

# MERRY JANE

## Most Americans Don't Think Anyone Should Go to Prison Over Drugs, Poll Finds

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October 3, 2019

My, how times are changing. According to a new poll, 55 percent of Americans would rather see drug offenders receive civil infractions, like small fines, instead of prison sentences.

The poll was conducted by the libertarian think tank, the [Cato Institute](#). It surveyed 1,700 adults, and prompted them with this question: "Would you favor or oppose re-categorizing drug offenses from felonies to civil offenses, meaning they would be treated like minor traffic violations rather than crimes?"

Here's how the responses broke down by political affiliation.

Of those surveyed, 69 percent of Democrats, 59 percent of Libertarians, 54 percent of Independents, and 40 percent of Republicans favored drug decriminalization. It should be noted that this question asked about decriminalizing *all* illicit drugs, not just weed. Those who identified as "liberal" made up the largest group in support of decriminalization, at a whopping 75 percent in favor of decriminalization.

As pointed out by Kyle Jaeger at [Marijuana Moment](#), the most surprising result from this poll is the Libertarian response. The Libertarian platform explicitly supports marijuana reforms, and the party's stance against "Big Government" interference in people's private lives should vibe nicely with drug decriminalization. Yet, 41 percent of Libertarians felt drug offenders should serve hard time simply for getting high.

And while the GOP also claims to espouse "Small Government" policies, just like Libertarians, 60 percent of Republicans thought people should go to prison over minor drug offenses. Ironically, the War on Drugs is one of the biggest tragedies of "Big Government." Besides giving federal and state governments a convenient excuse to unconstitutionally steal citizens' private properties, the War on Drugs costs American taxpayers \$51 billion a year. So, taxes for social programs are grave ills according to many Republicans and Libertarians, but according to this poll, most of them are perfectly fine with the government wasting valuable money on a war that has done little to nothing to curb drug use, dealing, or addiction.

Democrats don't get off so easy, either. Presidents [Bill Clinton](#) and [Barack Obama](#) both ramped up the nation's drug war policies during their terms to appear "tough on crime," with little criticism from their party peers. Perhaps the latest Democratic shifts toward more liberal, tolerant drug policies reflects the party's feelings of buyer's remorse (at least when it comes to drugs).

The Cato Institute's findings aren't entirely novel, either. In 2014, a [Pew Research poll](#) found that 63 percent of all American respondents wanted courts to get rid of mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenses. Mandatory minimums force judges to dispense harsh prison

sentences for any and all drug offenders, regardless of the offender's situation. Under American legal traditions, judges are supposed to wield discretionary sentencing powers in every case. In some states, drug offenses count toward "Three Strikes" policies, meaning some small-time dealers are serving life sentences for otherwise victimless crimes.

What's the takeaway here? Americans are starting to see the War on Drugs for what it really is: A sham campaign designed to keep private prison companies rich while impoverished Americans are terrorized for essentially self-medicating. Research shows that most drug addicts (as opposed to casual users) become addicts to deal with unresolved psychological and emotional traumas. In other words, drug addiction is a disease and should be treated as a public health issue, not a criminal one.

Will the trend hold up? Americans are, typically, a fickle demographic. But hopefully these poll results signal a sea change for a far more tolerant, understanding, and enlightened society that bases its policies on verified scientific evidence rather than racist scare tactics.