). Recent developments indicate this security orientation, with OCGs increasingly recruiting external shooters through digital platforms and assembling resources in ways that minimise detection (Europol, 2025b).

There are indications of this trend also in Sweden, where firearm violence linked to OCG conflicts increased over the last decade. One manifestation of this trend is the increase in contract killings and increasing compartmentalisation of responsibility in OCG-related homicides (Granath, 2024; Selin, 2021). Examples include recruiting inexperienced youths as shooters and using intermediaries ("goare") to position targets without direct contact, thereby distancing orchestrators from the crime (Angerbrandt et al., 2024). In response to these developments, Europol launched *Operation Grimm*, an initiative targeting actors who orchestrate *violence-as-a-service* arrangements (Europol, 2025a).

The increase in OCG-related homicides in Sweden is primarily examined within the broader literature on firearm violence. Swedish scholarship examining this increase in firearm violence generally treats lethal and non-lethal shootings together and is largely quantitative, drawing on registry-based data. Studies typically focus on offender characteristics, spatial patterns, incident frequencies, and cross-national comparisons of firearm violence (e.g., Sturup et al., 2019a; Ceccato, 2025; Magnusson et al., 2023; Krüsselmann, 2023). Although quantitative analysis is essential for identifying spatial and temporal patterns of violence (Weisburd & Piquero, 2008), aggregate firearm data obscure the operational processes preceding shootings. Understanding these pre-incident dynamics is central to developing precise preventive strategies (Clarke, 1995).

To address this gap, this study examines the research question: What patterns shape the planning of homicides within organized crime groups in Sweden?

Data

Between 2019 and 2023, European law enforcement agencies gained access to several encrypted communication platforms, representing a major intelligence breakthrough against organized crime (Cox, 2024). Through Europol, Swedish authorities gained access to millions of encrypted messages documenting the organization of various forms of crime. To date, this material has contributed to 1,518 convictions across 189 court cases. These messages provide rare insight into how organized crime is planned and coordinated. Researchers at Malmö University have been granted access to the material, which has been analysed and coded into several datasets (Ursing, 2024).

Homicide-related cases in the OMEGA database (including homicide, attempted homicide, and conspiracy to commit homicide) is identified through systematic searches of project records containing information on each court case. This approach assumes that cases meeting the legal definition of homicide, defined as the intentional killing of another person (Chapter 3, §1 Criminal Code), contain relevant information on homicide planning. Following de Korte and Kleemans (2022), both completed and interrupted plots are included because each provides insight into planning processes. The search identified 45 unique homicide-planning instances across 21 judicial proceedings. Six instances are excluded because planning remains at the discussion stage without concrete preparatory actions. Each case is reviewed alongside the corresponding police investigation to determine whether it have been carried out in an organized crime context, defined as cases in which participants shared allegiance to the same OCG. To strengthen the linkage between usernames and actors, cases involving the same OCGs are compared for recurring associations between usernames and individuals (Campana & Varese, 2022). No cases are excluded based on uncertain organizational affiliation during the planning process. The final dataset consists of 39 homicide-planning instances and 171 encrypted usernames across 21 judicial proceedings from multiple regions of Sweden (Table A2). The homicide-planning instances constitute the analytical units, with encrypted chats as the primary material and police investigations used for contextualisation and corroboration.

Method

Crime Script Analysis (CSA) is a framework that conceptualises criminal events as sequences of actions extending before and beyond the offence itself (Cornish, 1994). Actions are then organized into acts, which are further divided into scenes representing the progression of behaviours required for the crime to occur. For example, a homicide may be decomposed into several acts, beginning with planning and ending with efforts to conceal the offence. By



mapping these sequential behaviours, CSA identifies the actors involved and their roles, the tools they use, and the situational conditions that facilitate the crime (Cornwell, 2015). Depending on the research objective, CSA can be adapted to analyse either individual criminal events or broader categories of crime, allowing the framework to reflect the specific crime type and context (Borrion 2013). This flexibility has contributed to the growing use of CSA, particularly for identifying effective intervention points for law enforcement (Ekblom & Gill, 2015; Dehghanniri & Borrion, 2019).

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Operationalisation

Agency of 171 encrypted usernames in 21 judicial proceedings across 39 homicide-planning instances are scripted at a micro-level, to capture all variations in the planning procedure. Chats are coded for actor roles, tools, and facilitating conditions. An abductive coding approach is used, allowing new components to emerge while maintaining the overall conceptual structure (Chainey & Berbotto, 2022; Cockbain et al., 2011). To facilitate comparison across cases and identify broader patterns, the coded planning data are aggregated into higher-level analytical categories. Specific weapon models are grouped into broader categories (e.g., submachine guns), unless recurring models justifies separate classification. Using empirically derived classifications rather than symbolic OCG terminology (e.g., "boss" or "middleman") improves reliability by grounding roles in observed behaviour (Rostami et al., 2017). In this study, role classifications are based on an OMEGA dataset developed from empirical analysis of 150 actors across different crime types. Roles are initially coded descriptively based on court documents (e.g., Lures_out_Victim), after which labels are simplified for clarity (e.g., Lures_out_Victim is renamed Decoy). The resulting role classifications are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Role classifications in article

Role	Definition
Principal Orchestrator	The offender has initiated and led the orchestration of whatever is defined by the name of the crime label.
Co Orchestrator	The offender has orchestrated and shared responsibilities in conspiracy with others regarding whatever is defined by the name of the crime label, but that they are not the main instigators, or it is unclear.
Decoy	The court has determined that the offender has lured or led the victim into a trap where he is to be victimized.
Shooter	The offender to have been assigned or taken on the responsibility of shooting, with regards to whatever is defined by the name of the crime label



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The planning process is conceptualised as a single act comprising several sequential scenes. To identify these scenes, Tompson and Chaaney’s (2011) four-stage model of Preparation, Pre-Activity, Activity, and Post-Activity is adopted. Compared with Cornish’s (1994) 11-step model, the broader four-stage approach better accommodates fragmented sources, such as partial encrypted chat conversations, while facilitating comparison across cases. The stages are operationalised by identifying recurring transitions in the empirical material that signal movement from one stage of the planning process to the next. This resulted in four operational scenes: (1) planning initiation, (2) actor recruitment, (3) resource acquisition, and (4) coordination of actors and resources prior to execution (Table 2). This operationalisation applies to majority of instances. In six instances, recruited shooters withdraw after the resource acquisition stage, requiring late-stage recruitment of replacements. However, given the limited number, late withdrawals are treated as exceptions and do not warrant changes to the overall crime script. Microsoft Excel is used to code each username according to the scenes defined in the operationalization framework.

Table 2: Crime Script of homicide planning

Act	Planning the Homicide			
Scene	Preparation	Pre-Activity	Activity	Post-Activity
Description	Planning is Initiated	Deliberations on risk and resources	Acquisition of resources	Assembly and storage of resource

Results

This section presents the Crime Script Analysis of 171 usernames across 39 homicide-planning instances. The findings are organized according to the sequential stages of the planning process. Specifically, the analysis examines how homicide plans are initiated, how targets are identified, how shooters and decoys are recruited, how weapons are acquired, and how the necessary resources are coordinated prior to the planned homicide. To facilitate interpretation of the findings, each subsection includes a summary table outlining the identified variables alongside illustrative citations, as well as the number of occurrences in instances and percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Preparation: Initiating the Process

In 30 instances (77%), planning is initiated by a Principal Orchestrator, typically the OCG leader, who contacts one or more members to begin planning (Table 3). Police investigations indicate that principal orchestrators are generally long-standing members occupying managerial positions. In the remaining

nine instances (23%), planning is initiated collectively by co-orchestrators who, in the absence of a defined leader, assumes responsibility for initiating violence. The relationship between organizational structure and the use of violence is also reflected in planning dynamics, suggesting how violence may serve different organizational functions, ranging from immediate retaliation to introduce yourself to the business (where violence is regulatory), or to the maintenance or reinforcement of an existing status quo. The duration of the initiation scene typically ranges from several hours to a few days.

Variation in planning time appear to be associated with both the circumstances leading to the homicide and the organisational arrangements governing decisions to use violence. When decision-making authority is concentrated, violence appears to be timed according to broader organizational objectives rather than immediate emotional responses. On the other hand, OCGs involving multiple co-orchestrators tend to exhibit shorter planning phases, often following emotionally charged triggering events and calls for immediate retaliation, suggesting a less controlled approach to violence. For instance, where several young members of an OCG had been unexpectedly targeted, participants in the chat repeatedly demanded swift revenge:

"Brother, I can't figure out these whorekids¹ attempted to kill me with a Kalashnikov and a Gun. They killed a 12-year-old, I can't understand it. These whorekids got to die brother. We got to get them now, it's very important"².

In terms of how the homicide is presupposed to occur, across most instances, the use of firearms appears taken for granted. Discussions rarely concern whether firearms should be used, focusing instead on practical arrangements, as illustrated by a pre-made list spelled out by one of the offenders:

"Fix long underwear, gloves, warm bandana hat (maybe waterproof), fix 765, change place on 'large', check the lake" "[unregistered response]" "No brother just wrote because that's what I'm going to fix today"³

Most homicides are embedded in pre-existing inter-group conflicts and appear reactive rather than representing first contact between OCGs. An exception involved contract killings carried out on behalf of another organization. Chat logs show how many incidents involve revenge or retaliation following a perceived offense, either in eight instances personal (21%) or in about half of the instances directed against the OCG (21; 54%).

In instances where retaliation appears as a reaction from the organization to protect its members because of a member being attacked, homicide planning is rarely initiated by the individual directly affected. Instead,

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1. Translation from Swedish word "Horungar". Alternative translations "Son of bitches; Bastards".
 2. Södertörns TR B-20229-21, Aktebilaga 414, p. 14
 3. Solna TR B-11371-22 Aktebilaga 149, p. 41

higher-ranking members typically assume responsibility for responding to perceived transgressions against the group, suggesting how retaliatory violence often serves organizational rather than purely personal purposes. Where homicides that function as strategic demonstrations of power, particularly in organizations with clearly defined leadership structures tend to involve more delayed and deliberate planning. Personal motives are more aligned to leaderless OCGs. In seven instances (18%), the apparent catalyst is repeated unauthorised incursions into local drug markets. Such incursions are often interpreted as violations of established territorial boundaries and is often linked to notions of respect and reputations (Moeller & Sandberg 2017). Whereas it would be permissible to guess that lack of material obscures how motives (often complex) interrelate between the different categories, available material does not determine whether these market disputes overlap with other defined motives. Overall, more centralised organizations appeared better able to delay violence until it aligned with broader organizational objectives, whereas decentralised groups more often engaged in immediate retaliation.

Target Selection

Target selection follows two patterns. Almost all instances (35; 90%), the target is an identified member of a rival OCG. Only four instances (10%) involved individuals with no apparent current connection to an OCG, although chats suggested previous membership or other ties to the organised crime environment. Regardless of target, chat communications indicate that orchestrators generally possess at least some prior knowledge of the intended victim, even if limited to their role within a rival OCG. However, detailed contextual information about the target is often lacking, suggesting that the motive for the homicide did not necessarily stem from a long-standing personal relationship. Instead, particularly in instances where a principal orchestrator is responding to a perceived act of offence, limited knowledge of the target necessitated further information before the homicide could be carried out:

“Now I know who you mean [excluded name]. Yes, I think they should check it up. I think there are several who are hiding there bro. Check if any *dara* [female] is with them. Brother we will take the Swede, then we will go through all they have”⁴

In contrast, where no principal orchestrator is present, prior connections more often reflects personal relationships. Chats frequently refer to names, associates, and locations, suggesting that younger offenders rely on personal rather than organisational networks before becoming integrated into more structured OCGs.

4. Göteborgs TR B-2041-23 Aktilaga 256, p. 633



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Table 3: Distribution of Roles, Target and Motives in studied instances of homicide planning (n:39)

Components	Type	Count
Role (Initiating)	Principal Orchestrator	30
	Co-Orchestrators	9
Target	OCG-Members	35
	Non OCG Members	4
Motive	Market-Competition	7
	Revenge (OCG)	21
	Revenge (Individual)	8

Pre-Activity: Recruitment

Once planning is underway, attention shifts to recruiting the personnel required to carry out the homicide, particularly shooters (Table 4). In 25 instances (64%), shooters are recruited through channels extending beyond the OCG structure, suggesting a deliberate effort to compartmentalise knowledge and responsibility.

Shooters

Police investigations show how in the 25 instances where shooters are recruited, a total of 40 shooters are recruited. This follows two recruitment patterns: established OCG members with a reputation for homicide, or younger individuals seeking to establish themselves in the criminal environment. In 5 instances, professional OCGs specialising in contract homicides are recruited. This follows a simple business model of service for payment, facilitated over the encrypted phones, similar to findings by Warburton (2025) and de Korte & Kleemans (2022). When established OCGs are recruited, homicide planning largely shifts to the contracted group. In contrast, when younger shooters are recruited, the original orchestrators retain control of planning while shooters receive only final operational instructions. Recruitment of younger shooters rely on individuals, often external to the OCG, with extensive social networks and access to encrypted communication platforms. These individuals, appeared to spread general information about task and payment in a broader criminal environment, including subsidiary OCGs, offenders from other regions, and youth residential care institutions. The chat communications illustrate this opportunistic recruitment environment: “Ready to move on: I am with 3 CAPABLE youths”.⁵ The wording suggests that recruitment is framed as access to available personnel rather than the mobilisation of specific individuals, indicating a broader criminal labour market. This pattern suggests that homicides increasingly rely on

5. Solna TR B 11371-22 Aktilaga 149, p53

access to that labour market rather than membership in a specific OCG, relating to the concept of *violence-as-a-service*.

Most younger shooters are selected because they lack personal ties to either the orchestrators or the intended victim. Young shooters frequently appeared uncertain about how to proceed, requiring instructions to be relayed through facilitators. Despite this, orchestrators rarely provide detailed operational guidance, suggesting that maintaining organisational separation takes precedence over maximising the likelihood of a successful attack. Instead, the instructions followed general directives that aligned more closely with the overall likelihood of successfully killing the person than with a detailed map of the progression:

“This is a concept that works. Probably park a stolen car next to his [car], fill it with 15-20 [bullets] and call [his]phone as soon as he is near his car door. Usually you put it on the side closest to his door 10 is enough too but the person who connects must get all the capacity [ammunition] out.”⁶

This separation suggests that operational security is prioritised over shooter competence. It also creates communication gaps, making it difficult for orchestrators to obtain immediate feedback after the homicide:

“What a fucking thing, bro” “I’m freaking out too” “Helicopter up there. But not over the apartment” “He might have made it, the kid. Because he’s not answering” “He’s not answering me either”⁷

Decoys

Approximately one-fifth of the instances (7; 18%) involves the use of decoys (“goare”) to position the target. Similar to shooters, decoys are recruited through promises of financial reward or appeals to loyalty and instructed to lure the target to a specific location under the pretext of a purchase, service, or social or romantic interaction. The use of decoys is typically discussed early in the planning process, although recruitment occurred later during the recruitment scene. Once recruited, decoys receive only minimal instructions and little information beyond their own role, reflecting the broader indication of compartmentalisation of homicide planning. Contrasting to shooters, however, decoys are selected because of previous acquaintance with the target. Their prior relationships with the target allowed them to approach rival OCG members without immediately arousing suspicion. Depending on the decoy’s relationship with the target, different strategies are used to reduce the target’s suspicion before the attack: “The plan was put into action yesterday. We asked her to stay in touch. Gave her drugs yesterday to give to him. As compensation for her messing up another thing

6. Attunda TR B 10010-20 Aktebilaga 128 p. 79

7. Attunda TR B 10010-20 Aktebilaga 134, p. 48



with him”⁸ However, reliance on decoys also appears to create vulnerabilities within the planning process. Some chats suggest that decoys informed rival OCGs about planned attacks, allowing shooters to be lured into ambushes and contributing to a broader environment of mistrust: “Who is even going to goa?” “A reliable guy. You don’t know who it is” “Who bro” [...] “Fuck names, brother you will see him” “Okay, you’re sure he’s not goa us?”⁹

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Tabel 4: Number of instances with: Recruited Shooters and Decoys (n.39)

Type	Count
Shooter	25
Decoy	7

Activity: Acquiring Weapons

A total of 60 weapons planned on being used during the homicide are identified in the chat material, including semi-automatic pistols, rifles, revolvers, and explosives (Table 5). Rather than indicating easy access to firearms, the chats suggest that acquiring weapons and ammunition represents a significant organisational bottleneck. Weapons are primarily purchased from other OCGs through encrypted communication platforms, most often by Principal Orchestrators (15 instances; 38%). Obtaining weapons within the required timeframe is often difficult. Orchestrators frequently sought firearms from other regions or weapons not previously linked to crime to reduce traceability, creating delays in the planning process:

“Brother, I have guns, but as I said, we are ourselves at war with whorekids and we are killing one of them, so these are not available [guns].” “Ok, check if you can fix a [caliber] 9 and I’ll do it quickly” “But brother, I told you they are not available”¹⁰

Some OCGs maintained trusted relationships for weapon purchases, suggesting that firearm acquisition occurred through broader inter-organisational exchange networks rather than isolated transactions. How these overlapped with the already existing narcotics market can only be speculated. Weapons are typically assessed through direct inquiries about functionality and visual inspection using shared photographs. Online “neobanking” services are suspected to facilitate many payments, a pattern also documented in police investigations (Swedish Police Authority, 2024). Payment methods are, however, seldom specified, with discussions focusing primarily on price. With no standardized price range on purchases, this appear to indicate how some OCGs’ financial capacity may be more closely linked than others to their ability to carry out planned homicides:

8. Attunda TR B 10010-20 Aktilaga 128 p. 79
9. Helsingborgs TR B 108-22 Aktilaga 32 p. 1319
10. Göteborgs TR B 1359-21 Aktilaga 429 p. 150

"Brother found guns a 762 and a Walter but 33 thousand each" "Of course I can ask brother. [...]" "Do you want one or both?" "I can take both if it's reasonable brother" "33 is too expensive" "Absolutely brother it's crazy expensive. But he was the only one who answered."¹¹

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Particularly in violence-as-a-service arrangements, given that costs are often distributed across vehicles, shooters, weapons, and other equipment. The material primarily featured semi-automatic pistols (22; 37%), submachine guns (14; 23%), and semi-automatic rifles (14; 23%). The chats suggest that weapon selection is driven largely by availability rather than strategic preference. In the case of semi-automatic rifles, the exclusive identification of Kalashnikov-type weapons may indicate either that such firearms are relatively prevalent in Sweden or that they are preferentially retained and circulated within OCG networks. Finally, many instances indicate that ammunition availability represents a significant constraint for OCGs. Matching calibres between weapons and ammunition is often difficult in practice, as purchasing a weapon does not automatically provide access to compatible ammunition. Instead, after acquiring a weapon, actors sometimes must initiate a separate process to identify a supplier and locate compatible ammunition, creating an additional obstacle to carrying out the homicide. This pattern must be understood in relation to both weapon and ammunition availability. Because pistols are relatively common among criminals in Sweden, and a substantial proportion of seized pistols are chambered in 9 mm Parabellum (also referred to as 9×19 mm or 9 mm Luger), demand for this calibre is correspondingly high. At the same time, 9 mm Parabellum is widely used in civilian shooting sports and is also licensed to hunters for dispatching injured animals. Consequently, domestic availability is comparatively high, as licensed firearm owners face no statutory limit on ammunition purchases, supplemented by ammunition smuggled into Sweden. By contrast, ammunition for less common calibres, including 9 mm Browning Short (9×17 mm), 9 mm Browning Long (9×20 mm), 7.62 Tokarev (7.62×25 mm), and 7.65 Browning (7.65×17 mm), is considerably more difficult to obtain within Sweden. Such calibres are used in some of the less common pistols and submachine guns recovered by Swedish law enforcement, making compatible ammunition substantially less accessible.

Tabel 5: *Distribution of Weapons in instances (n:39)¹²*

Type	Count
Semi-Automatic Pistol	22
Semi-Automatic Rifle	14
Submachine Gun	7

11. Göteborgs TR B 533-21 Aktilaga 360 p.79

12. Note. Weapon types occurring in three or more cases are presented.

Post-Activity: Storage

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As external shooters rarely own their own equipment, weapons and other materials are distributed through intermediaries, typically through safe houses (11; 28%) or via storage vehicles (7; 18%) (Table 6). Safe houses are seldom continuously occupied before a homicide but instead functions as temporary operational sites. Typically, safe houses are either OCG-controlled apartments routinely used for storing illegal goods or narcotics, or residences rented shortly before the planned homicide. Although generally unoccupied at the time of the homicide, activity surrounding safe houses increases shortly beforehand the homicide is to be committed, as shooters are placed in a state of preparation, together with the acquired equipment. This typically followed a directive from the orchestrators who determined the optimal timing based on information from various sources and their ability to locate and monitor the target within a short timeframe: "Brother, since he's home now, we'll have to choose an address to hideout at, I think. And let's hope he goes out around 12-13 p.m. [...] Got a Glock and TT [Tolkared] ready".¹³

The importance of safe houses should not be understated, as it provided orchestrators with possibility to coordinate key logistical elements, reduce reliance on individual participants, and structure the conditions under which the homicide is carried out. Further, because safe houses functions both as locations for staging the homicide and concealing shooters following the event, the provision of resources ranging from food and entertainment to narcotics facilitates the management of waiting periods before and after the operation. This usually entails the provision of entertainment, narcotics, and easy-to-prepare food: "Hey brother" "Hey" "Just arrived at the flat" [...] "1 cola 1 fanta and frozen pizzas, six of them. And shampoo and gloves".¹⁴ Short-term rented accommodation is often accessed by intermediaries acting on behalf of orchestrators using commercial rental platforms. Seldom are intermediaries' professional actors within the organisation. Instead, they often serve as suitable buffers for compartmentalising the process, creating communication challenges like those encountered when instructions are communicated directly to shooters:

"Go to search brother" "Yes, I'm going to a computer, sending several pictures, but it's the correct page?" "Then you write area, not address, then there is date where you can choose then go to filter and check 'complete accommodation' then further down check flats otherwise there will be villas and things"¹⁵

This suggests how access to temporary accommodation constitutes a critical logistical resource to reduce chance of detection. Several instances also involved apartments allocated through social services to individuals recently released from custody, with access apparently co-opted by OCGs in

13. Göteborgs TR B 1359-21 Aktil 431 p. 1957

14. Solna TR B 10412-20 Aktil 405 p.17

15. Solna TR B 10412-20 Aktil 405 p.9

exchange for services or financial compensation. Storage vehicles provided an additional logistical solution. Typically inconspicuous, often stolen, and parked in secluded locations, they are used to conceal equipment before the homicide.

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Tabel 5: Number of instances with: Storage of Personal & Equipment (n:39)

Type	Count
Safe House (People)	7
Safe House (Equipment)	11
Vehicle (Equipment)	7

Intervention Points

This article identifies intervention points using CSA. The intervention points are derived from recurring patterns in the planning process that, if targeted, may help disrupt homicide planning before it is carried out (Figure 1). First, planning is frequently initiated by catalysing incidents in low intensity conflicts between OCGs with prior interactions. Catalytic incidents include reprisals following recent assaults, perceived violations, and conflicts over narcotics markets, all of which appear to overlap with notions of respect and the ability to continue criminal operations without interference. Systemic mapping of changes in OCG contexts, both locally, regionally and nationally, is important. Hostile, non-lethal interactions or changing dynamics in narcotics markets may function as early warning indicators and underscores the need for closer attention to indicators in later stages. Second, intervention efforts may focus on recruitment. Principal Orchestrators commonly relies on young individuals with no direct ties to either themselves or the intended target, distancing orchestrators from detection. As suggested by Granath (2022), young people recruited to commit violence on behalf of OCGs often display multiple risk factors associated with persistent antisocial behaviour. The analysis further suggest that many recruits have connections to youth residential care institutions. Strengthened information sharing regarding absconding, unauthorized leave, and emerging OCG contacts in such settings may reduce the feasibility of recruitment. This issue is already the subject of ongoing policy debate in Sweden, and investments are currently being made to enhance the capacity of relevant actors to reduce recruitment. Third, firearm acquisition often involves relatively short relational chains between Principal Orchestrators and the offence itself. Although payments are often made through different financial services, procurement chains frequently provide relatively direct links to those orchestrating the homicide. Targeted firearm tracing and analysis of

procurement networks may therefore provide direct investigative pathways to those orchestrating lethal violence.

Finally, safe houses and storage vehicles are consistently used to facilitate merger of weapons and recruited shooters. Although the available evidence does not permit strong conclusions, the material suggests that safe houses typically fall into three categories: residences temporarily rented through intermediaries, apartments allocated through social services, and apartments already controlled by the OCG. Apartments suspected of being used by OCGs for varying purposes may therefore warrant earlier police intervention rather than waiting until operational activity has intensified. Alternatively, such locations can be subject to increased monitoring during periods of escalating lethal violence. Regarding storage vehicles, although the legal threshold for searching such vehicles may be relatively high, information on vehicle models, registration numbers, and geographic location may collectively provide sufficient grounds for obtaining a search warrant. Greater attention to suspicious vehicles parked for extended periods near OCG-controlled areas may therefore improve disruption efforts. Importantly, most of these indicators are already contained within datasets held by police and other public agencies. The primary implication is therefore analytical rather than structural: existing datasets can be systematically analysed to identify intervention points.

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Figure 1: Identified Intervention points

Act	Planning the Homicide			
Scene	Preparation	Pre-Activity	Activity	Post-Activity
	Escalating conflicts between OCGs often trigger homicide planning	Shooters are recruited from outside OCG by internal/external facilitators	Weapons and ammunition are purchased from other OCGs	Storage of equipment in non-associated locations. Merged with shooters at location close into commission.
Intervention				
	Monitor OCG dynamics as early warning signs. Reprisals and market frictions acted as catalysts	Facilitate information-sharing between relevant parties (e.g. schools and police) on absconding youths with identified risk-factors	Use existing OCG links to merge with firearms tracing and procurement network-analysis	Investigate social-housing links. Apartments owned by suspected fronts with sudden increases of activity and dormant vehicles near OCG territories.

Discussion

This study examines how Swedish OCGs plan homicides through court cases containing encrypted chat material. Encrypted communication platforms appear to facilitate multiple aspects of homicide planning. Although this study can not assess significance beyond the available chat material, findings suggest that encrypted messaging technologies facilitate collaboration between OCGs, reshape how operations are conceived and coordinated, and ease recruitment and equipment acquisition. By improving access to illegal markets and weapons, they facilitate conditions that can be particularly conducive to violent escalation (Granath, 2024). Findings are substantiated by findings made by de Korte & Kleemans (2022) & Warburton (2025), suggesting similar outcomes across Europe.

Organizational structure, particularly the presence or absence of a defined leader, shapes homicide planning. OCGs with defined leaders exhibit more rationalized and coordinated approaches embedded in broader calculations of risk, reward, and organizational positioning than more fluid or leaderless groups, a feature also suggested by von Lampe (2016). Importantly, organizational structure also influences *if* violence occurs. Principal Orchestrators lean more into a strategic approach to using violence, OCGs with many co-orchestrators appear more driven by impulsive reactions to perceived disrespect or personal grievances. Although no general statements should be drawn from this, due to low reliance of other indicators of OCG structure, it emphasises a more systematic mapping and categorization of OCGs along structural frameworks for better understanding how it relates to agency (see for instance: Powell, 1990; Skarbek, 2024; von Lampe 2016). The analysis further demonstrates how homicide planning does not occur in isolation within individual OCGs but is embedded in interdependent larger structures. Weapon acquisition reveals a high degree of cooperation across different OCGs. The existence of what looks to be standardized practices for purchasing firearms from other OCGs indicate shared norms and routines governing illicit exchange. Interactions suggest that Swedish OCGs operate as nodes within a wider criminal ecosystem characterized by both competition and collaboration.

Generally, the homicides in this sample reflect instrumental motives also identified by Liem and Moeller (2025), including establishing respect and reputation, maintaining market share, and ending escalating conflicts. Planning discussions often reflect cost-benefit considerations intertwined in considerations of security and efficiency, including target selection, timing, methods, and degree of exposure. A significant feature is outsourcing shootings, pointing to the commodification, or 'marketisation' of violence within organized crime. Commonly referred to as *violence-as-a-service* (Europol, 2025a), it enables separating planning from physical execution, reducing recognized risk of apprehension. For instance, there emerged two layers in

terms of security efficiency, in context to the paradigm presented by Morselli et al. (2007). One of orchestrators, seldom directly interacting with the target to facilitate distance to the crime – one of shooters and decoys who are stuck in an efficiency grouping where security is neglectable. Although the chat material does not contain explicit statements explaining why external shooters are recruited, this aligns with previous research suggesting risk displacement as a primary mechanism (de Korte & Kleemans, 2022; Warburton, 2025). The commodification of violence further reflects broader importance of market dynamics within organized crime, where specialized services, firearms, safe housing, and execution, are sourced through formal and informal markets. In this sense, homicide planning resembles logistical coordination within an illicit economy, reinforcing the view of homicides as a routinised and market-integrated practice. Importantly, rationalization does not imply total uniformity or efficiency. Planning processes are often fragmented, revised, or abandoned, indicating that rationality operates under conditions of limited information and operational constraints. Nevertheless, the recurring framing of homicide as a calculated response underscores its normalization as a legitimate problem-solving mechanism. Taken together, these findings suggest that homicide planning within Swedish OCGs is best understood as a product of technological, relational, and market-based processes. Encrypted communication platforms mediate coordination and escalation, violence is rationalized as an instrumental practice, criminal groups operate within dense networks of interdependence, and lethal force is increasingly outsourced and commodified. Addressing organized criminal violence therefore requires attention not only to individual actors or group structures, but to the broader infrastructures and exchanges that sustain and normalise lethal violence.

Police data research is influenced by the inherent constraints of the material. Included are policing priorities, varying enforcement levels, selection effects and coverage biases (Berlusconi, 2013; Campana & Varese, 2022; Windle & Silke, 2019). Court cases in the OMEGA material contains only intercepted communications considered evidentially relevant for prosecution and in which at least some participants can be linked to specific usernames. Reliance on intercepted communications also raises concerns about self-censorship, incomplete coverage of OCGs, and the uncertain relationship between what is discussed in conversations and what is ultimately enacted in practice (Campana & Varese, 2022). Similarly, research on OCGs based on police data is affected by inconsistent definitions of what constitutes "organized" crime. Studies of organized crime are characterised by a broad and often fragmented conceptual vocabulary. Terms such as *gangs*, *networks*, and *mafias* illustrate the conceptual diversity and lack of terminological consensus (Rostami, A., 2016). This issue is mitigated to some extent in the Nordic context. Although organized crime differs across the Nordic countries, reflecting social contexts that shape how crime is

committed, organized, and addressed by authorities, all countries apply the EU's 11-point definition of organized crime (Korsell & Larsson, 2011). Taken together, these limitations influence both the recurring patterns identified in the reconstructed crime scripts and the interpretation of what constitutes organized crime. Finally, this study adopts an exploratory crime scripting approach based on court cases containing encrypted chat material. Consequently, the findings should not be generalised beyond the cases examined. Without complementary studies examining homicide planning through other sources during the same period, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the broader phenomenon.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that homicide planning in Sweden is highly dependent on secure and efficient channels of communication, particularly encrypted communication platforms. Although this study is limited to material derived from EncroChat, SkyECC, and ANOM, the findings suggest that encrypted communication platforms reduce the need for face-to-face interaction by providing secure and efficient channels for planning and coordination. The relative stability of these patterns between 2019 and 2023 also underscores the coherence of these organizational arrangements and illustrates the difficulty of disrupting them without adequate intelligence, information, and institutional capacity. Encrypted communication platforms facilitate weapon procurement, access to previously unknown shooters, and operational coordination, thereby increasing both efficiency and security. This supports Morselli et al.'s (2007) argument that organized crime is shaped by the need to balance operational efficiency with security.

By reducing the risk of detection and apprehension, encrypted communication may also increase resource efficiency by lowering the operational costs associated with planning violent offences. The comparatively low perceived risk of apprehension during this period may itself have contributed to the increase in lethal violence. A similar emphasis on risk mitigation is reported by Warburton (2025) in relation to subcontracted violence in London, suggesting a promising avenue for future comparative research. The material indicates that a combination of legal and illicit structures is mobilized to facilitate homicide planning: recruiting shooters, acquiring weapons, and arranging safe houses. These arrangements suggest that organizational capacity and routinised planning are not confined to a small number of OCGs but are evident across the material. Although these findings highlight the scale of the problem, they also demonstrate the value of CSA. The recurring procedural patterns identified in the material reveal potential intervention points that may support preventive and investigative efforts. Finally, the CSA is used on material covering the period 2019-2023 and captures a time-period during

which lethal violence in Sweden reached historically high levels. Should similar developments emerge elsewhere in the Nordic region, the Swedish case may provide a useful analytical framework for understanding how such patterns develop and how they might be disrupted.

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Appendix

Table: Geographical Distribution – District Court

Attunda Tingsrätt	1
Göteborg Tingsrätt	7
Halmstad Tingsrätt	1
Helsingborg Tingsrätt	1
Malmö Tingsrätt	7
Norrköping Tingsrätt	2
Solna Tingsrätt	5
Stockholm Tingsrätt	1
Södertörn Tingsrätt	5
Örebro Tingsrätt	1
Sum	39