

An analysis of costs of private prisons against public prisons in South Africa

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Paper Abstract

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Abstract

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Abstract

This paper examines the costs, accountability, and human rights implications of private prisons in South Africa. Drawing from the author’s previous research, the recent work of Ruth Hopkins and the Wits Justice Project, the study focuses on the conditions and treatment of inmates at the Mangaung Correctional Centre (MCC) and the Kutama Sinthumule Correctional Centre (KSCC). The findings challenge the notion that private prisons offer superior conditions compared to public prisons. The documentary “Prison for Profit” further highlights the controversies and mistreatment under the management of G4S, the private operator of the MCC. These revelations raise concerns about the human rights cost associated with private prisons. Transparency issues surrounding the contracts between the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and private entities hinder accountability and raise questions about protecting commercial interests. The recent termination of the contract with the Bloemfontein Correctional Services consortium signifies a step towards holding private prison operators accountable. However, there are concerns that problems observed in DCS-run prisons may also emerge in the transferred facilities following the conclusion of public-private partnership contracts. Comparative analysis between private and public prisons reveals that private prisons receive a higher budget per capita and exhibit better maintenance, theoretically providing improved living conditions for their smaller population. However, it is crucial to consider the overall impact, including the potential human rights costs and implications of profit-oriented management. Further research is needed to conduct cost-benefit studies on prison privatization in South Africa and to assess the feasibility of privatizing non-core functions by prison authorities. Additionally, examining the long-term costs and benefits of private prisons compared to public prisons will inform policymakers.

Key words: Accountability, costs, corruption, human rights, private prisons



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