

## Reviews

### Privatization in Criminal Justice: Past, Present and Future

edited by David Shichor and Michael J. Gilbert

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#### *Reviewed by Robert Stokes*

The issue of privatization in government services has been an on-going policy debate in the US and Britain since the late 1970s. A policy rhetoric that had its genesis with Thatcher's Tories in Britain and was brought to the US by Reagan's Republicans, the notion that private firms could perform services better and cheaper than public providers is now a commonly held political chestnut for conservative ideologues (and many centrists) in both nations.

Particularly controversial have been the efforts of these nations and their 'sub-governments' to privatize elements, facilities and/or services of the justice system. While most of these efforts proceeded just under the public's radar screen—especially in light of promised cost savings—notable controversies as well as basic philosophical differences have emerged regarding these endeavors.

The edited volume reviewed here examines some of these differences and controversies related to privatization in justice services. While the research here centers on the US experience, there are references to the British and Australian experiences. To this end, the editors offer a 13-chapter work that is organized into four main sections: I, history and general issues in privatization; II, components of privatization; III, privatization case studies; and IV, methodological challenges to the evaluation of privatization efforts. Lastly, the editors make up for a rather short introduction with a well-written and concise epilogue.

Part I offers three chapters, the first of which explores a historical analysis of privatization efforts in the areas of policing, corrections and prosecutions (courts). Chapter 2 examines the growing size and political dynamism of the criminal justice 'sub-government', and concludes with issues of contract monitoring and accountability. Chapter 3 seeks to explicate the limits of criminal justice privatization and poses the question: 'How much is too much?'

The editors organize Part II of the book into three chapters, each taking on a major element of the public justice system—courts, policing and prisons. In Part III, a series of authors offer case studies that examine the politics of prison privatization and pre-trial release services. Due to the controversies surrounding such endeavors, as well as the size of the industry, the book looks mostly at the process, politics and impacts of prison privatization.

In the last section, methodological challenges are addressed for those endeavoring to do research in this area. The biggest challenge in doing comparative evaluation research of privatization schemes is the availability of data on the private side of the comparison. In a chapter on prison

privatization, the authors point out that many private operators guard their internal data as potential trade secrets. Aside from the obvious limitations on drawing valid comparisons with public operations, the public's level of cynicism over private justice efforts tends to grow in the face of such secrecy.

The weakness of the book rests in its failure to effectively distinguish between private for-profit service operators and the burgeoning not-for-profit sector. A chapter that lays out some of the operational and philosophical differences among these private service types would have been appreciated, especially considering the growth in faith-based and secular community-based service providers in the US. This growing network of private service providers compete with public providers in terms both of costs and of philosophical orientation. It is within these differing operational philosophies—where such notions as community restoration, family promotion and/or character-building efforts are part of the programming lexicon—that policy makers see prospects for increased efficacy as well as personal political gain.

In sum, this edited volume works because it manages to covers a wide range of aspects of the justice system, while placing the recent movements in justice system privatization into a meaningful historical and political context.

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