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Jeff Sessions Redefines Failure

Jacob Sullum | November 19, 2010

At her confirmation hearing yesterday, acting DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart agreed with Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) that drug legalization has "failed" in "any country that's tried that." Strictly speaking, no country has legalized drugs, but many have policies less draconian than the U.S. government's, and several have experimented with various forms of decriminalization. Portugal arguably has gone the farthest, treating possession of all drugs for personal use as an administrative rather than criminal matter. Based on a comparison of health and criminal justice trends in Portugal to those in Italy and Spain since 2001, a new study (PDF), reported this month in the *British Journal of Criminology*, finds that Portuguese decriminalization has been associated with "reductions in problematic use, drug-related harms and criminal justice overcrowding."

Last year *Reason* interviewed Glenn Greenwald about his Cato Institute paper on decriminalization in Portugal, which reached similar conclusions.