

## Should the US end the war on drugs?

### Issue Timeline:

1930:

#### **Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) created**

*The Bureau (FBN) was established to impose harsh penalties on drug users, and the associated trafficking and smuggling of opium and heroin from France, Italy, Turkey, Beirut, Thailand and other countries to the United States drug market.*

1968:

#### **Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) created**

*The BNDD, with an allotted budget of 43 million, was more than fourteen times higher than the previous Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) budget. Widespread corruption off agents involved with the program was a suspected issue before the merging of the BNDD with the current Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).*

1971:

#### **Controlled Substances Act (CSA) passed**

*Signed into law by Richard Nixon, the Act is utilized by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to make decisions as to which substances are illegal to consume, buy, or otherwise possess.*

1980's

#### **Just Say No advertising campaign**

*Spearheaded by then First lady Nancy Reagan, Just Say No utilized public awareness campaigns, consisting of news pieces, advertising and celebrity endorsements to educate the public on the dangers of drug addiction and usage. The idea of marijuana as a 'gateway drug' increased significantly at this time.*

1996

#### **Compassionate Use Act passed in California**

*The Compassionate Use Act permits the use of medical marijuana provided that a doctor's referral is given, and stipulated that designated Primary Caregivers could possess and cultivate marijuana per personal medical use*

2020:

#### **Oregon becomes first state to de-criminalize hard drugs**

*Allows for the selling, consumption and possession of small amounts of hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine and LSD.*

## Legislative News:

*Headline:* National Drug Control Strategy

*Date:* June 17, 2021

*Type Tag:* Introduced

*State Tag:* National

Summary: Joe Biden's White House released its drug control proposal, the National Drug Control Strategy, in 2022. This report outlined two main objectives, including eliminating the avenues of drug trafficking and untreated addiction in the United States, especially in regard to the opioid (fentanyl, heroin) and crack overdose rates.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/21/fact-sheet-white-house-releases-2022-national-drug-control-strategy-that-outlines-comprehensive-path-forward-to-address-addiction-and-the-overdose-epidemic/>

*Headline:* Massachusetts Section 35

*Date:* August 2018

*Type Tag:* Introduced, with ongoing legal modifications

*State Tag:* Massachusetts

Massachusetts is currently debating changes to Section 35, which allocates millions of dollars to fund involuntary addiction treatment for those deemed in need of aggressive action for treatment of drug and /or alcohol addiction.

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/05/24/massachusetts-section-35-drug-jail-money-debate>

*Headline:* Drug Policy Reform Act of 2021

*Date:* June 17, 2021

*Type Tag:* Introduced

*State Tag:* National

Summary: To reform United States drug policy relating to reduced criminalization for drug offenses, as well as demographic investigation to root causes of drug and addiction spread in certain communities. This is to identify ineffectiveness and harms of the War on Drugs and the policies centered on criminalization and punishment.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4020/text>

## Micro Issues:

### **Racial/Minority/Socio-Economic Status**

Studies, such as the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) have shown that vulnerable communities such as African American, LGBTQ+ and Latino populations have increased usage of illegal drugs as cultural and racial stigma, social isolation, lack of economic opportunity/support, and poverty contribute to increased illegal drug use.

## **Mental Health**

Studies conducted by the National Institute of Mental health show that addiction disorders often coincide with mood disorders such as depression, anxiety and manic/borderline personality disorders at a rate up to 50 percent. Drug laws, pro and con, possibly could be geared towards these root mental health causes that lead to drug abuse and addiction.

## **Genetic Pre-Disposition Towards Addiction**

Scientists estimate that 40-60 percent of drug addiction factors can be traced to genetic vulnerability. Legalization of drugs could provide further avenues for the already pre-disposed to become addicted to drugs or experiment with drugs.

\*\*\*PRO\*\*\*

- 1. Drug Legalization reduces crime and government expense**

Reduces the criminality associated with the black-market drug trade, and allows for financial resources used in anti-drug enforcement to be utilized elsewhere.

- 2. Drug Legalization allows for regulation**

Allows for regulation of all drugs legalized, as well as controlling of drug quality. This significantly reduces toxic additives often found in street drugs.

- 3. Expansion of access to addiction resources**

Expands access to addiction treatment and prevention, and prevention of stigma associated with chronic drug use within marginalized groups, as well as the wider population.

- 4. Repeal of minor offense convictions**

For minor drug possession, economic benefits involving less security cost, and reduction of the overloaded capacity of most prisons due to these minor offenses.

- 5. Eliminates state-to-state inconsistencies related to the status of legal vs non legal drugs.**

Widespread discrepancies among states about what is classified as legal and illegal drugs allows for possible incarceration, arrest or seizure of individuals or substances crossing state lines. A criminal record resulting from a drug arrest in one state can be un-enforceable in another.

\*\*\*CONS\*\*\*

**1. Legalization will increase general population addiction rates**

Legalization of previously illicit drugs could increase the percentage of the US population addicted to substances, leading to overloading of critical care and addiction treatment services.

**2. Threat of societal decay due to legalization**

Higher levels of potential addicts created by legalization could increase the latent threat of violence in public society due to uncontrolled behaviour.

**3. Higher incidence of serious and fatal overdoses**

Wider availability of deadly drugs such as fentanyl and opioids could mean further widespread overdoses in vulnerable populations.

**4. People prone to addiction have more opportunity to become drug addicts**

Individuals where biological disposition to addiction is more pronounced, increased drug availability could lead to increased addiction potential.

**5. Deadly drug use and cost of such drugs could increase**

For certain drugs considered to be too toxic to be legalized, increased cost and potential interest in these drugs would possibly occur.

Agree or Disagree

- 1. Legalization of previously illegal drugs will increase addiction rates.**
- 2. Legalization of previously illegal drugs will decrease criminal activity related to drugs.**
- 3. Legalization of previously illegal drugs will decrease stigma of marginalized communities and mental health issues.**
- 4. Legalization of previously illegal drugs will increase criminal activity.**

## **Summary**

The issue of drug use and legalization in the United States has become a hot button issue in an already overheated political environment. It has been for most of the last century. Should drugs be legalized, or would such an action jeopardize societal stability to a profound degree?

The US War on drugs, ongoing since its foundation, was politicized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially reflected by Richard Nixon's statement that illegal drugs were 'Public Enemy Number 1'. [Originally though](#), US drug laws took a backseat to the seemingly larger issue of prohibition of alcoholic beverages. Alcoholics were considered volatile and a menace to polite society. Whereas drug addiction, though stigmatized, was less troublesome. Due to drugs being consumed in secret, this led to the perception of addicts as non-violent in wider society.

However, it was not a non-issue. One argument against prohibition even proposed that the non-availability of liquor would increase drug addiction in the United States.

Widespread use of drugs such as cocaine, heroin and various street opioids, and prescription drugs such as morphine, [occurred at the turn of the century](#). So-called “Opium Dens”, associated with “foreign” influence, had infamous reputations. Often, addicts and drug users in this period, as now, were judged, many times unfairly, and without proper context. These judgements came from economic classification, racial identity and even gender, as many prescription morphine addicts were women. Today, mental health is another context in which addiction must be addressed. [More than one in four adults](#) living with mental health complications also have a co-occurring substance abuse issue. [In addition](#), more than 50 percent of drug addicts have genetic pre-disposition to drug addiction due to inherent dopamine function.

[Since 1996](#), illegal drug overdoses and trafficking has reached a peak unforeseen in history. This has increasingly led to [vast divergence of opinion](#), often along political lines. Democrats support legalization of marijuana 49 percent to 28 percent, while 32 percent of Republicans support legalization and 50 percent oppose it. Public opinion is somewhat more lenient. [Over 2/3 of Americans support](#) legalization of marijuana, even as the opioid epidemic reaches extreme levels. [An estimated](#) 40,000 deaths in 2016, and a further 91,799 deaths in 2020 from drug overdoses ranging from Fentanyl to Methamphetamines showcase the critical state of US Drug Policy.

<https://recovery.org/addiction/us-drug-laws/>

<https://www.carmichaellegal.com/federal-drug-possession-charges>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/23/us-house-representatives-again-passes-marijuana-reform-bill>

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/05/24/massachusetts-section-35-drug-jail-money-debate>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/21/fact-sheet-white-house-releases-2022-national-drug-control-strategy-that-outlines-comprehensive-path-forward-to-address-addiction-and-the-overdose-epidemic/>

<https://amp.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/03/oregon-drugs-decriminalize-arizona-new-jersey-marijuana>

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/356939/support-legal-marijuana-holds-record-high.aspx>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK234755/>

[Democrats support legalization 49 percent to 28 percent, while 32 percent of Republicans support legalization and 50 percent oppose it](#)

<https://www.turnbridge.com/news-events/latest-articles/decriminalization-vs-legalization/#>

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

<https://headsup.scholastic.com/students/the-role-of-genes-in-drug-addiction>

[https://youtu.be/9A\\_qzEQr-wM](https://youtu.be/9A_qzEQr-wM)

<https://youtu.be/IIQRgceBcSc>