

# Essay on private vs. public prisons

[Economics](#), [Money](#)



Governments are fighting to balance their budgets. Therefore, there is a need to examine the costs and benefits of the alternatives available for reducing costs and increasing revenues. One alternative is to privatize some of the services, for instance, prisons. Construction of public prisons and privatization of public prisons have advantages and disadvantages.

Competition driven, innovation and reduced costs are some of the factors that should be considered when evaluating the available options. This paper discusses the advantages and disadvantages of private prisons vis-à-vis public prisons. There is a general concession that private prisons save reduce government expenditure on prisons.

A private prison is a place where prisoners are interned or confined by a third party usually contracted by the state, local or federal government. On the other hand, a public prison is a place where prisoners are confined by the state, local or federal government. Privatization of prisons also implies taking control over public prisons by private operators. Privatization of prisons can be traced back to the confining and caring of prisoners after the American Revolution. The Great Britain started placing prisoners on hulks in English ports after they were deprived of the capacity to transport offenders to the colonies. The other phase of privatization of prisons began during the reconstruction period after the end of the civil war in the South. On the other hand, state and federal governments started contracting out certain services to private organizations. These included services on food preparation, inmate transportation, vocational training and medical services among others. However, the increased numbers of prisoners as a result of increased incarceration and fight on drugs led to an increased number of private prisons.

The rise in prison population resulted in increased costs of operation that could not be managed by the government. In reaction to this inflating justice system, private business got an opportunity to establish prisons. Therefore, the private sector inclusion in the prison department shifted to contracting the full management of the entire prison from mere contracting of particular services.

Privatization of prisons comes with various benefits and costs. The benefits and costs of operating a private prison can be evaluated using the performance management measures. These indicators can be derived from institutional records and the satisfaction level of the staff members. Firstly, a private prison has better design facilities as compared to a public prison. Secondly, there exists a good communication system. Communication is a very important ingredient in the proper management of an institution. Moreover, there is decentralization and authority does not, therefore, lie on a few individuals. This reduces the chances of beauracracy which is experienced in public prisons. Beauracracy usually leads to inflexibility and increased time in making of decisions. Private management of prisons also leads to increased morale among employees and creates a sense of ownership and enthusiasm among the employees. Private prisons have lower operation costs than public prisons. This is because the main motive behind establishing private prisons is to make profits. With the profit maximization objective in mind, private prisons will, therefore, be managed using the minimum costs possible. Private prisons are a source of competition to the public prisons. The public prisons are encouraged through the competition posed by private prisons to reduce their operational costs. This in turn saves

the tax payers` money which is used to ensure smooth running of the public prisons operation. As such, states with a larger share of private prisons incur lower costs in housing prisoners. Private prisons are also better than public prisons since they offer quality service to inmates. Studies reveal that the private prisons offer better health care services and have contributed greatly to controlling bullying and suicide cases. More attention is given to the prisoners. This reduces the chances of riots or fighting among the prisoners. The prisoners are also exposed to more specialized programs which enable them acquire different skills and techniques. Private prisons are highly accountable for all their actions and employees are rewarded based on their performance. This is unlike public prisons in which employees frequently lobby for wage increment through their union groups. This has made prisoners` guards wages too high for the states to maintain. Constructing of private prisons and privatizing some public prisons should be encouraged. This is because the public prisons will be pressured by heavy competition and will be forced to cut down their operation costs or risk being closed down. Therefore, from an economic view, private prisons will tremendously save the taxpayers money.

Nevertheless, any system has its` own flaws. Private prisons are not an exception to that. The disadvantages of a private prison are the advantages of a public prison. The main objective of a private prison, just like any other business, is to maximize profits. Most of the flaws of private prisons stem from this objective. Private prisons are often accused of making prisoners to work tirelessly so as to save money. Since prisoners are not paid or at times they are paid very little, they could be seen as a source of cheap labor.

Transparency is also undermined through privatization of prisons. Prison employees are tasked with treating prisoners ethically. This may not be achieved in private prisons as the prisoners could be poorly treated with an aim of saving costs. A government can also become too dependent on private prisons which may undermine a state's sovereignty. In case the private prisons increase the costs of operation, the government would suffer a great deal due to overdependence. Further still, as much as private prisons increase competition, competition may lead to the decline in the quality of services offered. Establishing private prisons as a way of saving costs can also compromise security. Some private prisons have poor patrols, relaxed visitor screening processes and a generally lax culture. Therefore, there are very high chances of the prisoners escaping from the private prisons as compared to public prisons.

All in all, a private prison leads to the saving of tax payers' money. This is because of the various reasons. First of all, private prisons induce competition. With increased competition, public prisons which are operated using tax payers' money will definitely reduce its costs or risk being closed down. Establishment of private prisons will also save the tax payers' money used to pay the prisoners' guards in public prisons. Therefore, as much as private prisons have a few flaws, there is a need to construct them so as to enhance efficient operations of the prison system. This will lead to a significant saving of the tax payers' money due to the reduced costs and increased competition.

## References

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