



Sending kids to prison

Eine geplante Verschärfung des Jugendstrafgesetzes hat in Kanada eine hitzige Debatte ausgelöst. Ist härtere Bestrafung der richtige Weg? **medium**

The Canadian government is preparing a crime crack-down that will send more young offenders — under the age of 18 — to prison. It is a controversial move that has caused heated debate across a country usually known for its liberal values.

The ruling Conservatives promised to introduce the tough-on-crime measures during last year's general election. Playing to the public's fears of a rising crime wave, they said they would change current laws, which many people think are too lax.

Current laws aim to find a delicate balance. Under the 2003 Youth Criminal Justice Act, violent repeat offenders are sent to prison. Young people who commit less serious crimes are not. Since this act became law, the proportion of young offenders in prison has fallen from 10 to 4.6 per cent. Still, Canada's total incarceration rate in 2009 was higher than that in many OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, including Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The new proposals would drive the incarceration rate higher. Courts would be required to consider adult sentences for young people who commit serious crimes. Youths could be sent to jail if their behaviour set the life or safety of others at risk, even if no one was actually hurt. And the names of more young offenders could be made

public. It's a highly emotional issue — an earlier version of the bill was known as “Sébastien's Law”, after a teenager who was killed by a gang of youths in 2004.

Critics of the tough-on-crime measures say they are regressive. Once out of prison, many people find it hard to get a job. With so few prospects, they are more likely to reoffend. Some return to prison, thus establishing a vicious circle that can last throughout their adult lives. Prisons can also act as crime schools, with experienced criminals corrupting younger minds.

If caught early enough, young offenders have a chance to reintegrate themselves through programmes that help them to find work and become productive members of society. Many Canadians believe that investing money in rehabilitation rather than incarceration is the wiser strategy.

The sledgehammer measures are being considered at a time when they are becoming less common in other parts of the world. In the US, for example, pro-prison measures have proved not only ineffective, but also expensive, swallowing huge amounts of taxpayers' money to house offenders who often go on to spend their lives in prison. The 2008 Second Chance Act, which provides money for US rehabilitation programmes, was a sign of the changing times.

Will young offenders in Canada face tougher rules, or will they be given a second chance?

Lorraine Mallinder asked people in Montreal:

Listen to Matías, Julie, Tony and Leni



Should we be tougher on young criminals?



Matías Duque, 37, fund-raiser

I think we have a good balance at the moment. I think [being tougher] is going to cost us more money and probably hurt the offenders as well, because they're going to have to stay longer in jail.



Julie Paquette, 32, artist

I don't think that prisons should be made larger. I think that there should be more money put into rehabilitation and special programmes to help young people rather than put them in prison.



Tony Loupessis, 48, supermarket owner

I believe that Canada is not tough enough on young criminals — or any criminals. There is no severe penalty, there's no fear, there's no respect of the law. ... There should be harsher penalties.



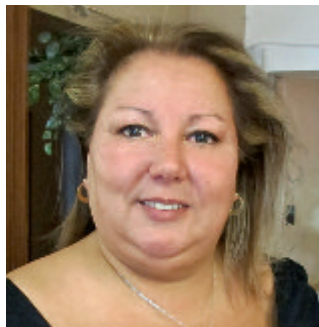
Leni Parker, 45, actress

There are better ways than putting people behind bars, especially young offenders. Rehabilitation would be one thing — and better youth programmes. That's where we should be putting our money.



Jean Garand, 38, unemployed

Jail is not the solution. The government should go to the root of the problem instead of acting in such a punitive way. More people in jail means more money we have to pay in the form of taxes.



Silvana Disessa, 47, restaurant owner

What would that change in regard to drugs, stealing or violence? Because I don't think we're all that bad. There's not very much of that going around compared to places in the US.



Fred Glzman, 16, student

We never know what happened in their past: maybe something with their parents; maybe they got into something [with] a group of friends. ... They should be given another chance.



Iovan Lucas, 53, business developer

I don't think jail is a solution for this type of problem: not for adults, and even less for minors. We need to invest more from a human point of view than from an incarceration point of view.

commit ~ a crime [kə'mɪt]	eine Straftat begehen
corrupt [kə'rʌpt]	verderben
crackdown ['krækdaʊn]	hartes Durchgreifen
drive [draɪv]	treiben
fund-raiser ['fʌnd ,reɪzə]	Spendensammler(in)
general election [ˌdʒenərəl i'leɪʃən]	Parlamentswahlen
harsh [hɑːʃ]	hart, scharf
incarceration [ɪn,kɑːsə'reɪʃən]	Inhaftierung
measure ['meɪʒə]	Maßnahme
move [muːv]	Schritt, Zug
offender [ə'fendə]	Straftäter(in)
penalty ['penəlti]	Bestrafung

prospects ['prɒspekts]	Aussichten
punitive ['pjʊ:nətɪv]	strafend
regressive [ri'ɡresɪv]	rückschrittlich
reintegrate [ˌri:'ɪntɪɡreɪt]	sich wieder einfügen
reoffend [ˌri:'ɒfend]	erneut straffällig werden
sentence ['sentəns]	Urteil, Strafmaß
severe [sɪ'vɪə]	streng
sledgehammer measure ['sledʒ,hæmə ,meɪʒə]	Hauruck-Verfahren
(sledgehammer)	Vorschlaghammer
vicious circle [ˌvɪʃəs 'sɜːkəl]	Teufelskreis
Youth Criminal Justice Act [ˌjuːθ ,krɪmɪnəl 'dʒʌstɪs ,ækt]	Jugendstrafgesetz