

Mallea, Paula. 2011. *Fearmonger: Stephen Harper's Tough-on-Crime Agenda*. Toronto: Lorimer. ISBN 978-1-55277-898-2. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 229.

**Reviewed by Lisa Wright**  
**Carleton University**

In *Fearmonger*, Paula Mallea seeks to confront the ideologically driven tough-on-crime policies of the Conservative government. Mallea argues that the law reforms ushered in through legislative initiatives are deeply problematic and contradictory to expert findings on how to create safe communities. Fiscal and human costs, as well as high rates of recidivism and the lack of a deterrent effect, are used by Mallea to demonstrate the failure of relying on incarceration as a means of producing safe communities.

Mallea achieves two goals in *Fearmonger*. First is an assessment of the effectiveness of the Conservative government's tough-on-crime approach to crime control, where impact is evaluated in human and fiscal costs. Mallea uses the evidence from her analysis of the costs of the tough-on-crime agenda to create the foundation of her second goal, to contribute to the public debate on how to respond to crime.

In order to achieve these goals, Mallea provides a comprehensive and accessible explanation of many of the Conservative government's crime bills and draws on parliamentary hearings, news articles and academic literature as supportive evidence. The explanations provided by Mallea make the inherent problems (for example a reliance upon incarceration) with these bills obvious by washing away the propaganda the Conservatives have manufactured to justify their legislative changes. The tough-on-crime agenda, according to Mallea, is inherently ineffective.

Harper and the Conservative government, however, as Mallea points out, are not interested in effective responses to crime. She writes, "the Conservative government, in an effort to be seen 'doing something' about crime, prefers a solution based upon a simple network of prisons rather than a more complex network of social services" (11). Mallea explains how the tough-on-crime propaganda accompanying legislative and policy changes works to mislead the public into thinking they are actually doing something about crime. As well as not actually doing anything about crime, Mallea argues that these crime bills are also not encouraging public debate about crime. Mallea believes that in Canada there is not currently an informed public debate about how to respond to crime and argues that such a debate is necessary if we seek to create safe communities.

As a means of moving forward from ineffective tough-on-crime policies, different alternatives to incarceration currently in use in Canada and internationally are continually promoted as evidence of a better way. "There are myriad ways of dealing with

most offenders that do not require imprisonment, and many more ways of preventing crime in the first place” (152). Preventive programs are promoted throughout *Fearmonger* as a means of confronting the reactive legislative changes proposed by the Conservative government. Expert and community sources (such as the Church Council on Justice and Corrections) are used to support the viability of the prevention programs that are recommended.

A key concern with *Fearmonger*, and Mallea’s examples, is that deeply problematic alternative programs are promoted as useful alternatives to incarceration. While Mallea provides a lot of alternatives to incarceration and exposes many holes in the Conservatives crime policies, she does not critically engage with the alternatives provided. A critical engagement with various programs that respond to crime is a necessary part of a public debate on how to produce safe communities. One program that is brought up several times in the book is drug treatment court. The positioning of drug treatment courts as an alternative to incarceration is problematic in and of itself as most participants of drug treatment courts are sentenced to time in prison during the program as punishment (Moore 2007). Drug treatment court programs have also been found by social science researchers to wreak havoc on the lives of their participants in many different ways, for example see Moore, Freeman and Krawczyk (2011) for an analysis of the impact of spatial restrictions placed on drug treatment court participants.

Also missing from *Fearmonger* is a discussion about the goal of these crime bills, if not to effectively respond to crime, as she is silent on possible explanations. Mallea outlines expected populations which will be affected by these legislative changes (this includes youth, the mentally ill, Aboriginal peoples as well as others) without any discussion of why the Conservatives would target these populations. Without a discussion of the reasoning behind these legislative changes, *Fearmonger* misses the connection between these legislative changes and the Conservative government’s anti-expert knowledge stance. Mallea demonstrates, in many different ways, the lack of consideration by the Conservative government for expert research on how to respond to crime but she does not use it to provide a reason for the Conservative position. A discussion of the anti-expert knowledge stance would have provided a useful layer of analysis for those of us seeking to make sense of our government’s actions that go beyond questions of effectiveness.

A final criticism of *Fearmonger*, concerns Mallea’s use of the Conservative strategy of creating panic about crime to discuss responses to crime. Mallea uses fearmongering tactics to scare the reader, for example the use of rare cases as examples makes these cases seem like the norm. “Nothing in the proposed laws would have helped in stopping a Clifford Olson or Willie Pickton before they started to commit their appalling crimes” (65). If the goal is to incite public debate, however, this tactic should be reconsidered, as scare tactics are not enabling of public debate.

Readers interested in questions of effectiveness will find *Fearmonger* a useful resource, as will those looking for an accessible explanation of the Conservative crime bills. Readers who are well versed in criminal justice matters, however, will already know that the Conservative crime bills will not reach their stated goal of producing communities safe from crime, but can make use of the data being set out.

## References

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**Reviewed by Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe**  
**University of Victoria**

Security and intelligence agencies have expanded rapidly since September 11, 2001. Given the consequences for social justice in Canada and the rest of the world, studying this expanding security and intelligence community has never been so important. Two significant contributions in this area are *The Freedom of Security* and *Intelligence Cooperation and the War on Terror*.

*The Freedom of Security* explores how security and freedom have become entwined in Canada since September 11, 2001. Specifically, Bell investigates the practices of Canadian government agencies like the Canada Border Services Agency and Department of National Defence, with the rationale of drawing attention to Canadian federal government agencies as key actors in the War on Terror (2). The purpose of the book is not to demonstrate that there has been a reduction in rights since the events of