

Questioning criminology - a case of scientific populism? Contextualizing attacks on criminology in Swedish media.

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In recent years, Swedish criminology has been the subject of harsh criticism coming from both politicians and opinionators. This criticism has often called into question the scientific legitimacy of criminology. In particular, research addressing the relationship between crime rates and immigration, or the deterrent effects of punishment, have been dismissed as unscientific and ideologically biased. However, accusations like these are not unique to criminology, recent years have witnessed similar attacks on both gender studies and climate research. While previous research has studied the attacks on these subject matters, and analyzed them in relation to the rise of right-wing populism in many countries, such approaches are still lacking in the case of criminology. Through the concept of scientific populism, we analyze a number of debate articles published in the Swedish media 2019-2020. Questions asked are: how is criminology framed as an ideological rather scientific practice? What kind of sway is criminological research said to have had on criminal policy? And how can we comprehend these representations of criminology as compared to populist outbursts concerning other scientific disciplines? Our results show that the critique of criminology largely shares themes with the critique directed at both climate research and gender studies. Criminological research is linked to a scientific elite, detached from the everyday life of the populace. This elite is furthermore described as ideologically motivated activists who systematically ignore or suppresses certain research results, while exercising a substantial political sway.