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Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Salzburg Global Seminar initiative
In partnership with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation,
the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the David Rockefeller Fund

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR IS GRATEFUL TO THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR SUPPORT FOR THIS PROGRAM:

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GLOBAL INNOVATIONS
ON YOUTH VIOLENCE,
SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice

Executive Summary



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Introduction

In January 2021, Salzburg Global Seminar began implementing a major multi-year initiative, Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice, in partnership with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the David Rockefeller Fund to tackle youth violence and promote youth safety and criminal justice reform.

Overview

GOALS

The *Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice* initiative is founded on the premise that serial failures to redress social, legal, and economic injustice and structural racism and to develop adequately and act on a body of research evidence addressing such ills underpin societal violence and disproportionally shape politics, policing and judicial systems around the world.

To address this, the initiative focuses on four different levels of intervention:

- Individuals' lived experiences
- Individual and community interactions with systems of authority and law and order
- System/institutional mandates, funding, staffing, metrics and accountability
- Research that is sustained, relevant and applied to the causes and responses to these challenges

Its ultimate long-term goals are to:

- Enhance community safety and cohesion
- Reduce violence, crime and incarceration
- Transform judicial and prison systems

PROCESS

Through regular online convenings, the first phase of the initiative engaged 67 participants—known as Salzburg Global Fellows—from 19 countries in wide ranging conversations, and focused on sharing information and experiences. These meetings brought together activists, formerly incarcerated persons, policymakers, public officials, researchers, and social entrepreneurs in order to identify and evaluate approaches, tools and technologies in four specific fields:

- New intervention points that could have long-term benefits for reducing violence, injustice, racism, and implicit bias/prejudice in and outside criminal justice systems.
- Multi-country comparisons, focusing initially on national/subnational jurisdictions that have pioneered successful approaches in criminal justice policy and practice.
- Direct engagement of people and communities of color and other marginalized communities to learn from and amplify their voices.
- New initiatives to change attitudes, behaviors, and investments, responding to racial and social justice protests in the United States and around the world and to risks and demands driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These discussions highlighted in particular initiatives that focus on young men aged 18-26, as these men fall outside of most juvenile justice reforms but are still developing their identity and full cognitive maturity. These characteristics make their engagement a particularly powerful lever for youth violence reduction overall.

OUTCOMES

The immediate outcome of this first phase of the initiative—with its focus on information collection and sharing—is this report, available in full online:

reports.SalzburgGlobal.org/youth-justice

It is divided into five sections:

- 1. Culture of Justice**
- 2. Public Health Approach**
- 3. Data and Metrics**
- 4. Public Communication**
- 5. Youth Violence and Safety**

Based on the growing consensus that effective criminal justice reform should look beyond the criminal justice system, each section considers community-centered, cross-sectoral approaches and socially integrative methods of engaging young people and violent offenders before, during, and after they encounter the criminal justice system.

Each section highlights the key challenges and opportunities identified by the initiative's international participants, with illustrative case studies, recommendations for consideration and action, and suggestions of where the research agenda should focus in future.

Background

How has youth justice evolved?

Youth violence and its consequences remain a global challenge, although there has been progress toward reforms in recent decades. Youth experiences with violence, whether gang-related or in homes, schools, or the community, vary by age, gender, place of residence, and socioeconomic status, but they are a global concern. Youth are very frequently victims of violence rather than its perpetrators. 42% of global homicides in 2020 affected youth 10-29 years of age and violence is the fourth leading cause of death in that age group.* Even when someone is not killed or badly injured, exposure to violence has lasting physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts on a young person's life, in addition to the effects of incarceration or contact with the criminal justice system on those who perpetrate violence. These can compound existing forms of social disadvantage or marginalization.

In recognition of these costs, many jurisdictions are engaged in youth violence reduction efforts and criminal justice reform. For example, in 2015, the World Health Organization released a major report focused on preventing youth violence. In 2019, the United Kingdom introduced dedicated Violence Reduction Units in the areas worst affected by violent crime. As recently as May 2021, the US Department of Justice released a “Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violent Crime”, seeking to better integrate work by government and non-government actors all over the United States with a specific emphasis on safer communities.

Whether guided by a human rights or cognitive development approach, criminal justice reforms have also brought increased use of alternatives like diversion programs and changes to the sentencing landscape (including the near elimination of life without parole for youth in the United States). Youth incarceration has decreased accordingly. The total number of youths in custody or confinement in the United States, which has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, has dropped by more than 60% since 1995 and some countries have almost eliminated youth incarceration. However, those youth that remain in the system (a daily average of 45,000 in the United States and 22,000 in Brazil, also known for its crowded facilities) continue to suffer adverse consequences from incarceration. (The 2019 Prison Policy Report also points out that 4,535, or about 1 in 10, US children were confined in adult facilities, which are less safe and lack age-appropriate services. Czechia by comparison had 76 incarcerated juveniles in 2021, for a population of 10.7m. The US population was 328m in 2019; Brazil's 203m in 2014.)

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent economic crises and global restrictions

* All references and resources are available online:
reports.SalzburgGlobal.org/youth-justice#introduction-resources

changed the landscape again. The severe limitations on daily life reduced home safety, as confinement and additional home stress increased child abuse and domestic violence. These stressors dramatically decreased mental health, particularly for groups who were vulnerable before the pandemic. Youth also experienced an increase in virtual dangers as the internet became one of very few social avenues, but unfortunately one haunted by cyber-bullying, access to hateful or triggering content, and grooming and sexual abuse. The disruption of normal protective factors—school, community groups, sports, and relationships outside home—left youth particularly vulnerable. Additionally, the economic impacts of COVID-19 threaten to disproportionately affect youth, already three times more likely to be unemployed prior to the pandemic, which could increase violence and crime rates. Meanwhile Brazil, South Africa and the United States saw major violent crime increases in 2020 and France saw a sharp rise in gang violence in particular.

In light of this evidence, there is growing recognition among policymakers and reform advocates in many countries that there is a need to invest more into violence reduction and criminal justice reform. Many jurisdictions are reimagining public safety and criminal justice. Communities are coalescing around visions that consider investments in collective well-being and the appropriate wraparound systems to sustain it. Community members want to see appropriate, effective, and equitable policy reforms that promote safety while minimizing harm to community members, and policy advocates are seeking ways to ensure that those most affected by these reforms are in the conversations shaping them. The effects of COVID-19 join a list of factors influencing the future of these reform efforts, including efforts for greater social equity and inclusion, significant conversations around police reform in the US and the UK, changing demographics and climate, migration patterns, new technologies, and shrinking public budgets.



Crafts produced and sold by Baltimore Youth Arts
(credit: Baltimore Youth Arts)

Cross-Cutting Themes

Six themes echo across the various sections of the report:

1. SUCCESSFUL YOUTH VIOLENCE REDUCTION SHOULD BE CO-CREATED WITH YOUTH—THEIR VOICES SHOULD BE PRIORITIZED IN THE CREATION OF COMMUNITY IDENTITIES, A SENSE OF BELONGING, AND SAFE PHYSICAL SPACES

Effective violence reduction programs bring youth into the heart of an intervention to help identify and implement their own solutions with support from experts and institutions as needed. This can prompt new solutions, develop a sense of ownership, and harnesses productive self-interest.

Intergenerational dialogue can combine energy and new ideas with experience from previous initiatives. Mentor/mentee programs as well as informal, sustained interactions like youth programs or sports leagues, can be effective ways of sustaining and broadening the dialogue. Such programs can facilitate informal dialogue with police and others in positions of authority, which supports learning and trust-building. Mentors can also show youth how to channel their energies and question authority or push boundaries in healthier ways.

Developing effective “waterfall leadership”, i.e., the capacity of engaged youth to lead their peers on an ongoing basis, ensures that young people can carry this work forward.



Trust building exercises at
Fundación Reintegra
(credit: Fundación Reintegra)

2. COMMUNITY COOPERATION AND TRUST ARE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION—BUT PUBLIC SAFETY EFFORTS HAVE HISTORICALLY UNDERMINED THAT TRUST WITH MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Violence reduction programs operate most effectively on a basis of trust between, broadly speaking, the community and public safety officials.* Youth learn and grow in their communities, developing habits and a set of life skills, including how they process emotions and challenges. The safety of these communities has a profound impact on youth lives and in turn, their communities play a key role in violence reduction programs from the earliest prevention to stopping retaliatory violence. However, the trust between communities and those responsible for public safety has often been undermined most strongly in the marginalized communities experiencing the highest rates of violence and crime. The excessive or targeted use of force, racial or social disparities coded into criminal justice systems, and histories linking law enforcement to inequitable policies all contribute to fostering this mistrust.

Effective interventions recognize these histories and make a concerted effort to engage and support communities in their efforts. They also begin to replace the traditional security lens with a proactive and holistic public health approach focused on prevention. Such an approach engages at-risk individuals before incidents occur and replaces police with trained experts on mental health or substance abuse where possible. This helps de-escalate situations and reduce the overall levels of violence, improving community safety.

3. DEDICATED LEADERSHIP IS VITAL FOR THE ABILITY TO CONVENE AND ALIGN STAKEHOLDERS, ELEVATE INITIATIVES, AND MOBILIZE RESOURCES—BUT LEADERS NEED THEIR OWN SUPPORT SYSTEMS

“Culture eats policy for breakfast”: Culture comes from the top, so strong leadership and sustained engagement promote policy change as those in positions of power have the ability to change structures—for example by implementing a public health approach and linking up agencies—and ways of working that the disempowered cannot reach. Culture also shapes how data and evidence are viewed, analyzed, and communicated, as well as which policy solutions even enter the discussion, rendering leadership equally important in changing these considerations. Political power also helps ensure resources reach those they are intended to benefit, and that those voices are included in the initial decisions on resource allocation. There may be more power and greater reach on the national levels, which can help raise awareness on key issues, but deeper work may happen locally, where people know each other personally.

* The distinctions between “community” and “public safety officials” are certainly not impermeable, as many people serve in both capacities. These words are used here to broadly delineate those who hold official roles rendering them responsible for public safety and those who live in the areas wherein safety is sought.

Beyond politics however, all actors can lead on taking an anti-discriminatory approach within their institutions to ensure that all youth benefit from equal opportunities. This may mean changing policies, procedures, and practices at all levels, as well as holding people and institutions accountable. One tangible example is writing explicitly inclusive criteria for all roles and reaching beyond the usual candidates to reshape employment pipelines.

Cultural change usually does not happen overnight and leaders themselves benefit from strong personal relationships and peer support. The challenges around youth violence are multi-faceted and beyond the scope of any one intervention's abilities. Systems are slow to change and may require repeated conversations, relationships, and strong targeted evidence to evolve. This work and its human consequences can be a heavy emotional burden for those engaged in violence reduction or criminal justice reform, which makes peer support, strong personal and institutional allyship, and community capacity important components of any reform effort.

4. LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVES SHOULD BE CHOSEN CAREFULLY TO CENTER ON THE PERSON AND TO AVOID STIGMATIZATION—FOCUSING ON A YOUTH'S POTENTIAL INSTEAD OF THEIR HISTORY

How people and events are discussed changes the listener's or reader's perception. To take one well-known example, the use of the term "superpredator" in the US drew on animal imagery to depict young black men as particularly dangerous, changing public perception and supporting narratives calling for their incarceration. As part of greater reform efforts, everyone from the media to policymakers can consider their use of language more carefully and increasingly use it to reflect innate human dignity and the value of all individuals. Person-first language is not a cure-all, but it can serve as a reminder that someone is a valuable part of the community. Words trigger associations that affect the reader's sympathies. When someone is described as a "student", "business leader", or "entrepreneur", the associations are very different from when the same person is described as a "convict", "felon", or "gang member" and yet they may be one and the same person. A "third-generation immigrant" is also just a "citizen". Changing language is a form of changing lenses and it can be used to highlight potential over history and include rather than exclude.

Sometimes language can also be a vehicle for recognizing that the structures or environment may be the problem, rather than the people involved. A teenager may not be exhibiting "bad" so much as "distressed" behavior. Shifting the language in small ways, like using "challenges" rather than "disorders" avoids pathologizing and supports an individual's agency in addressing these challenges.

5. MOST YOUTH ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE FREQUENT LONG-TERM OFFENDERS—IMPROVING THE ABILITY TO IDENTIFY THESE WOULD ALLOW THE REST TO LEAVE THE SYSTEM EARLIER

Consistent estimates indicate that 80-85% of system-involved youth could return to normal, productive lives as the chances of future incidents are low if they are given the right support systems. A US study examining these trends found that juvenile offenders fall into consistent groups typified by number and type of offenses. Only about 10% of juveniles became frequent offenders, while 21% drop off within a year or two of their first offense (making support during this time essential), and 57% report very few offenses after their initial involvement with the system at all. (The final group—12%—is also of interest as their rates of criminality rise around age 18.)

The difficulty is that it is currently not possible to predict someone's trajectory based on their initial offense or characteristics. Some factors like substance abuse are clearly influential but none are determinative. Progress is not linear and variability in the groups and an individual's ultimate "membership" appear to derive primarily from the intervening events and a youth's development. While this makes it difficult to predict outcomes and likely results in an overly broad deprivation of liberty, it also serves as a reminder that paths are not preordained. Youths should not be written off due to their initial offense or circumstance, as their outcomes can improve with the system's response and strong support networks.

6. DATA TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS IS BEING GATHERED—BUT FURTHER RESEARCH IS NEEDED

Strong evidence bases are vital for successful reforms. A vast array of data are being collected in many jurisdictions, by various bodies and for the advancement of multiple interventions. However, this data collection is often hindered by limited resources or political agendas. Where data is solid, it is often siloed, making comparative studies difficult. Much research is also still very US- or Euro-centric in either its focus or methodology. Greater collaboration between researchers on what is measured, how and by whom is needed to strengthen this evidence and expand reforms.

Beyond calling for the enhancement of existing data gathering practices, such as by drawing insights from "social trust" metrics and expanding data sets to include greater lived experience, this report also highlights needs for further research in each section, outlining both areas for focus and opportunities for collaboration where improved knowledge and understanding could have greatest impact on individuals, communities and policymaking.

Culture of Justice

Overview

When the culture of justice shifts away from a focus on safety, retribution, and systems of incarceration—the custody, control, and suppression model—to consider models that focus on human dignity, personal responsibility, and human rights as core values, youth violence prevention can be more effective.

Changing the culture of justice is an integral part of violence prevention. A healthier culture of justice starts by interrogating the “why” of a crime, to better understand why people are coming in conflict with the law and to invest resources into mitigating those factors, rather than merely enforcing the law and perpetuating a cycle of violence and crime. This requires understanding a youth’s background, not only to individuate the justice system’s response, but to prevent similar occurrences.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Justice systems can be more effective and prevent future violence by offering communities more opportunities for mediation, dialogue, and healing—and ultimately afford individuals more dignity and agency.
- Individuals and communities are often better served by restorative justice models.
- Justice systems can be internally reformed (see [Case Study 1 | New Jersey Police and Juvenile Justice Reform](#)) or completely remade (see [Case Study 2 | Georgian Police and Criminal Justice Reform](#)).
- Reform can also be driven by external international partners rather than domestic players, which raises a different set of considerations (see [Conditions for Reform in Countries of Transition](#)).
- The culture of justice can also be shifted from within the individual, such as through youth arts interventions (see [Case Study 3 | Baltimore Youth Arts](#)).

KEY RECOMMENDATION

- Reformers should consider looking beyond the criminal justice system to examine the reasons why people come into conflict with the law and work to mitigate those causes. This can prevent some conflicts from ever occurring, eliminating the downstream consequences and the cycle of violence.

DIVE DEEPER

Human Dignity

Restorative Justice

Case Study 1 | New Jersey Police and Juvenile Justice Reform

Case Study 2 | Georgian Police and Criminal Justice Reform

Case Study 3 | Baltimore Youth Arts

Conditions for Reform in Countries of Transition

Resources

Conclusions

From an individual's sense of dignity and agency to the broader themes of restorative justice and the key role of prosecutors to the ambitious reforms undertaken in New Jersey and Georgia to the intricacies of working with countries in transition, changing the culture of justice is deeply participatory.

Changing culture is equally a project for leaders, for institutions, and for the public to evolve their thinking. It is about demonstrating the human, safety, and financial benefits of a changed system and showing that accountability need not require punishment. It is about locating and addressing the weaknesses in the current system—corruption, bias, inequality—to arrive at systems that offer better safety and community outcomes. Such transformation may be slow and multi-faceted as each piece adjusts, but the depth of change can make a system more resilient in the face of challenge.

LOOKING AHEAD

Ultimately however, the criminal justice system alone cannot solve social injustices. Systemic challenges require systemic solutions. Changing the culture of justice is an integral part of violence prevention, but solutions must also ultimately flow from re-shaped social structures and opportunities. A broader approach to transformation—focused upstream of the criminal justice system—will reduce the number of people who come into conflict with the law and the impact of the criminal justice system on their lives.

One frequent factor when people come into continuous conflict with the law is race or identity. In many societies, disadvantaged social groups—whether defined by race,

ethnicity, religion, social status, or another factor—encounter public safety authorities more frequently. In the UK, Black people are stop-and-searched four times more often than white people and Black men have tasers drawn on them at a rate eight times that of white men. In the US, Black neighborhoods often experience high levels of social control and surveillance policing, but are under-served when it comes to emergency services. In India, caste distinctions are factored into police treatment, with increased brutality experienced by the Dalit (the lowest caste). These increased interactions with the police can increase a person's criminal record as well as their likelihood of being incarcerated, triggering serious life consequences that are less likely for those engaged in the same activity without police presence. These disparities are particularly problematic for non-violent offenses like drug possession and where they go so far as to be coded into the criminal justice system.

Notably, a history of disadvantage can also infuse interactions with local authorities, particularly police, with tension even if these authorities have undergone additional training and seek to diffuse tensions. This can cause disproportionate stress to these groups and affect community dynamics. The focus in moving forward and designing new systems should be on inclusivity (particularly at leadership levels) and dialogue to allow healing while also holding accountable those responsible for historical systemic injustice.

Systems like housing, banking, law enforcement, and even access to healthy food can be designed to perpetuate systemic inequalities, generating the causes of some crimes. In the US, housing and banking policies for example contributed to creating majority-minority neighborhoods that experience high levels of policing. These systems can be included in reforms advancing equality. During this process, the culture of policymaking should broaden, so that policymakers and politicians hear from uncommon voices with uncommon experiences to better understand the challenges experienced by affected communities. The knowledge necessary for change resides both in those who experienced the inequalities produced by these systems, as well as in those who control them. Sharing both sets of knowledge with the intent to create a more equitable society can support reforms.

FUTURE RESEARCH

One system to highlight as able to accelerate other cultural reforms and act as a force-multiplier is the educational system. Equal educational opportunity is particularly important in improving youth outcomes, but local structures can inhibit those opportunities. Merely having the right to education does not guarantee educational access in practice. Poorer areas often offer lower quality educational opportunities, which can promote negative cycles. The US educational system, for example, relies on property tax funding, which exacerbates socioeconomic disparities. Similarly, despite a constitutional right to education, some rural South African schools not only lack resources and teachers, but adequate sanitation and electricity, negatively affecting the learning environment.

Access to education or the lack thereof, with the resulting opportunities, plays into the likelihood of a youth becoming a criminal. Therefore, investing in education is one way to reduce crime and violence. Additionally, some schools currently interact with criminal justice institutions and processes in a problematic way. In the US, this takes the form of the “school to prison” pipeline, which can rob (disproportionately non-white) children of their access to education as well as their freedom by criminalizing minor infractions. Such interactions should be monitored and reformed to prevent such early transfers to the criminal justice system. Embracing positive discipline strategies instead of punitive ones can improve school safety and academic performance, improving outcomes for all students. (See Case Study 1 | Glasgow and Inter-Agency Collaboration in Public Health Approach section.) Going forward, the question of where educational investments could play a role in violence prevention and how to best teach the contested histories whose legacies shape student identities and experiences with the justice system should be further investigated.

Empathy: The Key to a Justice System that Heals

How do we change a justice system that fails so many? From the US to Ukraine the root answer might be the same

[Read the feature](#)

[Watch the video](#)



Public Health Approach

Overview

A public health approach treats violence like a health crisis, suggesting policymakers use scientific evidence to identify what causes violence and what interventions can stop it from spreading.

This expands into a whole system approach when different organizations and professions come together to support youth and address the causes of violence holistically.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The most effective public health approaches are whole-system approaches, marked by encouraging collaboration across stakeholders from different agencies and organizations, conducting root cause and risk factor analysis, and identifying appropriate investments into prevention.
- Whole-system approaches link public safety, health, education, social services, and criminal justice systems to enable proactive interventions before a young person ever encounters the criminal justice system (see [Case Study 1 | Glasgow and Inter-Agency Collaboration](#)).
- Effective public health approaches share several basic components: cooperative and collaborative program design, shared and sustained funding, and reliable data (see [Value of Public Health Approach](#)).
- While not part of the health system or service, schools play a vital role in a public health approach to youth violence as they offer a means of early intervention (see [Communities and Schools](#)).
- Preventative measures—e.g., promoting critical thinking and using peer networks to break down and build resilience to extremist beliefs—are more successful than reactive interventions when combating extremist ideologies (see [Combating Extremism](#)).
- A public health approach both requires mutual respect and trust between communities and those in positions of power, including teachers, administrators, and police officers—but over-policing should be avoided, and local contexts fully understood (see [Trust, Police, and Community Safety](#)).
- A public health approach recognizes the links between the social determinants of health such as social disadvantage and discrimination, and social deprivation, violence, crime and trauma, and seeks to support communities accordingly (see [Social Determinants of Violence and Trauma](#)).
- Experience of domestic violence and substance abuse can both be indicators of future propensity for violence (see [Domestic Violence and Substance Use Disorders](#)).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- All relevant stakeholders—from the bottom-up to the top-down—should be identified and included to ensure successful adoption of public health approaches.
- These relevant stakeholders should collaborate closely, including sharing budgets.
- Programs should be iterative, inclusive of the communities they serve, informed by ongoing data collection, and context appropriate.
- Researchers should look beyond traditional providers of public health approaches, such as health and social care services, to the education system and the communities themselves to expand existing data sets.

DIVE DEEPER

Value of the Public Health Approach

Communities And Schools

Case Study 1 | Glasgow and Inter-Agency Collaboration

Combating Extremism

Trust, Police, and Community Safety

Social Determinants of Violence and Trauma

Case Study 2 | Switzerland and Heroin Assisted Treatment (HAT)

Resources

Conclusions

The public health approach is a powerful way to draw on a broader set of skills and experiences in addressing violence and its root causes. Whether a reform begins by focusing on the provision of safer spaces and schools or retraining local authorities, or supporting people with substance use disorder, most public health approaches share certain components.

LOOKING AHEAD

First, it is important to identify all the relevant players and ensure that buy-in to a single mission occurs across the board and all relevant organizations, not only at the top or on the ground-level. This often means consistent training on the overall approach and on related

matters like trauma-informed practice and biases. This may also mean sharing budgets with people or organizations who have the necessary expertise and reaching into specific places like hospitals where the cycle of violence can be broken. Close collaboration and broader understanding ensure that all relevant knowledge can be collected and shared effectively, and it may unlock new avenues for prevention.

Programs should be iterative and closely involve the youth and community they serve. Not only can and should youth be involved in finding their own solutions, these close discussions allow programs to be proactive, to understand local needs and challenges and address them before they turn into violence. Ongoing data collection can also help monitor progress and highlight areas in need of additional attention.

Finally, context matters. Public health approaches should be organic to their communities and consider any legacies of marginalization or unequal opportunity. These can continue to affect a community's experience or their relationship with local authorities. Such legacies take time and concerted effort to undo but addressing them contributes significantly to violence prevention.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As researchers seek to develop and evaluate new public health interventions, much of the work remains reactive and many of the traditional models around research and evaluation are US- and Euro-centric. New public health solutions may not be found in health or social care, which reflect the “acute” end of the spectrum, but in the daily ecosystem: in education, the community, and how youth experience the lives they lead. These feedback loops could be developed further to understand and replicate this demonstrated resiliency.

On the development of new research and interventions, experts in this area may benefit from collaborating more frequently with related disciplines to gain a broader perspective. They might also consider new research better incorporating the experience of impacted communities and exploring the interactions between disadvantage, marginalization, and youth violence. This is particularly important in the field of mental health research. Such broader consultations would expand existing data sets and help better tailor interventions to a community's need.

A Sum of its Parts: The Whole System Approach

How the UK is shifting the focus of a long-running problem and taking a whole-system approach to stop youth violence.

[Read the feature](#)

[Watch the video](#)



Workshop of the Peace Ambassadors Integration Organization, Kenya
(photo courtesy of Samuel Karuita)

Data and Metrics

Overview

Strong evidence bases are the foundation for developing a consistent data-based message that can be translated for policymakers and communicated to and understood by the public—a key component of successful reforms. They are also necessary for comparative work and for identifying the most promising interventions.

However, each piece—from choosing the correct metrics to integrating and analyzing the data to finally presenting it to policymakers and the public—presents unique challenges. While data are being collected in many jurisdictions, by various initiatives and both official and civil society bodies, the lack of resources or the presence of political agendas can hinder this collection. Data are often siloed even when collected, making it difficult to access, integrate, and interpret and to track progress or differences between systems.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Data are often interpreted, analyzed and communicated through pre-existing cultural, political and power structures, which may be driven by particular institutional interests or fail to capture nuanced experiences within affected communities. Alternative metrics such as social trust may be more insightful (see [What Are the Best Metrics?](#)).
- Community-based organizations closest to impacted communities and city, county or state-level officials do not always use the same metrics, leaving communities to feel “over-studied, yet underserved”. This is a gap stronger metrics can close and inform better policy outcomes (see [What Are the Best Ways to Collect Data?](#)).
- The existence of data does not automatically change policy (see [Data-Resistant Evaluations](#) and [Post-Collection: Policy Advocation](#)).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- New metrics to track reforms’ desired outcomes, which are viable even in those countries that cannot invest in vast data collection mechanisms, should be developed.
- Researchers should work more closely with advocates to ensure that their insights directly inform policy and that their results reach the broader public.

DIVE DEEPER

Data Collection and Metric Definition

Case Study 1 | Oakland and Public Safety

Case Study 2 | Chicago and Gun Violence

Data-Resistant Evaluations

Post-Collection: Policy Advocacy

Case Study 3 | MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge

Ethical Considerations

Resources

Conclusions

Data and metrics are integral to the design, execution, and evaluation of successful interventions, as well as to policymaking more generally.

LOOKING AHEAD

It is essential to develop metrics linked to intended policy outcomes and in consultation with those the policies are intended to serve, with the best systems combining top-down and bottom-up approaches to produce data that is both community-specific and comparable across jurisdictions. Data collection is often seen as a daunting, additional expense since the development of a strong data collection system or the cleaning of existing data can mean high start-up costs. However, these early costs are likely to produce financial and social savings later and can ensure that ongoing investments target the most impactful areas. The public sharing of data can also be a useful advocacy tool, not only in holding institutions accountable from the outside, but also in insulating those institutions against potential false narratives, which may question the efficacy of reform efforts. Data are not a cure-all, but the ability to track inputs and outcomes is an important part of any reform effort.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In addition to the need for better metrics, more data may help solve criminal justice puzzles. For example, many have observed that only about 10-15% of people in the criminal justice system cannot be rehabilitated and therefore require the system's strictest measures. 85-90% of people, however, could with some additional support return to a normal, productive

life. Enhancing a jurisdiction’s ability to predict an individual’s future conduct could therefore allow more people to regain their freedom and return to their lives faster, with fewer disruptions, reducing the burden and cost of the system overall.

Similarly, the integration of existing data collected by other fields—those focused on sustainability, nutrition, and sleep to name a few—with data from the criminal justice space may reveal new patterns. These linkages are under-researched but could inform more targeted investment in preventative and supportive work to reduce incidents of violence. (See Public Health Approach.)

Finally, the stagnant fields of gun and gang violence also need motivation to innovate and form closer interactions with their constituencies. Research and interventions on youth violence and gangs struggle to define who is “at-risk” and may not always reach the most affected communities. When this happens, the data gathered is not always accurate to the wider population.

What’s Measured, Matters

How capturing better data and measuring social trust could help build better criminal justice system—for the people within it and their communities

[Read the feature](#)

[Watch the video](#)



Public Communication

Overview

Effective public communications around youth violence interventions and criminal justice reform are critical. They appear at every stage from convincing policymakers and the community that reform is necessary to unlocking the requisite capital to avoiding spin and protecting reforms from being portrayed as “soft on crime” once they’ve been set in motion.

Beyond examining core policy decisions, it is important to consider lessons from successful communication strategies globally. These strategies are particularly important in a time when many countries are experiencing fragmentation and polarization, low levels of trust in government, and rising populist and nationalist sentiments. In today’s fragmented media landscape, different parts of the population may focus on facts that threaten to derail the larger conversation, making it hard to maintain focus. Given the centrality of the feeling of safety to people’s lives, reforms to change that perception are particularly vulnerable to challenge. At the same time, rising crime in some countries, including the US, has also made the security paradigm more salient. In this context, effective communications strategies have become even more important, if challenging, for advocates.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The core considerations of public communications are the basics of understanding the narrative context, creating an emotional connection, and monitoring all language—as well as understanding the importance of messengers and partners (see [Core Considerations](#)).
- Messengers are essential to ensuring that messages are heard and in helping insulate those messages against challenge—but identifying the right messengers can be a challenge in and of itself. Done well, it can pay dividends. Done poorly, and it can scupper the message entirely (see [The Power of Messengers](#) and [The Power of Partners](#)).
- Mapping the local and national context where reforms are focused can help prevent falling for false messengers or misunderstanding community dynamics, and thus ultimately communication efforts can be more successful (see [Mapping the Context](#)).
- After mapping specific communication challenges in preparation for launching a communication strategy, there are multiple methods for setting communications strategies into motion, ranging from government inquiries and surveys to documentaries, social media campaigns and study tours (see [Setting the Strategy into Motion](#)).

- Communications challenges can be complex (see [Case Study | Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao's Legal Reforms](#)) and they do not end once a reform has passed. Communications often need to be ongoing (see [After the Reform](#)).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Know your audience—and work locally rather than nationally, focusing on bottom-up rather than top-down strategies.
- Work with local messengers and seek out creative or unusual partners—but vet them carefully to ensure they represent and meet community need.
- Communicate with emotion rather than dry facts—but ensure all points are supported by evidence and logic.
- Recognize that language matters—and ensure your actions align with your words, including after the reform has been enacted.

DIVE DEEPER

[Core Considerations](#)

[The Power Of Messengers](#)

[The Power Of Partners](#)

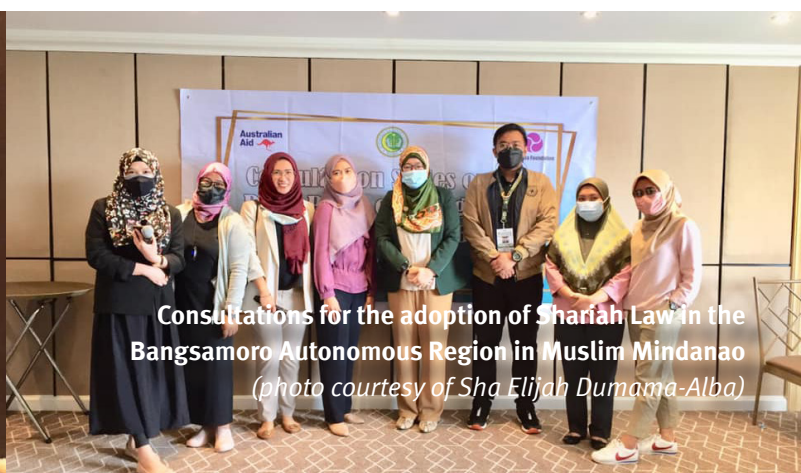
[Mapping The Context](#)

[Setting Strategy Into Motion](#)

[Case Study | Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and Judicial Reforms](#)

[After The Reform](#)

[Resources](#)



Consultations for the adoption of Shariah Law in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
(photo courtesy of Sha Elijah Dumama-Alba)



**New Jersey Attorney General
Gurbir Grewal addresses Newark PD**
(credit: Flickr/New Jersey Office of the
Attorney General)

Conclusions

For those looking to develop a public communications strategy around youth violence reduction efforts or criminal justice reform, the Fellows of the Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice initiative give the following recommendations:

1. Know your audience
2. Do not insist on moral purity; accept and encourage compromise
3. Work via local, community, and state engagement rather than national
4. Consider unusual coalitions
5. Vet your local partners carefully to ensure they represent and meet community need
6. Communicate with emotion over logic, though everything should be logically founded
7. Recognize that language matters
8. Seek out good and beware false messengers
9. Effective communication is bottom-up rather than top-down
10. Keep an open line to local media
11. Ensure your actions align with your words

LOOKING AHEAD

As conversations informing this report focused on the messaging and coalition-building undergirding reform efforts, future conversations should consider further the ways in which narratives evolve once they have left the control of the reformers.

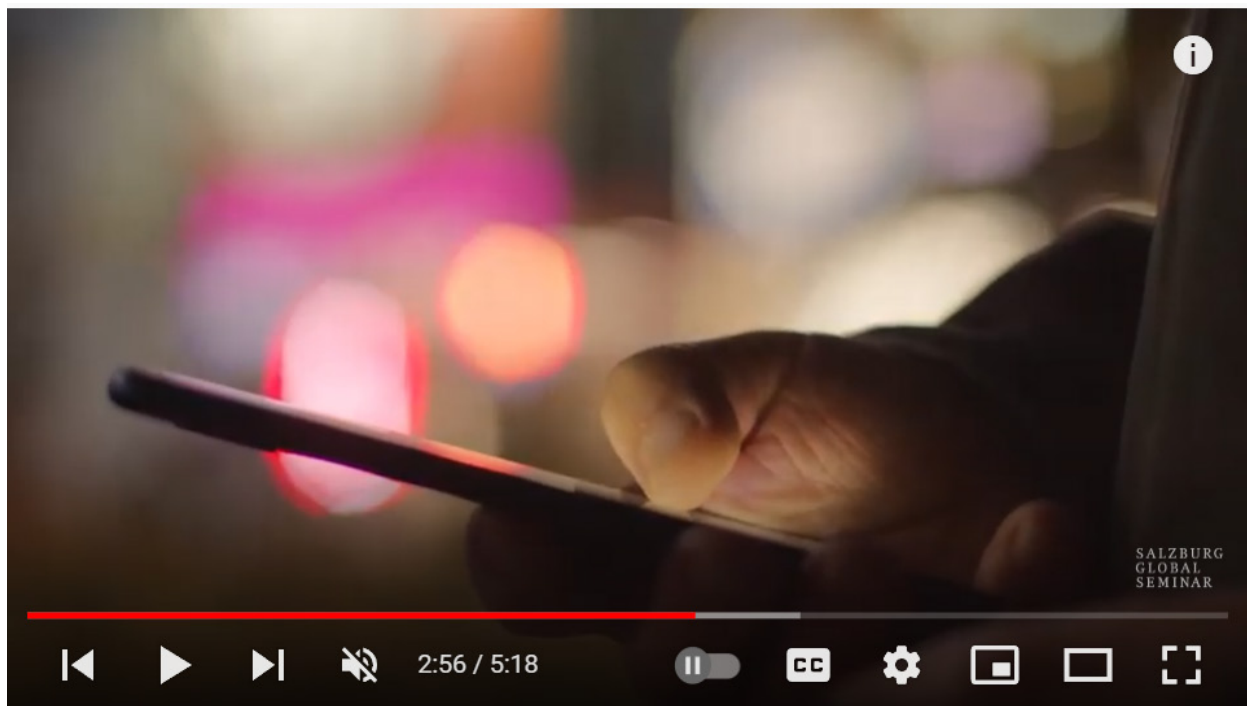
As social media has changed the media landscape and rendered the determination of “truth” more complicated, the danger that narratives will evolve in ways that challenge their authors has risen. Those working in public communications should consider carefully how they monitor and address potential challenges.

Shifting the Narrative

From the economical to the emotional, how we frame nuanced narratives around criminal justice reform can make or break its success

[Read the feature](#)

[Watch the video](#)



People Lobbying for the Bangsamoro Organic Law
(credit: Flickr/UN Women/Maricel Aguilar)

Youth Violence and Safety

Overview

Securing youth psychological and physical well-being, as well as inclusion in their communities, can successfully contribute to the reduction of violence—outside traditional justice institutions.

One frequent contributor to youth violence is previous experiences with violence in the home or the community, i.e., a lack of safety in the places where young people should feel safe. Much attention has been focused on early childhood interventions, but there is a need to identify and invest in effective programs for young adults.

Schools, families, and community programs are central players in all these initiatives. Similarly, Key elements of a successful long-term intervention include: a foundation of trusted people, which includes mentors with a more advanced perspective or education level and/or support services, as well as the development of future opportunities, i.e., jobs. Employment is not only important for creating economic opportunity but also for identity formation. Generally, a sense of belonging and a group identity is important at these early life stages and successful programs build a positive community, with chances for civic engagement and giving back. Many of successful programs also include an arts component, which allows participants to reach beyond their usual mental bounds.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Successful prevention programs preempt young people from ever coming in contact with criminal justice system. Instead, they generate feelings of belonging and empower young people in their communities, dispelling the tendency of some towards violence (see [Prevention](#) and [Case Study 1 | UNESCO and Open Schools](#)).
- Discipline/adjudication programs like youth courts focus on accountability and deterrence in an age-appropriate manner after violence has occurred (see [Adjudication and Disciplinary Stage](#)).
- Reintegration programs operate after disciplinary action to guide youth through their healing and back into society with healthier habits (See [Case Study 2 | Mexico and Alternative Skills and Pathways by the Fundación Reintegra](#) and [Case Study 3 | Chicago and Gun Violence](#)).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fund preventative work—the social and financial benefits of investing in youth early are considerable, both in preventing the social costs of violence as well as the financial burden of the criminal justice system.
- When working with youth, preserve a sense of accountability while providing the foundations for a future life, such as educational and vocational opportunities, as well as support services and the possibility of erasing criminal history.
- Ensure that all partners—regardless of professional background or role in a particular initiative—share a common vision, approach, language, and understanding of the factors that can contribute to youth challenges.

DIVE DEEPER

Prevention

Case Study 1 | UNESCO and Open Schools

Case Study 2 | Mexico and Alternative Skills and Pathways

Case Study 3 | Chicago and Gun Violence

Adjudication and Disciplinary Stage

Case Study 4 | Brazil and a Parallel Prison System

Resources



Print-making training at Fundación Reintegra
(credit: Fundación Reintegra)

Conclusions

Early childhood experiences have a lasting impact. It is important for all members of the community to recognize this and that institutions like schools—which can serve as safe physical spaces as well as places of discovery, learning, and training—are supported in their work.

LOOKING AHEAD

Supporting educational institutions and embedding them further in their communities can encourage partnerships that allow youth to develop their identities, independence, and healthy ways of coping with stressors. Much work in youth violence prevention builds on the development of relationships with trusted people and on the opportunities afforded by education, vocational training, and employment, which can also bring a positive sense of identity and belonging. While preventative work is always challenging to fund, the social and financial benefits of investing in youth early are considerable, both in preventing the social costs of violence as well as the financial burden of the criminal justice system.

In cases where youth do interact with criminal justice systems, those systems should remember that youth have different thought processes, needs, and potential than adults. When working with youth, it is important to preserve a sense of accountability while providing the foundations for a future life. These include not only educational and vocational opportunities, but also support services and the possibility of erasing a history of limited criminal activity should not be dismissed, given the disruptive cost of preserving such a history to the youth in question.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a need to better connect research around mental health and the effects of trauma on the brain with the workings of the criminal justice system to mitigate the potential for further harm.

Across the spectrum of work, parties engaging in youth violence prevention and criminal justice reform should ensure that all partners—regardless of professional background or role in a particular initiative—share a common vision, approach, language, and understanding of the factors that can contribute to youth challenges. This also means ensuring that leadership colleagues are prepared to engage with and respond to local community needs, hopes, and fears, including by having a historical understanding where appropriate

Finally, this report and the discussions informing it, focused primarily on young men, but it is worth reiterating that young women also experience violence and can take lead roles in preventing it. They are not exclusively victims or guardians, however. Gender stereotypes can reinforce unhelpful responses from violence prevention organizations or even the criminal justice system itself and should be considered carefully going forward.

Prevention is Better Than a Cure

“Adult crime, adult time”? Five experts debunk the need to be tough on crime—and propose impactful alternatives

[Read the feature](#)

[Watch the video](#)



Participants and volunteers of READI Chicago
(credit: Flickr/READI Chicago)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

The meetings of the Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice initiative have drawn out promising interventions across countries and challenges, addressing and identifying common themes around education, identity, opportunity, community, and supportive services as key ingredients in youth violence prevention and intervention efforts.

What was clear from the months-long conversations between the international cohort of Salzburg Global Fellows is that addressing youth violence, safety and justice requires a cross-sectoral, collaborative approach—no single agency, sector or level of government can make sufficient, substantial or sustainable progress alone.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Prioritizing youth voices and centering the needs of affected communities leads to more effective policymaking in addressing youth violence, safety and justice.
- Shifting the culture of justice away from a focus on safety, retribution, and systems of incarceration toward models that focus on empathy, human dignity, personal responsibility, and human rights, can make youth violence prevention more effective.
- Adopting a public health approach by linking public safety, health, education, social services, and criminal justice systems can enable proactive interventions before a young person ever encounters the criminal justice system.
- Closing the data gap between affected communities and municipal, state or national-level policymakers can help end the sense of being “over-studied yet under-served” and inform better policy outcomes.
- Investing in and fostering greater collaboration between researchers across disciplines—e.g., education, public health, mental health, psychology, sociology, criminology, law, etc.—can help improve knowledge and understanding of the root causes of youth violence and support more up-stream policy interventions to address youth safety and justice reform.
- Tailoring public communication around a reform to different audiences and identifying the best messengers to speak to those audiences can better ensure a reform initiative’s success.
- Securing young people’s psychological and physical well-being as well as inclusion in their communities, such as by addressing family trauma and providing employment, can successfully contribute to the reduction of violence and exposure to the criminal justice system.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage affected communities in development, implementation, and assessment of reform initiatives.
- Expand research focus beyond US and Europe to seek out knowledge and understanding of youth violence, safety and justice reform in other geographies.
- Look beyond the criminal justice system to examine the reasons why people come into conflict with the law and work to mitigate those causes—e.g., poverty, lack of opportunity, existing trauma, systemic racism—and end the cycle of violence.
- Adopt a public health approach by engaging a wide array of stakeholders—e.g., education, health, social care, community policing—to support youth and address the causes of violence holistically.
- Consider new metrics—e.g., social trust—to better track impact of reforms.
- Recognize that language matters and avoid using terms that can dehumanize individuals or communities.
- Fund preventative work—the social and financial benefits of investing in youth early are considerable, both in preventing the social costs of violence as well as the financial burden of the criminal justice system.



Participants and volunteers of Baltimore Youth Arts
(credit: Baltimore Youth Arts)

Next Steps

The conversations and workshops that took place in 2021 are intended to form Phase 1 of the Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice initiative. Salzburg Global Seminar and its partners now seek to move into Phase 2 of this multi-year initiative in 2022.

Phase 2 will bring the core network of participants together (taking into account the health, safety, and possibility of international travel for participants with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic) for a structured sequence of virtual and in-person programs. Stakeholders will identify and spearhead the most promising global examples of violence reduction and criminal justice transformation, proven through research to be effective, viable, and replicable. In today's polarized societies, solutions are urgently needed as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates existing inequities, and drivers of violence. Participants will identify and evaluate approaches, tools and technologies in four specific fields:

1. New intervention points that could have long-term benefits for reducing violence, injustice, racism, and implicit bias/prejudice in and outside criminal justice systems;
2. Multi-country comparisons, focusing initially on national/subnational jurisdictions that have pioneered successful approaches in criminal justice policy and practice;
3. Direct engagement of people and communities of color and other marginalized communities to learn from and amplify their voices;
4. New initiatives to change attitudes, behaviors, and investments, responding to racial and social justice protests in the United States and around the world and to risks and demands driven by the pandemic.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

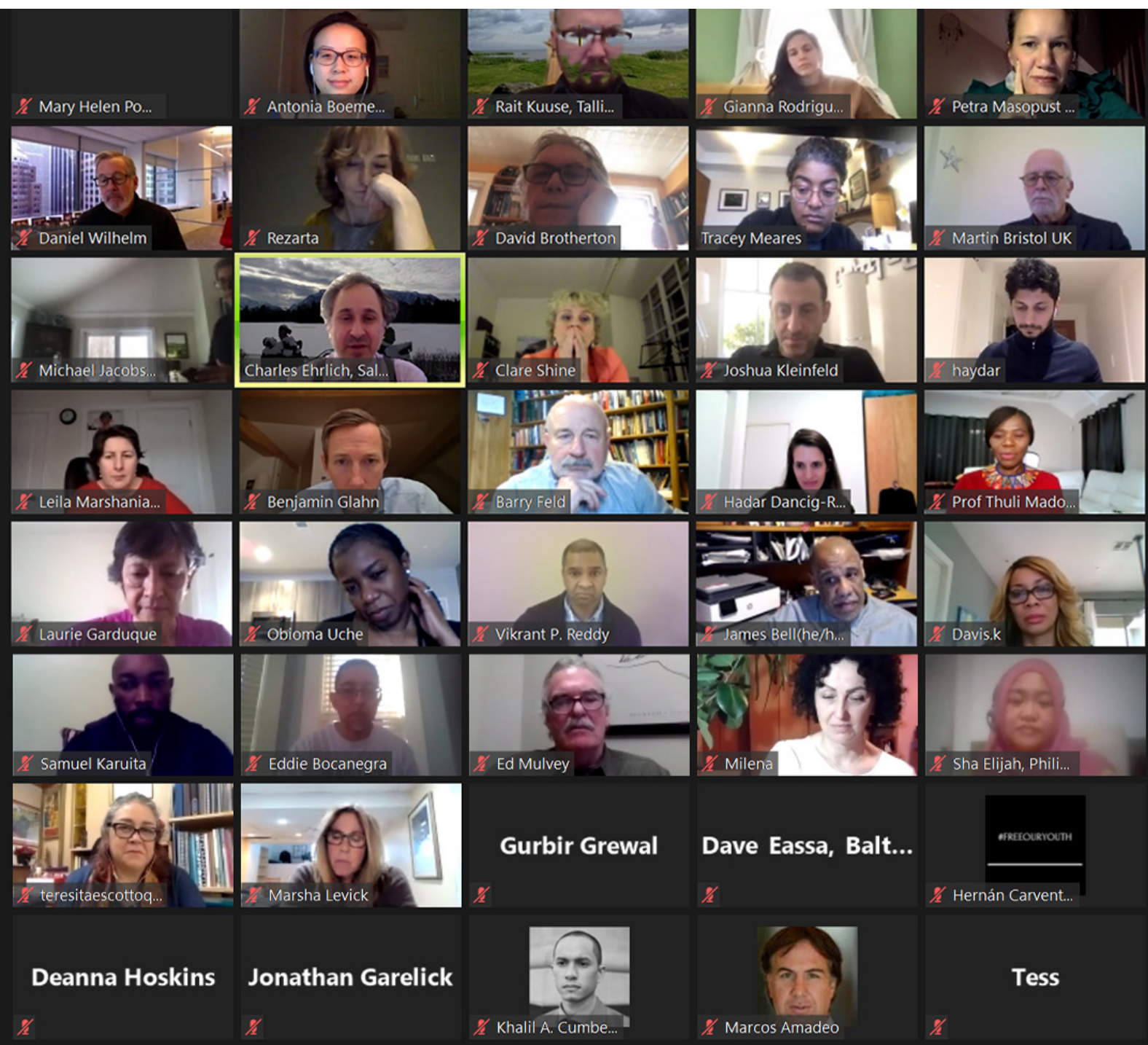
During the first half of 2022, meetings will include:

- A **public-facing webinar series**, to expand the reach of the initiative. These will take place between late-January and mid-March 2022, and will highlight innovative work carried out by Fellows, with the objective of inspiring policymakers and activists in a position to spearhead new reforms to join the initiative.
- Follow-up working group meetings to bring new Fellows into the discussions. The newly selected Fellows will be those who are best placed to catalyze the implementation of recommendations identified in this report. The objective of these follow-up meetings will be to identify practical and concrete next steps ahead of an in-person retreat.
- An in-person program, pandemic-permitting in mid-May. Up to 60 Fellows will be invited to take part in a strategic retreat-like meeting over several days. The retreat will take place in a workshop-style format, focusing on designing practical outcomes and pilot

activities which can be prepared and implemented, Fellows receiving support and advice from their relevant peers across the globe.

ONGOING COLLABORATIONS

Subsequently, the initiative will communicate and disseminate the most promising research-based strategies to reduce rates of violence, incarceration, and recidivism to policy makers and communities in the US and globally through publications, media, products, video interviews/documentaries, targeted recommendations, and a future cross-sector research agenda. Fellows will be in a position to continue to help support each other with ideas, expertise, and research as they advance reform in their respective jurisdictions, working with a wide range of stakeholders.



Future Opportunities

Beyond the Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice initiative, there remain many avenues for future development, ranging from the need for a broader set of allies beyond community advocates, local and national governments, judiciaries, NGOs and academia—all of whom were represented in the Salzburg Global conversations.

POTENTIAL FUTURE ALLIES

Future allies for justice reform include, first and foremost members of the law and justice systems, including (but by no means limited to) judges and judicial clerks, public defenders, law enforcement officers and prosecutors—especially those who would be open to data-driven reforms in the face of rising crime. There is a growing sense among some “tough-on-crime” actors that the punitive system is not work; how can that discontent be harnessed to support justice reform without them dismissing such reforms as being “soft-on-crime”?

Given the role that family trauma plays in exacerbating youth violence, there is scope for allying with organizations addressing domestic violence in order to mitigate youth violence and increase youth safety. In many communities, these sorts of services—as well as other community outreach efforts—are led by churches, mosques and other religious groups, who could also be coopted into these prevention and wider reform efforts.

There exists a clear need to build stronger allyship among local and state governments, as well as with corporations and the private sector. Particularly given the private sector’s resources, training expertise, and ability to access critical conversations, companies can play an important role in improving youth outcomes. The opportunities for investment range from enhancing youth training to changing employment practices. Some firms have already invested in this work, including by helping provide vocational training, mentorship, career opportunities, and reviewing hiring criteria that can be discriminatory. There is more however that can be done, and larger social change will require broader partnerships as most of the initiatives highlighted here are relatively small-scale.

Another key set of private sector partners could come from the technology sector. Some Fellows highlighted the influence of social media in particular. While the social media companies themselves may have differing roles, and variable public perceptions as well, it was seen that particularly from larger technology companies like Meta, owners of Facebook and Instagram and ByteDance, known for TikTok, whose platforms today play an inadvertent role in encouraging youth violence, might be re-purposed to promote more inclusive and transformative messaging.

Environmental organizations and city agencies that consider the built environment, and the creation of additional green spaces should also collaborate with organizations addressing youth violence, to create spaces that are not only safe, but more inclusive, centered on and perhaps co-designed by the youth they serve. These should be accessible to all, supporting healthier lives.

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS

There is clear need for investment in back-office support to those working in youth violence reduction and criminal justice reform. Human resources, legal, finance and other teams can be very expensive, but are essential to doing this work well. The development of solutions to lower these costs, be that cooperation, technical solutions, or otherwise would free up essential resources to deliver this important work.

Similarly, partnering with customer relationship management (CRM) companies like Salesforce could unlock new possibilities for youth interventions like street outreach programs, which would benefit from the ability to more easily manage individuals in their systems and track their progress through vocational trainings. Similarly, the software can provide and analyze data on weaknesses, e.g., frequently missed days of work, more easily. The ability to map social networks and to track patterns across individuals would benefit these organizations as they seek to improve their interventions and maximize their impact.

Finally, there are promising efforts at every step of the way, from prevention to improving short-term diversion programs and better re-settlement programs. Ultimately, at the final stage and given what is known about the development of young adults, it is important to explore youth alternatives to incarceration more concretely. These may vary by country and national contexts, but youth need a balance of structure to regain control of their lives and build healthy habits, with the potential for a complete fresh start. As the Young Adult Court demonstrates, for example, the removal of limited criminal histories are an important component of reclaiming a life, the potential for which is an important part of rehabilitation.



(credit: Shutterstock)

Salzburg Global Seminar

Salzburg Global Seminar is an independent non-profit organization with a 75-year-long history of bringing together current and future leaders for retreats in the historic setting of Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria.

Our inspiring environment, remote from the day-to-day buzz, allows participants from across the globe to come together and speak candidly, learn from each other, and return to their companies and communities with renewed purpose and fresh ideas.

We convene diverse voices from across generations, geographies and sectors, which would otherwise unlikely have a chance to exchange views. Together they create outside-the-box solutions and expand their networks in unprecedented ways.

Our focus is on addressing challenging questions that benefit from cross-sector and interdisciplinary dialogue and require the head space to step back and explore innovative approaches. The three areas we focus on are: trust and the rule of law, long-term and sustainable development, and creativity and social systems change.

Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice

The Global Innovations on Youth Violence, Safety and Justice initiative seeks to tackle youth violence and promote youth safety and criminal justice reform. Launched in January 2021, this major multi-year series brings together diverse stakeholders, including young adults, to address the legal, economic, and social weaknesses and inefficiencies of judicial and custodial systems across multiple jurisdictions.

For more info. please visit:
www.SalzburgGlobal.org