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Marijuana Legalization Means Safer Borders And Less Smuggling, Study Shows

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As more states have moved to create a legal supply chain for marijuana, less cannabis is being smuggled over the U.S.'s southern border.

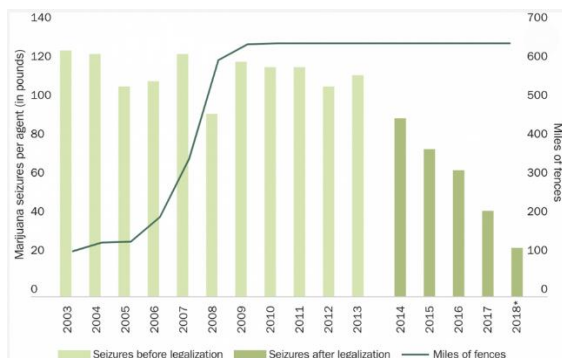
That's the conclusion of a new analysis from the Cato Institute, which looked at Border Patrol marijuana seizures over time.

"State-level marijuana legalization has significantly undercut marijuana smuggling," David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at Cato, wrote in the paper, published last week. "Based on Border Patrol seizures, smuggling has fallen 78 percent over just a five-year period. Because marijuana was the primary drug smuggled between ports of entry, where Border Patrol surveils, the value of the agency's seizures overall — on a per-agent basis — has declined 70 percent."

Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize cannabis in 2012, with legal sales starting in 2014, and more states have gotten on board each election cycle since. There are now ten states that have ended marijuana prohibition, with several more expected to do so in 2019 and 2020.

The Cato paper also calls into question President Trump's push to erect a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, which has led to a partisan dispute that caused an ongoing government shutdown this week.

"Given these trends, a border wall or more Border Patrol agents to stop drugs between ports of entry makes little sense," Bier wrote. "State marijuana legalization starting in 2014 did more to reduce marijuana smuggling than the doubling of Border Patrol agents or the construction of hundreds of miles of border fencing did from 2003 to 2009."



"From FY 2003 to FY 2009, Border Patrol doubled its workforce and constructed hundreds of miles of fences, yet this increased enforcement did not reduce marijuana smuggling. Each agent annually seized virtually the same quantity of marijuana through 2013, indicating roughly the same overall inflow of the illegal substance."

The findings bolster the claims of legalization advocates, who have argued for years that American consumers would much prefer to buy marijuana from licensed producers who test and label their products for potency and purity than via the illegal market, where no such quality control occurs.

Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) picked up on the idea in a congressional hearing last week, urging Homeland Security Sec. Kirstjen Nielsen to acknowledge that ending federal marijuana prohibition would make her and her agents' jobs easier.

"Some think that state-based marijuana is a gateway drug and makes people want illicit products more," he said, "but the people who've looked at your agency—and you've got this very difficult job—are saying that if states have the ability to innovate and make legal, high-quality medical cannabis available to people, then we're not going to have as difficult a job for you and your border patrol agents and for the people who live across our border."