

Media release

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Australians feeling safer – a good news story

Australians are feeling safer and property crime rates are falling, but new research by The Australia Institute suggests election promises and government policies that get ‘tough on crime’ aren’t helping.

The report *Tough on Crime*, released today, looks at links between feelings of safety, rates of property crime and the role of crime policies.

The property crime rate in Australia more than halved between 2001 and 2011 and The Australia Institute has found an increase in feelings of safety over the same period.

“But these improved feelings of safety don’t correspond with the implementation of ‘tough on crime’ policies,” Director of Research at The Australia Institute David Baker said.

“Western Australia brought in mandatory sentencing for property crime in 1996 and it has fallen behind other Australian states when it comes to improved feelings of safety within the community.”

The report also looks at what factors make Australians feel safer, with perceptions of social disorder having the greatest influence.

“This suggests that the ‘tough on crime’ rhetoric used by politicians and reported in the media may have a negative influence on feelings of safety in the community,” Mr Baker said.

“Excessive reporting of hard line approaches to crime gives the impression that crime remains a widespread problem. Ironically tough on crime policies could in turn increase levels of nervousness.”

The report suggests that constructive policy responses would be more effective in improving feelings of safety within our community than mandatory sentencing.

“Having the media report on more positive policies would also help Australians feel safer,” Mr Baker said.

“This report is ultimately a good news story. Property crime is down and people are feeling safer.”

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