

THE FUTURE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM & PUBLIC SAFETY

A CALIFORNIA 100 ISSUE ROADMAP FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION



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When it comes to criminal justice, as California goes, so goes the nation. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the state ramped up mass incarceration and passed laws that had adverse consequences, especially for low-income communities and communities of color. States across the country emulated California's tough-on-crime tactics. Now, California is again leading on criminal justice reform, but this time setting the tone for a smarter and more equitable system.

Perhaps more than any other state, California is immersed in a period of fundamental reform to its criminal justice system, most of which are intended to reduce the state's massive prison population. So far, these reforms seem to be working: California has a much lower incarceration rate than the national average. Most importantly, these significant reforms have not harmed public safety. Regardless, corrections costs remain high, racial inequities persist throughout California's criminal justice system, and surveys reveal that Californians still perceive bias in the state's criminal justice system.

As California looks to the future, it must grapple with calls for new reforms to other aspects of the system, including sweeping police reform in an effort to target racial disparities, and maintain a focus on a more equitable criminal justice system throughout the state.

FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

What will these changes mean for current and future generations of Californians, and how can we make sure that California's future in criminal justice reform remains innovative, resilient, inclusive, sustainable, and equitable?

In April 2022, the California 100 Initiative released a policy and future scenarios report on criminal justice reform, developed jointly by authors at the UC Irvine School of Social Ecology and the University of Arizona. The team conducted extensive primary and secondary research, and spoke with a wide array of experts in the public and private sectors to examine possible scenarios and policy options for future-focused action.

"When it comes to public safety and criminal justice reform, California has done many things right. But, it also has fallen short," said **Charis E. Kubrin, a professor of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine's School of Social Ecology.** "Corrections spending has not tracked with population declines, and costs remain high. Despite this spending, crime rates have not fallen proportionately, suggesting that the state is reaping diminishing crime-control returns on its incarceration investments. Which path will California choose? That's a critical question."



FUTURE SCENARIOS

Other key takeaways from the California 100 report include a consideration of policy options that improve criminal justice reform under **four future scenarios** that center around two dimensions: whether or not the state’s economy is characterized by expansion or contraction, and whether attitudes are motivated by fear and the desire to “get tough” on crime, or by hope for reforms and the desire to “get smart” on crime.

In a context where the economy is expanding and the state faces a budget surplus, the scenarios range from generous spending on programs that focus on prevention and addressing the root causes of recidivism, to a return to mass incarceration and high spending on punishment and deterrence. In a context where the economy is contracting and the state is in a budget deficit, the scenarios range from saving costs by reforming sentencing guidelines and using advancements in risk assessment to minimize both incarceration and recidivism, to finding ways to finance punitive measures through fines and employing new technologies that vastly increase surveillance .

Whatever the scenario, the research commissioned by California 100 indicates that we should refrain from “doing nothing” as a default or fall-back option. In order for California to perform better under these various scenarios, the state will need to investigate, deliberate over, and enact innovative solutions that advance **resilience** (such as enabling individuals, families, and communities recover from hardship and trauma), **inclusion** (building trust and meaningful, respectful, and ongoing engagement among stakeholders and communities), **sustainability** (by making careful and more efficient use of natural resources), and **equity** (implementing programs that reduce disparities and repair the injustices of past government actions).



Artist rendering of future scenarios in criminal justice reform
 Source: California 100



THE CALIFORNIA 100 ROADMAP

The California 100 report on policies and future scenarios is the first step in a multi-stage process that is designed to inspire and engage Californians—from a variety of sectors and all walks of life—to build a stronger future for current and future generations. In the summer of 2022, our expert and intergenerational Commission will conduct a series of listening sessions throughout the state, to solicit feedback on the ideas generated by our research and to generate additional big and bold ideas for consideration by public and private agencies, as well as by everyday Californians. We will also be generating insights from our policy innovation projects throughout the state that cover a variety of topics, and our deep engagement on questions of science and technology as they relate to a variety of issues, including criminal justice reform.

In early 2023, we will take these various policy ideas and scenarios, and engage in a process of deliberative democracy featuring a representative cross-section of California residents. The goal of this deliberative exercise is to understand the conditions under which Californians from various walks of life can come to agreement on the long-term challenges facing the state and, importantly, the kind of bold and visionary solutions we need to put the state on a stronger trajectory for the next century.

California 100 will also be engaging intentionally with young Californians, who have the most to gain or lose in the coming century. Our team members will engage young people throughout the state, including in high school and college settings, and will organize a statewide youth summit that will produce a manifesto for the future of California.

Finally, in Winter and Spring 2023, our intergenerational Commission will draft a vision and strategy document for the future of California, based on briefing materials that build on insights from the various streams of work. California 100 will then launch a culminating event in early summer 2023 that serves as the formal launch of the vision and strategy document and, importantly, also brings together leaders and partners from our various streams of work and prior engagement.

Our culminating event in the summer of 2023 will:

1. Showcase the pressing need for California to prioritize long-term futures,
2. Build an ambitious yet achievable vision and strategy that are grounded in rigorous research and community engagement, and
3. Inspire others to do the same, providing tools that a variety of partners (including policymakers, government agency officials, business leaders, activists, researchers, and next-gen leaders from various sectors) can use to build their own aspirational visions and strategies for California's long-term success.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA 100

The California 100 Initiative envisions a future that is innovative, sustainable, and equitable for all. Our mission is to strengthen California's ability to collectively solve problems and shape our long-term future over the next 100 years. California 100 is organized around 15 policy domains and driven by interrelated stages of work: research, policy innovation and engagement with Californians. California 100's work is guided by an expert and intergenerational Commission. Through various projects and activities, California 100 seeks to move California towards an aspirational vision—changing policies and practices, attitudes and mind-sets, to inspire a more vibrant future.

California 100 staff members compiled this roadmap document, drawing on research in two publications—a Policies and Future Scenarios Report and a Facts-Origins-Trends Report—by authors from the UC Irvine School of Social Ecology and the University of Arizona. The two criminal justice-related publications are part of California 100's larger research stream of work, built in partnership with 20 research institutions across the state.

California 100 sponsored grants for data-driven and future-oriented research focused on understanding today and planning for tomorrow. This research, anchored in California 100's 15 core policy domains, forms the foundation for the initiative's subsequent work by considering how California has gotten to where it is and by exploring scenarios and policy alternatives for what California can become over the next 100 years.

The California 100 Initiative is incubated through the University of California and Stanford.

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To learn more about the future of criminal justice reform in California, visit the California 100 website at California100.org, where you will find our detailed reports on the topic, and more information about our research partners.

