

Social Innovation, Law and Justice

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Criminal justice is an important topic for governments and voters. About 10 percent of Australia's national budget is concerned with 'public order and safety', a figure that does not include expenditures on private security nor the vast array of administrative regimes that regulate our behaviour.

One would have thought that this level of resource allocation would have ensured widespread debate concerning the most cost-effective means to police and address anti-social activity. Sadly, the justice 'debate' is usually facile and shallow, based upon the major political parties setting out their 'tough on crime' credentials. For the most part, political 'justice' promises are narrowly focused, centred on more police, more offences, heavier sentences, less discretion in the hands of those charged with the responsibility for delivering sentences and more prison beds. The problem is that few people argue with these policies, lest they be targeted as being 'soft on crime' and thereby place their political survival in jeopardy.

Rarely is there any informed discussion concerning alternative policy options that may better address crime and justice concerns. This is a political disconnect of major proportions and a very costly one at that. There is a growing body of innovative and cross-disciplinary research evidence that highlights successful policy initiatives that could be accessed by policy-makers. This paper will explore some of these ideas and the sort of vision that may be required to implement them.