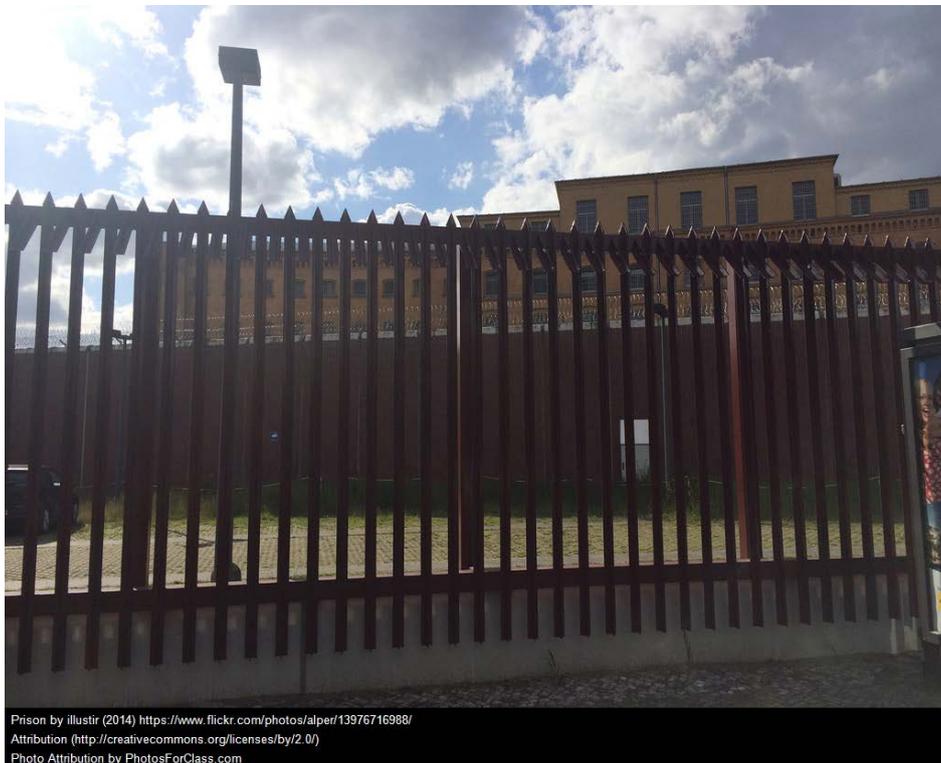


INGSA CASE STUDIES

ORANGERIA: MOBILIZING SOCIAL SCIENCE EXPERTISE TO REDUCE CRIME

Tatjana Buklijas (INGSA/University of Auckland)



ORANGERIA

MOBILIZING SOCIAL SCIENCE EXPERTISE TO REDUCE CRIME

Background

Orangeria is an upper middle-income democratic republic. Following a period of recession, it is now experiencing rapid economic growth and it has recently been admitted to the OECD. It is highly ethnically diverse, with 8 spoken languages among its indigenous peoples (making up about 20% of population), a number of ethnic minorities descended from economic and political migrants that had immigrated into Orangeria over the past century and half (further 20%) and the dominant ethnic group that also controls much of the country's wealth. Its inequality is one of the highest in the OECD and it is linked to pronounced health disparities as well as, arguably, high rates of crime. A large part of criminal activity involves drug trafficking and gangs. A reduction of crime is important, not only for internal reasons but also to signal the stability and security to foreign investors.

Dilemma

At last elections, a centre-right party won most votes but could only form government in coalition with one of the minority parties, a centre-left party that is supported by urban, educated Orangerians. One of the key election campaign promises was to "make crime a top priority". This promise was incorporated in the well-publicized campaign manifesto which included hardening of bail laws so that custodial remand is much more likely than in the past when bail would be given. The manifesto also included the introduction of longer prison sentences. However, the result has been an increase in prison populations, more incidents of violence in prisons and prison overcrowding, leading to a pressure to build new prisons. Orangeria's underprivileged indigenous and minority youth are overrepresented in the prison population already and this percentage has grown since the new policies were enacted. The main newspaper in the capital, *Orangeria Post*, has been running a series of investigatory pieces pointing the rising number of young adult males now in prison. This is now causing considerable political angst amongst centrists.

The Minister of Finance is arguing within Cabinet that the problem will not be solved by building more prisons and that the funds would be better spent on other areas, such as education and services for youth. The Minister of Justice, who created the plan, is adamant the 'tough on crime' policy is correct. The centre-left coalition partner had been uncomfortable from the start with the approach that the government had taken and has sided with the Minister of Finance, calling for the

policy to be reconsidered. They had been given the Ministries of Education, Social Services and Indigenous Affairs and are of opinion that inclusive educational programmes offer better potential for positive outcomes for those most likely to join gangs. While the President supports the Minister of Justice's plan, she is open to changes in policy as long as they give credibility to her party's commitment to reducing the crime rate.

To complicate the matter further, expert opinion is also sharply divided. A highly respected academic psychologist has argued that the problem starts in childhood and is better addressed through early childhood and primary school education. Public health experts follow a related line of thought, arguing that at least some of the funding spent on prisons should be directed into early intervention programmes. These programmes could discover families in need of help, prevent (or at least mitigate) child neglect and abuse, improve parenting skills, diagnose children in need of special assistance, health or educational support. In the long run, such interventions should help to prevent crime. Others argue the problem is one of mental health and drug addiction and money should be spent on that. Another psychologist associated with a right wing think tank argues young people need more discipline and conscription should be reintroduced.

An academic sociologist highlights the disproportionate representation of the indigenous peoples in prisons. She argues that this reflects the structural racism of the Orangerian society. Her argument links with the highly publicized work of an anthropologist working with Orangeria's indigenous peoples. The latter has suggested that the inability of indigenous men to find their place in a rapidly changing society has led to a lack of self-confidence, with many finding refuge in the gangs. He is suspicious of early intervention programme proposals, saying that these will only lead to a high rate of indigenous children being adopted out of their families. While such adoptions had only happened in isolated cases in Orangeria in the past, he is drawing on the historical evidence from other countries where removal of indigenous children from their families and their formative years spent in often abusive situations and without parental role-models caused a trauma that reverberated for generations. He asserts that a focus on early intervention in the absence of support for the whole family and broader community would exacerbate the problem of identity loss and could potentially lead to an even higher percentage of indigenous young men finding gangs to be a substitute for lost cultural and family affiliation and identity.

The anthropologist's arguments are, in turn, countered by claims that it is poverty and economic inequality, not racism per se, that is at heart of the problem. Those making these claims point out that for several decades the country has implemented a range of initiatives to correct past injustices by establishing programs to revitalise indigenous language and culture, and to settle land and

natural resources claims. These critics are associated with a left wing party that is gaining traction with the public by focusing more alleviating poverty by increasing minimum wage and making the tax code more progressive.

Further expert input comes from a local criminologist from the National University of Orangeria who thinks that the government should focus on the rehabilitation through novel means such as community sentencing and Elders' panels, which have been shown to be successful in other jurisdictions with high offending rates among indigenous youth especially. Yet many in the ruling party believe that is being soft and that the government should maintain a "tough" stance.

It is clear the question of crime is turning into a major problem, possibly destabilizing the current government with the coalition partner openly expressing its disapproval of the current approach. Making the matter more complex, different academic experts have very different views.

The President is becoming overwhelmed with the different types of evidence that the various experts are offering and is under increasing political pressure to act. She asks the science advisor a simple question: Whom should I listen to?

Notes to mentors

The science advisor's first task is to help the President understand the border between science and values. This is made difficult by the very different academic traditions that frame the problem in different terms. The framing, in turn, will produce very different data and different conclusions (and, thereby recommendations).

The science advisor must be able to understand how evidence is produced in the various approaches and show the relative weight that such evidence might carry. Is there one approach that is more or less robust than another? Why? How would the science advisor explain this?

What would 'gold standard' evidence look like for this problem? How would you collect it? Here, the mentor could extend the discussion by looking at:

- The use of longitudinal databases if these are available;
- How to set up a robust policy trial and the conditions under which this can be done appropriately;

- How to engage with indigenous community in a robust and respectful way to enhance the evidence base.

Can various evidential traditions be synthesised for a multi-pronged approach that address both short term and long term issues? How would this kind of approach be explained to the PM?



*This work is licenced for non-commercial reuse,
with attribution to INGSA and named authors, and link to <http://ingsa.org>.
See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> for more info.*



ABOUT INGSA

INGSA provides a forum for policy makers, practitioners, academics, and academics to share experience, build capacity and develop theoretical and practical approaches to the use of scientific evidence in informing policy at all levels of government.

INGSA's primary focus is on the place of science in public policy formation, rather than advice on the structure and governance of public science and innovation systems. It operates through:

- Exchanging lessons, evidence and new concepts through conferences, workshops and a website;
- Collaborating with other organisations where there are common or overlapping interests;
- Assisting the development of advisory systems through capacity-building workshops;
- Producing articles and discussion papers based on comparative research into the science and art of scientific advice.

Anyone with an interest in sharing professional experience, building capacity and developing theoretical and practical approaches to government science advice is welcome to join INGSA.

By signing up to the INGSA Network you will receive updates about our news and events and learn of opportunities to get involved in collaborative projects.

Go to <http://www.ingsa.org> for more information.



INGSA operates under the auspices of ICSU. The INGSA secretariat is currently hosted by The Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, New Zealand
PO Box 108-117, Symonds Street, Auckland 1150, New Zealand.
Tel: +64 9 923 9270; Web: www.ingsa.org; Twitter: [@INGSciAdvice](https://twitter.com/INGSciAdvice)