



Criminal Justice Systems, Community Well-Being, Mental Health, & Innovative Strategies for Thrivability



Table of Contents	
Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Judicial Systems - Criminal Justice - Sentencing and Crimes.....	5
Innovative Courts.....	6
Prisons and Penal Systems.....	7
Post-Treatment for Crimes - Rehabilitation	7
Law Enforcement: Effective Policing.....	8
Extra-Judicial Approaches.....	8
Mental Health Services and Innovative Strategies.....	9
Child and Family Welfare Strategies.....	9
Community Education on Mental Health	9
Access to Mental Health Services.....	10
Financial and Other Innovative Assistance.....	10
Psycho-Social Stressors and Prevention.....	11
Media and Cultural Depictions of Crime	12
Developing World Regional Issues Case Study: Africa.....	13
THRIVE Framework.....	15
Solutions.....	17
Conclusion.....	19
References.....	19



Figure 1. Criminal justice systems play a major role in preventing violence and disorder. Photo by Sora Shimazaki.

Executive Summary

Community safety and prevention of violence and disorder are integral parts of a thriving society. Achieving and maintaining such a society requires strong institutions and the equitable promotion of peace and justice. The criminal justice system is central to this endeavour and should be structured and governed in such a way as to effectively promote well-being and minimise crime, from law enforcement through to sentencing and corrections. Many interrelated factors influence the safety of a community, such as political and economic stability, the strength of its institutions, and the implementation of effective and innovative policy measures.

These elements, in turn, are heavily influenced by the broader social and historical context. For example, in some parts of the Global South, the legacy of colonialism and civil conflict continues to affect governance and public trust. In many Western societies, persistent socio-economic inequality presents its own challenges. The context in which a society exists also impacts the effectiveness of its institutions and which innovative policies that are successfully adopted.

By applying The THRIVE Framework's Foundational Focus Factors (FFFs), Context-Based Metrics, Systems Thinking, and Values-Based Innovation, a holistic, systemic, and context-based understanding of the intersecting realities of crime rates and their causes can be ascertained. In turn, the policies that can help to mitigate issues in the system can be further understood.

Using The THRIVE Framework as a lens through which to explore this issue, it becomes evident that there are many interconnected systemic links that shape outcomes related to safety, justice, and well-being for the community at large. These systemic links refer to the ways in which different sectors interact and influence one another. For example, early intervention in childhood to prevent violence and support mental health can reduce long-term involvement with the justice system.

Similarly, the design of criminal justice and law enforcement models has a ripple effect across employment opportunities, educational access, and overall community resilience. By examining these domains, which are significantly influenced by greater external factors, such as macroeconomic trends, regional inequality, and conflict histories, we aim to promote how innovative policy approaches can be effectively introduced across these interconnected areas, in ways that respond meaningfully to local and systemic conditions.

Introduction

The criminal justice system represents a major component of any functioning society. It includes the judicial and legislative processes used to inform law and order, correctional facilities and penal systems, as well as law enforcement. It also includes the cultural, social, political, and economic influences upon the institutions that carry out these processes. Within law enforcement, there are many systemic factors that inform how police officers carry out their duties, from specific laws and regulations governing police conduct to broader laws regarding offences committed. Within the criminal justice system, there are legislative influences upon sentencing, such as mandatory sentences minimising judicial discretion, and regulations influencing the effectiveness of correctional facilities, linked to factors such as privatisation and corporatism (Australian Law Reform, 2025; Freemon, 2024). As well as these are influences from media hysteria, impacting policy and revenue raising, driving police arrests and detainment (Kelly, 2019; Schuelinburg, 2021).

Historic approaches have been effective to various degrees in reducing crime rates and fostering rehabilitation, and some have been highly ineffective. This can be seen both in the West and in the developing world. By examining some of these cases, a clear picture can be illustrated of the benefits and drawbacks of different policy approaches across the globe and how they intersect with different influences.



*Figure 2. Criminal justice systems are defined by many systemic factors.
Photo by Kat Wilcox*

Judicial Systems - Criminal Justice - Sentencing and Crimes

The United States has one of the highest crime rates in the world when it comes to violent crime, higher than most developed nations. It also has one of the highest prison populations in the world, proportional to its population (World Population Review, 2025). Additionally, sentences can be severe, and the death penalty is still legal and operational in many states. Violence has been a major issue in many US prisons for decades, alongside police brutality, prison guard corruption, and a broadly punitive approach to crime and punishment, which largely affects the poor and disadvantaged. It also has one of the lowest rehabilitation rates and high rates of recidivism (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021).

In the 1960s and early 70s, a welfare-oriented approach to law and order and correction systems, or welfare penalism, existed, in which penal approaches were infused with welfare and rehabilitation owing to the sensibilities of liberal elites (Garland, 2023). This changed in subsequent decades to be more punitive and penal-focused, owing to the influence of media hysteria depicting the need for society to be tougher on crime. Policymakers introduced excessive sentencing laws to address high crime rates, which instead of mitigating crime, led to an increase (Tonry, 2017; Tcherni-Buzzeo, 2018).

In part, this was linked to the war on drugs and other politicised approaches, including criminalising prostitution and excessive punitive approaches to other non-violent offences. Introducing mandatory sentences was used as part of such punitive approaches. Whilst politicised approaches existed behind punitive approaches, so too did economic interests. Not only does the war on drugs have political motivations, but some entities profit immensely from this current system, from for-profit drug rehabilitation programs to for-profit private sector prisons, further demonstrating the flawed approach for addressing crime (Drug Policy Alliance, 2024).



Figure 3. Historically, judicial systems were primarily focused on punishment, such as through the imprisonment of offenders. Photo by Kindel Media

Innovative Courts

Welfare and mental health-based approaches do exist in some countries when it comes to sentencing for crimes where mental health and therapeutic courts exist, taking a less punitive, more holistic, rehabilitation, and treatment-based approach, such as in Australia. Mental health courts operate through a collaboration between the Department of Justice and the Mental Health Commission, aiming to provide holistic, therapeutic outcomes by addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour without relying on punitive sentencing (Magistrates Court of Western Australia, 2025). Research shows these courts reduce recidivism (Weatherburn et al., 2021). These courts' approaches are effective in reducing crime rates and repeat offending, and they holistically address the mental health of those before the court, holistically and systemically, addressing the root causes of crime.



Figure 4. Mental health courts offer an alternative to punitive judicial systems. Photo by RDNE Stock Project

Prisons and Penal Systems

Corruption in prison systems is a major issue for a democratic society. Studies in the United States and the United Kingdom found that corruption can be compounded by KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) and privatisation, with evidence that private prison systems enable 30% more inmate-on-inmate violence and 163% more inmate-on-guard violence (Barrington et al., 2021; Chowdhry et al., 2024). Issues connected to corruption can include bribery of guards by inmates for favours, inadequate oversight of guards' conduct, violence enabled between inmates, and a lack of effective reporting on crimes and treatment for prisoners.

The link between high levels of recidivism, or low rehabilitation, can also be linked to the ineffectiveness of institutions, particularly where corruption is prevalent. In a regional context, Latin American and African prison systems are marked by significant issues, as reflected by issues with overcrowding and violence. Studies demonstrate this is linked to corruption and ineffectiveness of prison systems, which have limited capacity to enable rehabilitation (UNODC, 2024; Groci, 2023). The United States has higher crime rates than most of the developed world, and also a much higher prison population than most of the developed world, owing to harsh punitive approaches, which do not see a crime reduction, but rather the opposite. The link between corruption and ineffectiveness of prison systems, without effective approaches to reduce recidivism and high crime rates, is relevant (Penal Reform International, 2024).

Post-Treatment for Crimes - Rehabilitation

The approaches to rehabilitation in Northern European countries differ significantly from those of the United States and Canada. One marked difference is the approach to punishment vs rehabilitation. In the United States, very lengthy sentences are given to those convicted, as a consequence of legislation from the 1980s and 1990s bowing to public demands for higher law enforcement, owing to media sensationalism (Tonry, 2017). It is also true that the United States has a strong history of excessive extrajudicial approaches in its early period, which accounts for the socio-cultural backdrop and historic context and legacy transferred to the modern era (Rigby et al., 2021). As a consequence, with historically embedded corruption from slavery, segregation, and other cultural influences, it exists along with social stratification along racial and socio-economic lines. This acts as a historical backdrop in the United States, shaping policy interventions, as has occurred with excessive sentencing and punitive approaches. The outcome is that the US still has extremely high crime rates compared to most of the developed world, particularly concerning recidivism. Norway, by contrast, has the lowest recidivism rates and highest rehabilitation rates in the world, with most other Scandinavian countries following with similar, albeit less successful, results (Sorozano, 2024; Truelock, 2023). This does not consider broader contexts of nations in which criminal justice systems operate; however, key aspects of approaches can be adopted and integrated into existing systems.

The approaches taken within countries such as Germany have been to use a therapeutic environment focused on rehabilitation, and less on the punitive approach, which results in ineffectiveness when it comes to rehabilitation and reducing recidivism or preventing crime broadly (Stastch et al., 2019). Studies have shown that whilst psychological treatment may be effective in some cases, as adopted by many prisons within the United States and many Anglophone countries, for criminals with impulse control issues, greater fostering of treatment is enabled by prison cultures which focus on this and not just treatment alone. This points to the relevance of a Context-Based approach to foster rehabilitation through treatment where a more therapeutic environment exists (Kilmer et al., 2023). In Northern European countries, with such approaches, even the most serious of offenders can be rehabilitated with this strong mental health focus (Hausam et al., 2023). This exemplifies a standard for many countries to follow, which needs to be linked to broader systemic approaches, such as those that are preventative. This includes mental health initiatives at both ends of the spectrum, from approaches within school systems as preventative efforts to post-release opportunities for individuals in prison (Sapthiang et al., 2018; Stinson, 2023).

Law Enforcement: Effective Policing

The proper oversight of law enforcement and the enforcement of laws is essential, as are the initiatives to prevent crime through effective social policy. Abuse of power by police or authorities through police brutality, corruption, inefficiency, or allowing extra-judicial approaches to occur are examples of democratic integrity, civic harmony, and civil liberties being significantly undermined.

Global surveys have detailed public attitudes toward the perceived extent of police corruption. One survey found that 36% of surveyed individuals perceived police as corrupt (Albrecht et al., 2023). Police should be trusted to ensure community safety and protection from violence, without the use of excessive force. While strict regulations are mandated in most advanced countries to ensure that human rights and civil liberties are upheld, police brutality often remains a notable exception. In many Western nations, there is a troubling lack of clear oversight or regulation when it comes to the use of force, violence, or degrading treatment by law enforcement (Banteka, 2023). This is why strict processes with internal affairs departments are needed, with ethical training, clear transparency, and accountability (Maurya, 2022)

By prioritising the rights of individuals involved in criminal activity, a country can improve its civil liberties index. Nations with strong civil liberties records have historically adopted approaches that emphasise respectful treatment and minimise the use of excessive physical force.

Extra-Judicial Approaches

Extra-judicial punishment is an issue present in many countries within the developing world where high crime rates and inefficient social policy exist amidst both government and police corruption (Friere et al., 2023). Social media has amplified the promotion of extra-judicial approaches more broadly, particularly with regard to exposing perceived offenders through social media trials, which is a concern for civil liberties, human rights and due process (Fielder, 2023; Rule of Law Education Centre, 2022). Issues such as lynching within India have been a major concern in recent years, in which suspicions around abduction and organ harvesting spread and showcase the danger of social media hysteria and the amplification of public paranoia (Patel, 2020).

Mental Health Services and Innovative Strategies

Many strategies foster individual and community well-being and mitigate stressors and oppression within communities. These partly include mitigating financial stressors. Some examples of these strategies include access to free mental health services and effective policy for education at the community level, whereby mental well-being is promoted and prioritised, thus giving mental health issues greater awareness. These strategies can be separated into several areas: child welfare and family systems, community education on mental health, including employment, and mental health services.

Child and Family Welfare Strategies

The maltreatment or abuse of children within family systems is correlated to broader family issues and has links to downstream criminality (Font, 2022). This link alone illustrates the importance of community standards in fostering and enabling struggling families to reduce the risk of childhood maltreatment or abuse.

This support may discontinue destructive family dynamics, potentially decreasing the chances of children resorting to crime in later years (Abdulgasiev et al., 2018). All abuse types need to be prevented, including physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, and neglect. Strong preventative measures include educating the public, which can occur through a range of programmes such as within postnatal programs and school systems (Gubbels et al., 2021).

Additionally, housing instability, low income, and those seeking assistance and coming to the attention of child services can also create stigma for many families (Marcal et al., 2021). Research has shown that there is a need to support families through both behavioural modelling and financial support to ensure no child is disadvantaged or faces abuse (Berger et al., 2019).

Community Education on Mental Health

Improving community understanding of mental health is critical. Equally important is ensuring mental health support for individuals and families. Stronger community understanding of mental health struggles, starting at the policy level, can alleviate stigma and cultural attitudes both from the community and service providers. Such stigma prevents individuals from accessing needed services (Ahad et al., 2023; Marcal et al., 2021). Holistic approaches to education, employment, and community support generally foster greater mental health outcomes while also helping to reduce both poverty and corruption. This can be seen in several developing countries where integrated social strategies have led to more resilient communities (Agbor et al., 2020).

Access to Mental Health Services

Access to mental health services needs to be high-quality, holistic, and driven by need, not by profit. It must be affordable and, where necessary, free in order to adequately address mental health issues for the most vulnerable. Access to mental health care can reduce crime (SIEPR, 2022). Mental health training is also vital for service providers, including those within social services, police, and the criminal justice system more broadly (Morgan 2021; Rogers et al., 2019).

Financial and Other Innovative Assistance

Access to social welfare and financial assistance to ensure basic needs mitigates the likelihood of committing a crime, such as theft and robbery (Deshpande et al., 2022). Different proposed approaches like UBI (Universal Basic Income), or obligation-free social welfare programs, in which volunteering and community contribution are encouraged, are effective strategies and important safety nets, for not only ensuring that basic financial needs are met, but also that mental and community well-being is facilitated in the process. Ensuring tenant rights and access to affordable housing is a vital step in mitigating socio-economic stressors and preventing finance-driven crimes (Marcal et al., 2021). One way that countries like the United States can begin to address high crime rates is by tackling systemic economic inequality on a significant scale (Garland, 2023). This includes expanding social welfare at livable rates, effective workplace protections, and affordable housing.

Other systemic socio-economic factors also play a role. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds can benefit from stronger preventative and mental health-based campaigns that support vulnerable populations and help mitigate crime linked to psycho-social stressors (SIEPR, 2022). Regional and cultural attitudes towards crime can inhibit progress in this regard, so effective mental health strategies are needed to overcome these barriers (Ahad et al., 2023). Psychopathology is also strongly shaped by cultural mores and attitudes, and so culture can merely alter the manifestation of psychopathology, not reduce it. This means that community-level attitudes need to be informed by accurate science-based education to offset disinformation and cultural attitudes.



Figure 5. Financial support is a valuable contributor to ensuring people's needs are met, reducing the likelihood of committing a crime. Photo by Branimir Balogovic

Psycho-Social Stressors and Prevention

Adequate support systems to ensure better mental health outcomes, and therapeutic approaches that are easily accessible can mitigate and prevent sexual assault and physical assault crimes linked to impulse control, such as domestic violence and battery (Hocken et al., 2021; Nasset et al., 2021; Kayouglu et al., 2024). Such crimes can often be linked to socio-economic stressors, intergenerational trauma, or lived experience of trauma, which treatment can mitigate the transference of into crime, if caught early enough through effective social policy approaches. This includes making it safe and easy for potential perpetrators to seek help before a crime is committed, in a way that fosters ongoing support and mitigation of psychological stressors

Some crimes are committed by people with psychopathic traits, which can include a lack of remorse, deceitfulness, aggression, recklessness, and manipulation (Yale University, 2023). This only accounts for under 4.5% of a given population, however with 1.2% adhering to the definition of psychopathy (Garcia et al., 2021). This is, nonetheless, partly shaped by adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and can therefore be prevented to a large extent through improved social welfare approaches targeting early childhood. These early experiences can also be linked to psycho-social stressors that impact how children are treated during their formative years (DeLisi et al., 2022).

Effective systemic, preventative, and psychological approaches are essential to addressing this issue. The significantly lower rates of violent crime in some countries compared to others suggest that crime is not merely an individual problem, but a systemic, societally created one, also requiring coordinated responses at the societal level. By having effective social policy approaches, this can be addressed (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024). Whilst not necessarily causational, there is a correlation between low levels of serious crime and low levels of socio-economic disparity and inequality, highlighting the potential relationship between adverse environmental shaping and crime. It may also be owing to genetically linked disorders, such as psychopathy, being able to be exacerbated by environmental shaping (Chithra et al., 2020; Mariz et al., 2022). This also suggests that alleviating psycho-social stressors could decrease community-wide crime rates.

In countries like Australia, with significantly lower socio-economic disparity and a far less punitive criminal justice system compared to the United States, crime rates are also far lower (NationMaster, 2025). The United Kingdom, which is less punitive than the United States, and closer to that of Australia, has greater socio-economic disparity than Australia and greater crime rates, but has less economic disparity, and significantly less serious crime, than the United States (Blundell et al., 2018; Nation Master, 2025). This points to a heavy link among healthy Western developed nations between inequality and crime rates, which are further amplified by punitive responses as seen in the United States.

Media and Cultural Depictions of Crime and Violence

Media hysteria and cultural attitudes surrounding crime and punishment, including the use of social media is an issues which has influenced policy outcomes. Policymakers have yielded to public demands, based on media hysteria, to be more punitive when it comes to crime. Since the late 20th century, this was driven by concerns, from wealthier people, of threats to property by crime driven by poverty. Such concerns, as amplified by the media, were able to influence policy approaches, but were not supported by evidence for reducing crime rates and increasing rehabilitation. Naturally, this does not address the root cause of property and theft-related crime, which is largely born out of poverty and economic factors, nor the psychosocial stressors caused by poverty that can result in some violent crime like mass shootings (Dundar, 2022; Blum et al., 2021).

For decades, there has been a strong media involvement in sensationalising crime and fueling public emotion, misrepresenting the reality of most crimes and compounding existing community psycho-social stressors, which cause most crime (Zatkin et al., 2021; Chithra et al., n.d.) Tough on crime approaches called for by the media can have a devastating impact on fair trials and separation of powers, such as with mandatory sentencing, and legislation requiring minimum or excessive sentences and other punitive responses (Law Council of Australia, 2025; Australian Law Reform Commission, 2025).

The bogeyman concept of the media depicting individuals as threats to society has long been a source of fueling hysteria instead of helping to address genuine violent or serious crime. People who commit crime with sociopathic or psychopathic traits, which itself is significantly linked to adverse childhood experiences, should be viewed through this lens, and a

lens of prevention (Di Giacomo et al., 2021). Organised criminal behaviour and intent largely exist where loopholes and corruption exist in society.

Media influence upon sentencing, and certainly trial by media, can infringe upon judicial independence, and also upon the privacy of the individual, posing significant ethical and constitutional issues concerning the rule of law, right to a fair trial, and privacy (Sree, 2025; Law Council of Australia, 2025). Mandatory sentencing laws, which are usually introduced following public outrage caused by media hysteria, can impede the independence and discretionary powers of judges. This can be a significant impediment when it comes to mitigating factors of a case, and can work against holistic, mental health, and approaches, such as when dealing with individuals with mental health, intellectual disability, or vulnerable individuals with a history of trauma (Law Council of Australia, 2025; Law Council of Australia, 2014). Trauma-informed approaches should be a standard approach of criminal justice systems broadly, and mandatory sentencing can impede this (Cogan et al., 2025; Levenson et al., 2022; Law Council of Australia, 2025).

In many developing countries, media and social media present a greater issue, with higher examples of vigilantism, lynching, and mob violence, fueled in particular by social media (Patel, 2019; Friere et al., 2023). Similar examples also exist in the West in regards to vigilante-type groups looking to promote sensationalist approaches and extra-judicial interventions. Even though law and order circumvent greater abuses, there are issues with minor offences, and toxic retribution compounded by social media. This further points to the need for social media platforms to take responsibility for decreasing the spread of socially irresponsible content, masquerading as “news”, seeking to manipulate public emotion through empty rhetoric.

Developing World Regional Issues Case Study: Africa

The practice of criminal justice in developed nations serves as a key indicator of a state's ability to deliver justice to its people. Criminal justice theory provides a framework for analysing these practices and assessing their adherence to established principles and standards. Africa, like the rest of the world, is not entirely unique in this regard. However, its historical experience as a former colonial territory has shaped its justice systems, often aligning them with the remnants of colonial governance (Aliverti et al., 2021).

In many African states recovering from colonial rule, political instability, and dictatorship, the criminal justice system plays a crucial role in either reinforcing or undermining political legitimacy. When regime changes occur owing to internal conflicts, wars, or coups, the impact on criminal justice and democracy is profound. Some scholars argue that Africa has largely inherited colonial justice systems, which have influenced the relationship between new political elites and former colonial powers (Aliverti et al., 2021). In times of political upheaval, the criminal justice system is often one of the first institutions to suffer, as governments prioritise political expediency over legal norms across many African nations.

South Africa has also faced challenges regarding judicial independence. A crisis emerged when a court ruling suggested that the National Prosecution Authority (NPA) was not entirely free from political influence (Matakalatse & Motsepe, 2025). In many African countries, maintaining both democracy and a fair justice system proves costly and inconvenient for ruling elites who seek to retain power, often

linked to Western sponsorship of corrupt governments to preserve existing trade arrangements (Andjembe Etogho et al., 2022). Across West Africa, political interference can undermine security, democratic, and judicial processes, resulting in vigilantism (Mensah et al., 2025). In conflict regions, military leaders often replace legal institutions with makeshift justice systems, which can be arbitrary and deadly.

The role of the justice system in shaping and maintaining political power remains central to criminal justice studies in Africa. A legitimate legal system is essential for the rule of law and social justice. However, in states where legitimacy is lacking, the criminal justice system is unlikely to serve either political opponents or ordinary citizens fairly. Across the continent, reports of police and security force abuses are widespread. Rather than protecting citizens impartially, law enforcement agencies often engage in corruption (Agbor, 2021; Matakalatse & Motsepe, 2025). As a result, many turn to alternative protection sources, including private security firms, civil militias, or vigilante groups, as seen from West Africa to South Africa (Gbenemene, 2024; Bezuidenhout & Kempen, 2022).

The criminal justice system in capitalist societies reflects their economic structures. This dependency is rooted in historical experiences of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (Andjembe Etogho et al., 2022). Consistent with Marxist political economy, those who control the means of production also shape ideological and institutional frameworks, including justice systems. Historically, colonial justice structures were designed to suppress and control local populations in favour of colonial powers. Today, similar dynamics persist as colonial

Developing World Regional Issues Case Study: Africa (continued)

legacies (Addo, 2022). Ultimately, the criminal justice system consists of the police, prosecution, judiciary, and correctional institutions, which play a fundamental role in enforcing societal laws. These institutions represent a critical function of government, tasked with maintaining order and ensuring justice. However, when compromised by political and economic influences, they risk becoming tools of oppression rather than instruments of fairness and security.

Human rights violations by security forces remain a major concern. Reports identify key issues from central and West Africa to South Africa, including politically motivated killings, extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary arrests, and prolonged detentions (U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, n.d.).

Police brutality is not unique to the West and South Africa. From Soweto to Nairobi, cases of police violence are rising, fueling public outrage and deepening mistrust. Police brutality has become a global issue, with activists and organisations regularly staging demonstrations. People across the continent are raising their voices against police brutality. In Uganda, citizens view the police as synonymous with impunity, torture, and arbitrary arrests. Many Nigerians intentionally avoid police officers owing to deep mistrust. This widespread abuse of power has led to calls for reform, accountability, and justice, as law enforcement agencies continue to operate in a manner that prioritises the interests of the elite over the rights and safety of ordinary citizens.



Figure 6. African police surrounding a protestor. Distrust in law enforcement institutions is a major problem, fuelled by a range of factors. Photo by Denis Ngai.

THRIVE Framework

The THRIVE Framework is a comprehensive tool for forward guidance, comprising 12 Foundational Focus Factors (FFFs) which make up the Systemic Holistic Model, to enable innovative transformations. Using The THRIVE Framework and key FFFs, recommendations for the best policy approaches can be made.

[Systems Thinking](#), a Foundational Focus Factor (FFF) of The THRIVE Framework, demonstrates how the interconnectedness of systems influences effects from one level to another, from micro to macro and vice versa. It also illuminates how policy decisions should consider other more systemic approaches to mitigate issues when it comes to criminal justice systems to foster a more thrivable and holistically safe and secure society. This includes approaches to education, social welfare strategies, individual and systemic mental health approaches, and economic support services, through to rehabilitation and preventative strategies at the community level. Systems Thinking reflects the need for more effective safety nets and social support innovations, and trust and value-based integrity in law enforcement and criminal justice systems.

This is also illuminated by [Values-Based Innovation](#), another FFF. Civil liberties, nonviolence, addressing inequality, and providing support to the vulnerable, as well as fair trials and protection from mistreatment or abuse of all individuals (irrespective of crimes committed), are key values held by Western democracies. These underpin central tenets of human rights and classical liberal thought, infused with the very origins of classical liberal thought and expanded on through approaches to civil liberties throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. This includes

precedents such as the abolition of the death penalty and any form of corporal punishment.

Recognising the importance of the interactions of societal systems is essential, and how holistic, innovative strategies infused within social policy to address this are needed. Therefore, tokenistic adherence to civil liberties by merely adhering to existing regulatory standards, which may fall short of fully protecting individual dignity and sovereignty, does not suffice in facilitating proper Values-Based Innovation. Issues of regulatory loopholes can be more easily mitigated when trauma-informed approaches in policing and complete prioritisation of individual sovereignty and liberties within a criminal justice context exist.

Recognising that the approach to criminal justice systems is interlinked systemically with other innovative approaches is essential when determining the best policy approaches. The contextual backdrop of a given society is also essential. This is where [Context-Based Metrics](#), another FFF of The THRIVE Framework, fits in. Organisational context is essential to understanding the best approaches required, as determined by ethical considerations and science. With regard to mental and community well-being and safety outcomes, best approaches can be guided by evidence from psychology and criminology, alongside adherence to the highest ethical standards. Factors such as embedded social and economic stratification seen within the United States and many developing countries within institutions have their own obstacles to overcome, requiring specific policy considerations tailored to mitigating intergenerational transfer of trauma and poverty. Factors such as colonial

THRIVE Framework (continued)

legacies similarly require specific considerations, again focusing on mitigating restrictions on economic, social or political interests, and well-being. Culture too is of great importance to consider, not just to tailor policy approaches to this, but in recognising where culture can impede human well-being interests systemically, in some cases contravening basic freedoms linked to classical liberalism, with regard to criminal justice and social policy broadly.

This reiterates the importance of considering approaches on an epistemic level, whereby policy approaches that have contravened aspects of civil liberties have been conducive to social justice movements, which have been largely identitarian in focus. By contrast, recognising the genuine structural stratification and inequalities existent on a socio-economic level, which can be heavily detrimental to both mental well-being individually and familial systems, is needed. Individuals from disadvantaged circumstances, irrespective of identity, should be afforded greater welfare-based approaches as part of welfare-based approaches broadly, in contrast to heavy crime and punishment approaches. This should occur whilst recognising a higher proportionality of inequality faced by different groups, without this being the primary focus or point.



Figures 7 & 8. The THRIVE Framework's 12 Foundational Focus Factors, and their relationship to one another.

Solutions

Financial and Psycho-Social Stress Mitigation

Key recommendations for governments and policymakers are to have social policy approaches that alleviate financial stressors. This includes access to quality employment and a high enough basic minimum wage for individuals to meet the costs of living, alongside proper safeguards and worker protections in the workplace. These approaches can further reduce psycho-social stressors systemically, which can link to poor behavioural modelling by parents of children in the early years at the very least, to prevent abuse and maltreatment from occurring. A basic income or social welfare income support as a safety net, obligation-free, can also mitigate this, alongside cheap and affordable housing. By ensuring that basic living standards can be met, this reduces psycho-social stressors, which can lead to mental health issues, substance abuse, and intergenerational issues that children are raised within.

Access to Services for Vulnerable People at the Preventative Level

As well as financial assistance, effective mental health services need to be free for many, accessible, and promoted publicly, in order to enable community understanding of mental health. For individuals who commit first-time or minor offences, counselling and mental health services should be the primary focus of criminal justice systems. For those who show early warning signs, such as children or youth, the same should apply. For instances where children appear to be facing maltreatment, effective, trauma-informed, mindfulness-based approaches should

be undertaken to provide systematic and holistic solutions. Such as recognising the broader micro system impacts of a child's lived experience and facilitating change to accommodate better standards.

Mental Health Education for Service Providers: Law Enforcement and Judicial Systems

Police, service providers, and criminal justice system employees should be well educated in trauma-informed approaches to recognise where trauma, vulnerability, mental illness, or neurodevelopmental factors commonly link to crime. Strong regulations on police conduct with regard to individuals suffering such vulnerabilities need to be implemented.



Figure 9. Mental health support can reduce crime levels. Photo by SHVETS Production

Solutions (continued)

Mental Health Promotion at Cultural Level, to Curtail Media & Social Media Views on Crime

Addressing the media's and social media's role in amplifying punitive attitudes should be addressed. Media outlets and social media platforms need to assist by fostering environments which do not promote violence or allow this to be disseminated. The same should be employed regarding disinformation and sensationalism promoting punitive attitudes which do not address root causes of crime, or provide understanding or mitigation of the circumstances which lead to crime in the first place. Greater education of the public, as well as police and other service providers is crucial to allow the issue of mental health and its connection to crime to be understood and addressed.

Focuses on Rehabilitation and Welfare Penalism

A return to welfare penalism is crucial. This does not just reflect returning to eras where less crime was prevalent in the West. However, it is exemplified by many Northern European approaches, such as Germany, to crime and punishment in which rehabilitation is the key goal for offenders, not punitive approaches, which many Western countries have in part adopted. Key areas for improvement are repealing mandatory sentencing laws, and excessive sentencing standards, which should be replaced with trauma-informed approaches guiding judicial discretion and independence, particularly with regard to mental health and trauma-informed approaches.



Figure 10. Rehabilitation should be a focus for criminal justice systems.
Photo by SHVETS Production

Conclusion

The structures of the Criminal Justice System are not just systematically linked to each of the separated institutions within it, but are more broadly linked to other interconnected social systems. These systems exist at the individual and family level, through to the varied institutions and governing bodies individuals interact with, from education, workplaces, social services, and mental health support systems. By ensuring that criminal justice systems operate as informed by the best science and [Values-Based Innovation](#), such as therapy-based and trauma-informed approaches, more optimal outcomes can be attained for society. This includes law enforcement, correctional institutions and the criminal justice system broadly. Alongside this, it should be required to repeal punitive legislation that may inhibit separation of powers such as with mandatory sentencing. If discretionary powers of judges exist as guided by trauma-informed and mental health-based approaches, this would be far more optimal, as reflected by many approaches already globally from Germany to Australia. Moreso approaches are beneficial when considering the context of individuals' broader experiences as well as their required supports as linked to other systemic and context-based factors. With such approaches, better outcomes can be achieved at an individual and broader societal level. If the same context-based, values driven approaches are in place as systemic preventative measures, crime can be mitigated, and its root causes addressed holistically and systemically.



Figure 11. Considering mental health issues can lead to more equitable criminal justice systems. Photo by Olia Danilevich.

References

- Addo, K. O. (2022). British colonial rule: Its impact on police corruption in Ghana. *International NGO Journal*, 17(2), 12-25.
- Agbor, A. A. (2021). Accountability of law enforcement personnel for human rights violations in Cameroon: Trends and challenges. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal/Potchefstroomse Elektroniese Regsblad*, 24(1).
- Ahad, A. A., Sanchez-Gonzalez, M., & Junquera, P. (2023). Understanding and addressing mental health stigma across cultures for improving psychiatric care: A narrative review. *Cureus*, 15(5).
- Albrecht, J. F., & De Melo Bandeira, G. S. (2023). Police Deviance and Corruption in the United States and in Portugal: Identifying Criminological Trends and Theoretical Explanations. *Revista Jurídica Portucalense*, 122-152.
- Aliverti, A., Carvalho, H., Chamberlen, A., & Sozzo, M. (2021). Decolonizing the criminal question. *Punishment & Society*, 23(3), 297-316.
- Andjembe Etogho, E. B., Eben, S. E. M., & Dalton, A. L. (2022). French neocolonialism in Africa: Historical overview and summary of current events. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 81(5), 829-849.
- Antenangeli, L., & Durose, M. R. (2021). Recidivism of prisoners released in 24 states in 2008: A 10-year follow-up period (2008-2018). *US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics*.
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2024). 'Help way earlier!'How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. *Australian Human Rights Commission*.
- Australian Law Reform Commission. (2015). Impact of mandatory sentencing. <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/pathways-to-justice-inquiry-into-the-incarceration-rate-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-alrc-report-133/8-mandatory-sentencing/impact-of-mandatory-sentencing/>
- Banteka, N. (2023). Police Brutality as Torture. *UCLA L. Rev.*, 70, 470.
- Barrington, R., Silverman, J., Hutton, M., (2021). Corruption in UK prisons: a critical evaluation of the evidence base. *University of Sussex. Journal contribution*. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23480156.v1>
- Bezuidenhout, C., & Kempen, A. (2022). Community violence, vigilantism, and mob justice in South Africa. In *Understanding and Preventing Community Violence: Global Criminological and Sociological Perspectives* (pp. 143-163). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Bjørnebekk, G., & Mørkrid Thøgersen, D. (2021). Possible interventions for preventing the development of psychopathic traits among children and adolescents?. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(1), 409.
- Chithra, N. K., Malathesh, B. C., & Math, S. B. Stress And Crime. *Stress And Struggles*, 540.
- Coccia, M. (2017). A Theory of general causes of violent crime: Homicides, income inequality and deficiencies of the heat hypothesis and of the model of CLASH. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 37, 190-200.
- Cogan, N., Tse, D., Finlayson, M., Lawley, S., Black, J., Hewitson, R., ... & Short, C. (2025). A journey towards a trauma informed and responsive Justice system: the perspectives and experiences of senior Justice workers. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 16(1), 2441075.
- Chowdhry, A., Nagesh, A., Luna, T., McKenna, N. (2024). Betrayal behind the bars: curbing corruption in prisons, [Policy Brief]. *Institute for Youth in Policy*. <https://yipinstitute.org/policy/betrayal-behind-the-bars-curbing-corruption-in-prisons#:~:text=Corruption%20within%20prisons%20has%20a,prisons%20compared%20to%20public%20ones.>
- Croci, G. (2025). Effectiveness and corruption in the criminal justice system of Latin America: An overview. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 49(1), 81-105.
- Deshpande, M., & Mueller-Smith, M. (2022). Does welfare prevent crime? The criminal justice outcomes of youth removed from SSI. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 137(4), 2263-2307.
- Deutsche Welle. (2020, September 8). In Africa, concerns over rising police brutality. *DW*.
- Di Giacomo, E., Santorelli, M., Pessina, R., Rucco, D., Placenti, V., Aliberti, F., ... & Clerici, M. (2021). Child abuse and psychopathy: interplay, gender differences and biological correlates. *World journal of psychiatry*, 11(12), 1167.
- Drug Policy Alliance. (2024). Plunder, profit & punishment: a syllabus for drug war profiteering. https://drugpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DPA-FactSheetDrugWarProfiteering_InDesign-Interactive.pdf
- Eme, O. I., Okoh, C. I., & Okeke, M. (n.d.). The police and criminal justice system in Africa: Agenda for reform. *Department of Public Administration, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, & Federal Polytechnic, Oke*.
- Freemon, K. (2024). Privatized jails: Comparing individuals' safety in private and public jails. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 90, 102134.
- Freire, D., & Skarbek, D. (2023). Vigilantism and institutions: Understanding attitudes toward lynching in Brazil. *Research & Politics*, 10(1), 20531680221150389.
- Galinato, G. I., & Rohla, R. (2020). Do privately-owned prisons increase incarceration rates?. *Labour Economics*, 67, 101908.

- Garland, D. (2023). The current crisis of American criminal justice: A structural analysis. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 6(1), 43-63.
- Gbenemene, K. (2024). INSECURITY, VIGILANTISM AND POLICING IN NIGERIA. *Michigan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(2), 1-9.
- Gubbels, J., van der Put, C. E., Stams, G. J. J., & Assink, M. (2021). Effective components of school-based prevention programs for child abuse: a meta-analytic review. *Clinical child and family psychology review*, 24(3), 553-578.
- Gupta, S. (2022). Role of Media Trials in Criminal Justice System: An Analysis. *Issue 2 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.*, 5, 835.
- Hausam, J., Franke, M., Lehmann, R. J., & Dahle, K. P. (2022). Effectiveness of social-therapeutic treatment for serious offenders in juvenile detention: A quasi-experimental study of recidivism. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 13, 909781.
- Hocken, K., & Taylor, J. (2021). Compassion-focused therapy as an intervention for sexual offending. *In Forensic interventions for therapy and rehabilitation* (pp. 189-219). Routledge.
- Jácome, E. (2021). How better access to mental health care can reduce crime. *Age*, 17(19), 21.
- Joshi, T., Philip, S., & Basu, A. (2020). STRESS AND TOBACCO ADDICTION. *Stress And Struggles*, 357.
- Kayao lu, K., & Köse, M. (2024). Effect of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy-Based Anger Management Training on Anger and Aggression Levels of Individuals Convicted of Violent Crimes. *Journal of psychosocial nursing and mental health services*, 62(10), 51-58.
- Kelly, B. D. (2019). Fighting crime or raising revenue? Testing opposing views of forfeiture. *Institute for Justice*, June.
- Kury, H. (2018). Rehabilitation In Prison German Experiences And What Can Be Done Better. *Romanian Journal of Sociological Studies*, (1), 19-36.
- Lappi-Seppälä, T. (2022). Rehabilitative Aims and Values in Finnish (and Nordic) Criminal Justice. *In The Palgrave Handbook of Global Rehabilitation in Criminal Justice* (pp. 161-180). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Law Council of Australia (2025, February 6) Mandatory sentencing is not the answer, [Press Release]. <https://lawcouncil.au/media/media-releases/mandatory-sentencing-is-not-the-answer>
- Levenson, J. S., Prescott, D. S., & Willis, G. M. (2022). Trauma-informed treatment practices in criminal justice settings. *Handbook of issues in criminal justice reform in the United States*, 483-502.
- Lorey, K., & Fegert, J. M. (2022). Incorporating mental health literacy and trauma-informed law enforcement: A participative survey on police officers' attitudes and knowledge concerning mental disorders, traumatization, and trauma sensitivity. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*, 14(2), 218.
- Magistrates Court of Western Australia. (2025). Start court. https://www.magistratescourt.wa.gov.au/s/start_court.aspx
- Marcal, K. E., & Maguire-Jack, K. (2021). Housing insecurity and adolescent well-being: Relationships with child welfare and criminal justice involvement. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 115, 105009.
- Matakalatse, R., & Motsepe, L. L. (2025). The Symptoms of Interference: Review of Political Influence in Policing. *London Journal*, 449, 449U.
- Mariz, C., Cruz, O. S., & Moreira, D. (2022). The influence of environmental and genetic factors on the development of psychopathy: A systematic review. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 62, 101715.
- Maurya, B. R. (2022) POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND BODY CAMERAS. *Law & Order Administration*, 68. <https://www.wisdompress.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Law-Order-Administration.pdf>
- Mellgren, C., Rostami, A., Gerell, M., Sturup, J., Hartvigsson, T., Munthe, C., ... & Sundell, K. (2024). Psychosocial Interventions Preventing Gang-Related Crime Among Young People: A Systematic Review. *Research on social work practice*, 10497315241305779.
- Mensah, R. O., Annang, A., Yeboah, N. N., & Effah, E. (2025). Political influence and the crisis of security in West Africa: the role of vigilantism in Ghana. *International Review of Sociology*, 1-33.
- Morgan, M. (2021). Police responses to persons with mental illness: The policy and procedures manual of one Australian police agency and 'procedural justice policy'. *Social sciences*, 10(2), 42.
- Nation Master. (2025). Violent Crime Stats: Compare key data on Australia & United States. <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/compare/Australia/United-States/Crime/Violent-crime>
- Nettet, M. B., Bjørngaard, J. H., Whittington, R., & Palmstierna, T. (2021). Does cognitive behavioural therapy or mindfulness-based therapy improve mental health and emotion regulation among men who perpetrate intimate partner violence? A randomised controlled trial. *International journal of nursing studies*, 113, 103795.
- Nila, K., Holt, D. V., Ditzen, B., & Aguilar-Raab, C. (2016). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) enhances distress tolerance and resilience through changes in mindfulness. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 4(1), 36-41.
- Nussio, E. (2024). The "dark side" of community ties: Collective action and lynching in Mexico. *American sociological review*, 89(4), 708-734.
- Patel, A. B. (2020). Is Mob Lynching a Contemporary Social Problem in India?. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 9, 315-324.
- Penal Reform International. (2024). Global prison trends 2024. https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PRI_Global-prison-trends-report-2024_EN.pdf
- Pinals, D. A. (2015). Crime, violence, and behavioral health: collaborative community strategies for risk mitigation. *CNS spectrums*, 20(3), 241-249.

- Rigby, D., & Seguin, C. (2021). Capital punishment and the legacies of slavery and lynching in the United States. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 694(1), 205-219.
- Rogers, M. S., McNiel, D. E., & Binder, R. L. (2019). Effectiveness of Police Crisis Intervention Training Programs. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 47(4), 414-421.
- Schuilenburg, M. (2021). *Hysteria: Crime, media, and politics*. Routledge.
- Stasch, J., Yoon, D., Sauter, J., Hausam, J., & Dahle, K. P. (2020). Prison climate and its role in reducing dynamic risk factors during offender treatment: *Corrigendum*.
- Saleh-Hanna, V. (Ed.). (2008). *Colonial systems of control: Criminal justice in Nigeria*. University of Ottawa Press.
- Stinson, J. A. (2023). We've Got Some Work to Do: How the United States Could Benefit from Implementing Germany's Prison Employment Program. *Ind. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.*, 33, 257.
- Søndena, E., & Holst, S. (2023). Offenders with Neurodevelopmental Disorders in Four Nordic Countries. *Forensic Aspects of Neurodevelopmental Disorders: A Clinician's Guide*, 252.
- Sapthaang, S., Van Gordon, W., & Shonin, E. (2019). Mindfulness in schools: A health promotion approach to improving adolescent mental health. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 17, 112-119.
- Sanz-García, A., Gesteira, C., Sanz, J., & García-Vera, M. P. (2021). Prevalence of psychopathy in the general adult population: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 661044.
- Santoro, G. (2021). State Authority and Lynching in Latin America. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 13(3), 1-17.
- Tang, K. (2023). Retribution Versus Rehabilitation: Why North America should Adopt the Nordic Prison Model. *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology and Criminology*, 6(1).
- Truelock, T. (2023). A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES AND SCANDINAVIA. *Ohio Northern University International Law Journal*, 1(1), 6.
- Tonry, M. (2017). Making American sentencing just, humane, and effective. *Crime and Justice*, 46(1), 441-504.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2024). Global prison population and trends A focus on rehabilitation. UNODC Research. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Prison_brief_2024.pdf
- US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. (2022). 2022 Country reports on Human Rights Practices: South Africa. US Department of State <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-africa/>
- US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. (2023). 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria. US Department of State <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nigeria/>
- Weatherburn, D., Albalawi, O., Chowdhury, N., Wand, H., Adily, A., Allnutt, S., & Butler, T. (2021). Does mental health treatment reduce recidivism among offenders with a psychotic illness?. *Journal of Criminology*, 54(2), 239-258.
- World Population Review. (2025). Incarceration rates by country 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/incarceration-rates-by-country>, <https://ocindex.net/rankings?f=rankings&view=List>
- World Population Review. (2025). Violent crime rates by country 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/violent-crime-rates-by-country>
- Yale University Mechanisms of Disinhibition (MoD) Laboratory. (2023). The criminal system is full of people with psychopathy. It fails to help them. (The Appeal). <https://modlab.yale.edu/news/criminal-system-full-people-psychopathy-it-fails-help-them-appeal>
- Zatkin, J., Sitney, M., & Kaufman, K. (2022). The relationship between policy, media, and perceptions of sexual offenders between 2007 and 2017: A review of the literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(3), 953-968.

Credits

Lead Author

Michael Hill

Research

Michael Hill
Maryum Ummi

Editor

Rebecca Hughes

Design and Layout

Justin McPhee



**Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0
International
(CC BY-NC 4.0)**