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Learnings from a total study of cash-in-transit robberies and opportunity structures

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June 10, 2015

Overview, total study

- Part of dissertation in criminology: police methods against organized crime; aggravated robberies against cash-in-transit vehicles and cash depots
- Background: 30-50 aggravated robberies against cash-in-transit vehicles and cash depots in Sweden from the late 1990s to the late 00s, by robbers often using automatic weapons and explosives.
- Period now: robberies conducted 2000-2012, will be expanded to 1996-2014/15, based on mass media sources
- Opportunity structures - motivated offenders target insufficiently guarded cash – explains increase, as well as decrease, of robberies (see Routine Activity Theory)

What's the point of a total study?

- A total study is a rare opportunity for criminologists to study a subject without having to deal with the usual restrictions of selection bias.
- By studying, briefly, *each* single case of a phenomenon the researcher reduces/eliminates problems of selection and representativity
- Thus, the researcher should be able to come to more solid conclusions of the studied phenomenon

Total studies vs organized crime

- A major problem in the studies of organized crime, and, the methods of police methods against it: a lot will be unknown to the police, and even more, to the researchers. Example: Many reasons for drug smugglers to keep their business out of reach for the police, and the mass media (and researchers).
- However: It is hard, or impossible, to carry out a robbery against a cash-in-transit vehicle, or a cash depot, without this robbery becoming public knowledge. This is especially the case for organized, large-scale robberies. A lot of the robberies are carried out in broad daylight.
- If the crime studied at the same time is rare, compared to every day crime, but not rare enough to be statistically problematic, then the researcher should be able to come up with a solid description of opportunity structures influencing the development of crime.

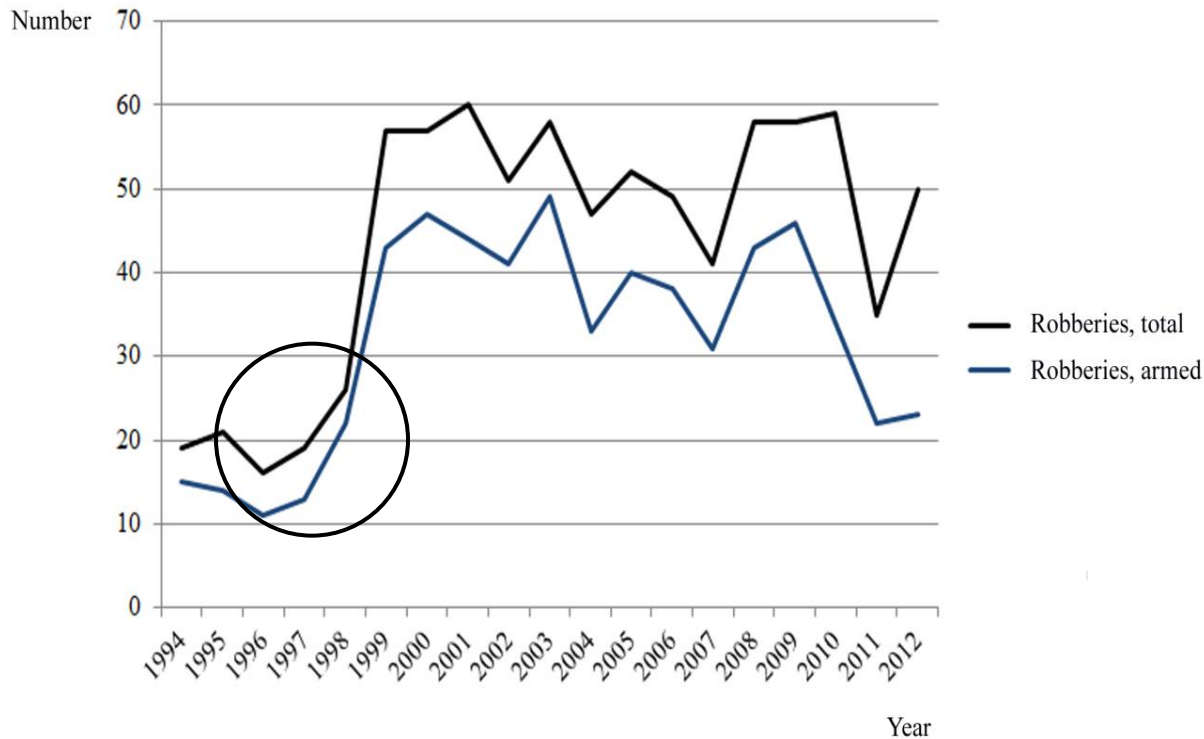
No research problems, then?

- Even if *every* single robbery became known to the public, some of the robberies might be classified in different ways statistically; armed/not armed, robbery of a bank, rather than a guard carrying a bag of money into the bank. Possible solution: more sources, especially mass media.
- Furthermore: based on mass media reports, the researcher can conclude that a robbery was carried out, and the general characteristics of it. However, the police and the security companies might be reluctant when it comes to go public with specific details of the robbery. This might make it harder to determine to what extent the robbery should be seen as organized.
- But: Using a number of criteria might help, see below.

Criteria of CIT robberies

- Number of perpetrators
 - Transport
 - Armament/equipment
 - Cash stolen
 - Level of violence
 - Vehicle/ATM/depot
 - (All available information of a pavement robbery)
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- The more boxes ticked, the more organized, and, often, the more spectacular robbery

Opportunity structures, macro



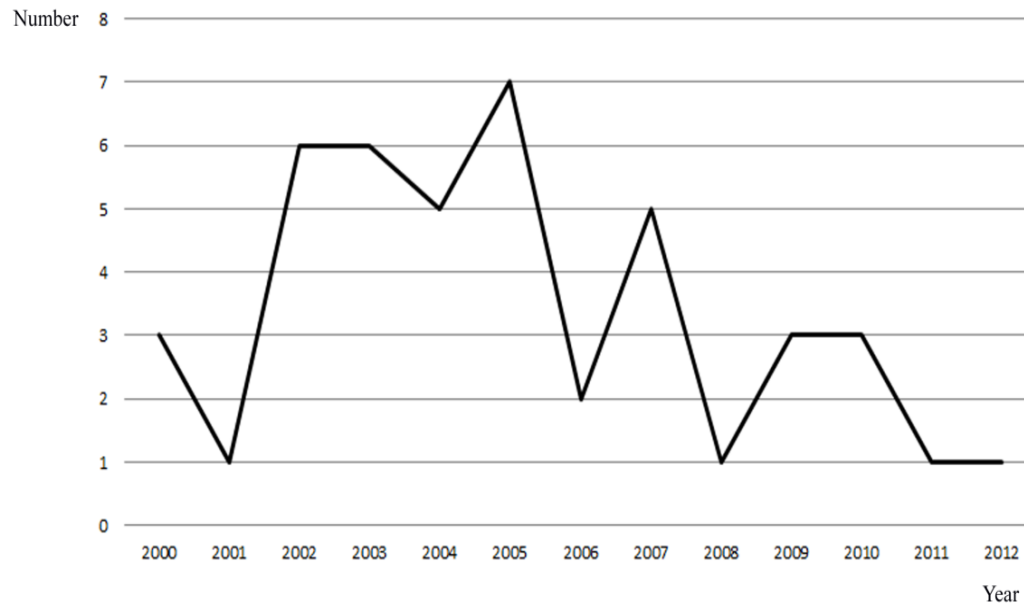
Cash-in-transit robberies in Sweden (Fors and Hansén 2014)

Routine Activity Theory

- Motivated offenders: often armed, quite often with automatic weapons and explosives
 - Targets/victims, here: a lot of cash
 - Guardians, here: 1-2 unarmed guard(s), but even more important; (the lack of) target hardening, especially technological. The money was easy to come by the first years
- (Cohen and Felson, 1979)

- Displacement effects: to CIT robberies, away from them, back again, then (maybe) away again.

Organized robberies

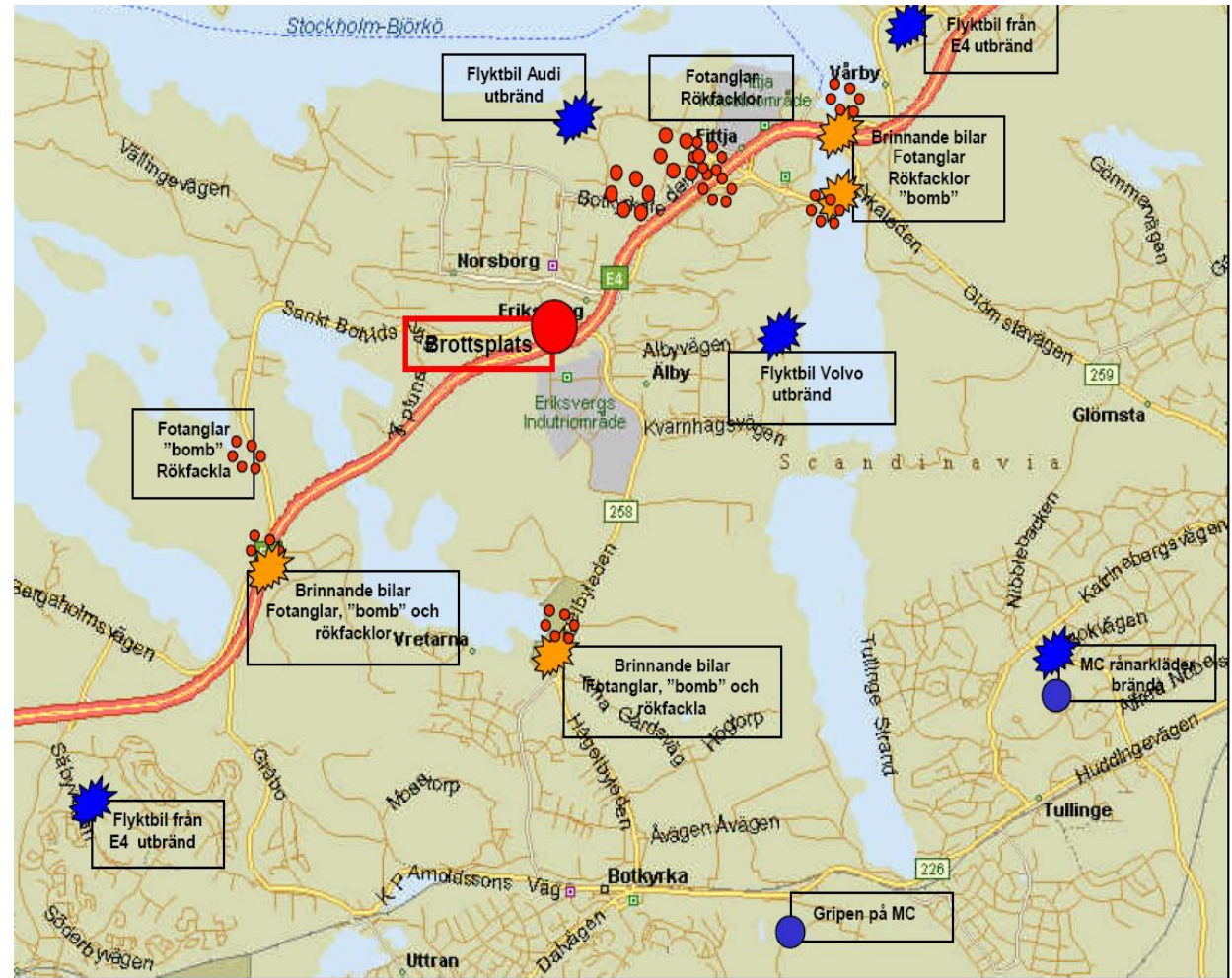


Highly organized robberies of cash-in-transit (Fors and Hansén 2014)

Hallunda, August 2005

- Cars set on fire, caltrops spread out, dummy bombs, and smoke grenades in eight different locations in order to delay the police
- €2M (15M Swedish Kronor) robbed
- Half a dozen of the robbers convicted

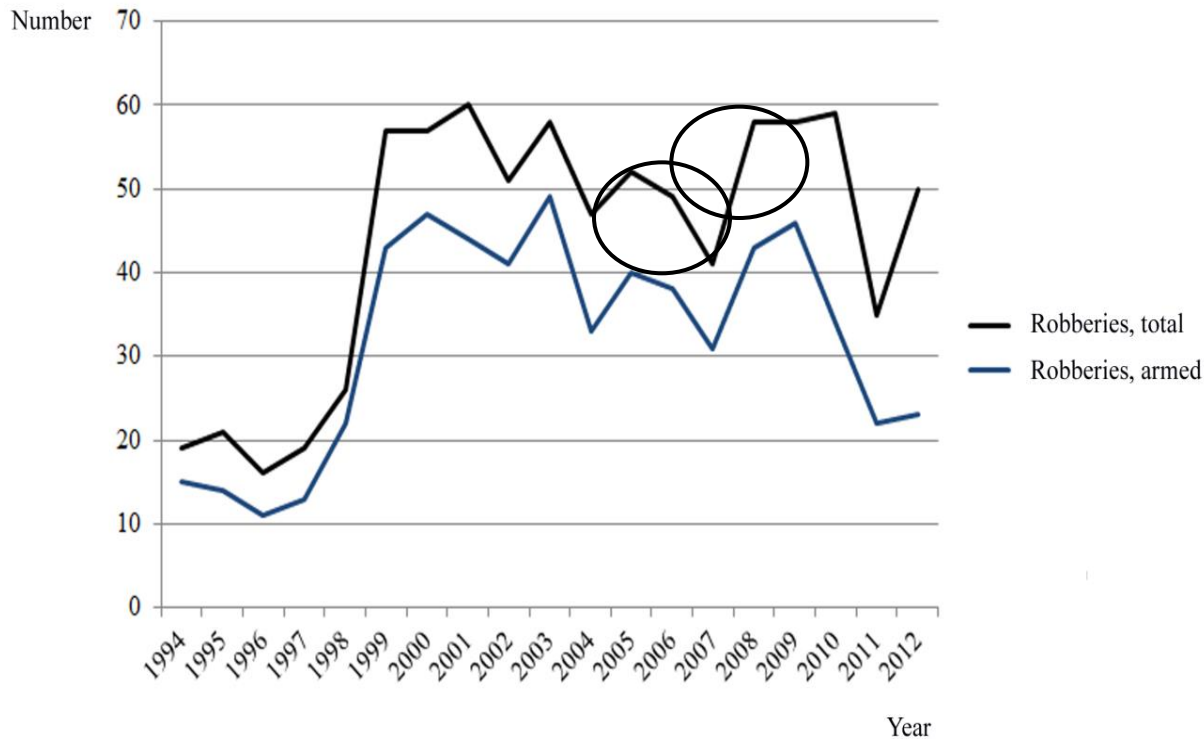
- (Map from the preliminary investigation, Police Authority Stockholm, 2007)



Criteria of robberies

- Number of perpetrators: ~20
 - Transport: lots of cars and motor bikes
 - Armament/equipment: assault rifles, explosives, burning cars, bomb dummies, iron caltrops, chains...
 - Cash stolen: €2M (15M SEK)
 - Level of violence: explosives used, threat
 - Vehicle/ATM/depot: vehicle
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- The more boxes ticked, the more organized, and, often, the more spectacular robbery. Here: Highly organized.
 - Example of opportunity structures: highly motivated offenders, insufficiently guarded huge sums of money

Opportunity structures, macro



Cash-in-transit robberies in Sweden (Fors and Hansén 2014)

Västberga helicopter robbery, 2009



- September 23d, 2009, Västberga, outside Stockholm: robbers used a helicopter to land on the roof of a cash depot.
- Bomb threat against police helicopters; caltrops spread to slow the police down.
- The robbers escaped with €4M (39M Swedish Kronor).
- Many of the robbers were arrested and sentenced, but the money has not been retrieved.

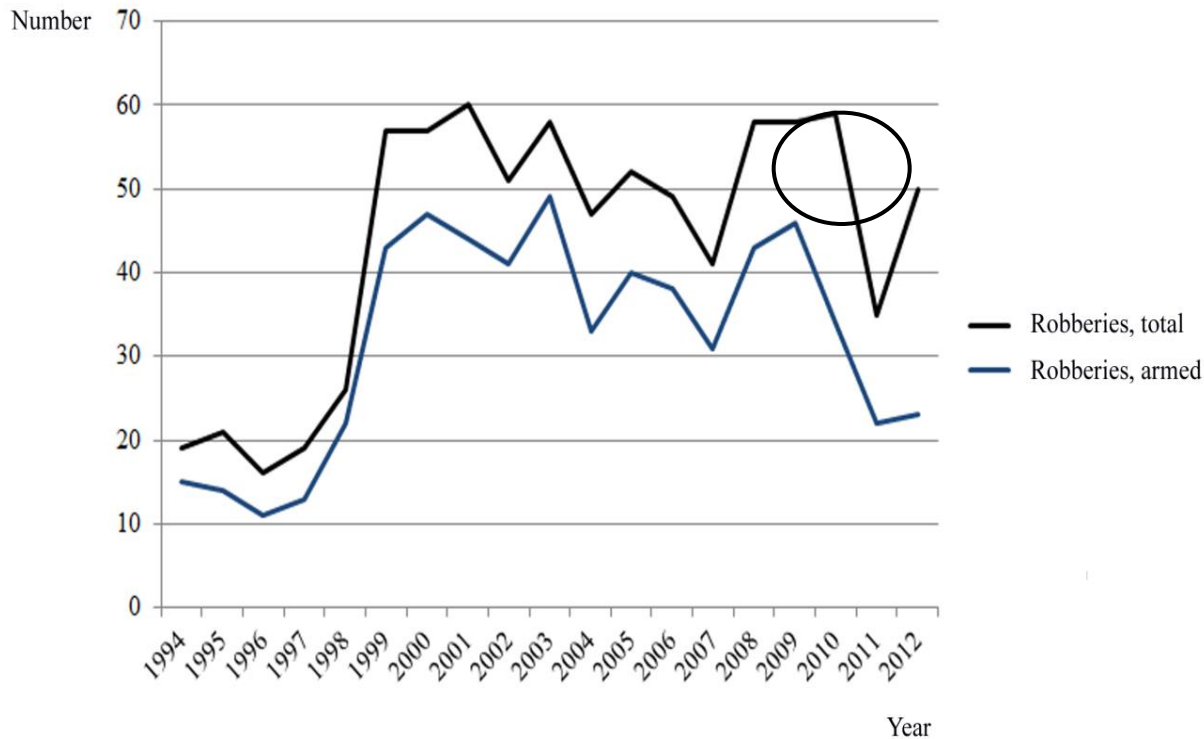
(preliminary investigation, National Bureau of Investigation 2010)

Criteria of robberies

- Number of perpetrators: > 12
- Transport: helicopter, cars
- Armament/equipment: assault rifles, explosives, bomb dummies (targeting police helicopters), iron caltrops, chains...
- Cash stolen: €4M (39M SEK)
- Level of violence: explosives used, threat
- Vehicle/ATM/depot: depot

- The more boxes ticked, the more organized, and, often, the more spectacular robbery. Here: Highly organized.
- Example of opportunity structures: highly motivated offenders, insufficiently guarded huge sums of money

Opportunity structures, macro



Cash-in-transit robberies in Sweden (Fors and Hansén 2014)

The "common" robbery



(Aftonbladet, October 28, 2013)

Criteria of robberies

- Number of perpetrators: 2
 - Transport: moped
 - Armament/equipment: pistol
 - Cash stolen: ?
 - Level of violence: threat
 - Vehicle/ATM/depot: vehicle
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- The more boxes ticked, the more organized, and, often, the more spectacular robbery. Here: Not organized.
 - Example of opportunity structures: (not very skilled) offenders, lower sums of money, higher level of target hardening

Summary: Routine Activity Theory

- Offenders: the motivated, skilled/specialized, offenders have moved on to other crimes – displacement effect. Unorganized, younger criminals are committing the (vast) majority of today's cash-in-transit robberies
- Targets/victims, here: less cash than before
- Guardians, here: 1-2 (still) unarmed guard(s), much more target hardening, especially technological. The money (seem to be) much harder to come by.

Thank you

- Questions?
- Contact: fredrik.fors@fhs.se