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# Should the U.S. Consider Legalizing Personal Drug Possession?

by SodaHead News

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Yes, Portugal shows it can work

No, it can only lead to chaos

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Remember that guy in your freshman anthropology class with the rainbow-colored beret, beaded dreadlocks and perma-grin who was also babbling on about "legalizing" it?

Well, he may have been on to something. According to Time magazine, a new report from the libertarian think tank [the Cato Institute](#) finds that Portugal's experiment with abolishing criminal penalties for personal possession of drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine has been an unqualified success and could point the way to the future.

The country -- a poor, socially conservative, largely Catholic nation, was questioned for implementing the new policy in 2001 by critics who said that decriminalizing [drug possession](#) would open its borders to "drug tourists" and exacerbate an already serious internal hard-drug problem, then one of the worst in Europe.

Instead of locking up offenders found with small amounts of drugs, the country sent them to a panel consisting of a psychologist, social worker and legal advisor for treatment. According to the Cato report, in the five years after decriminalization, [illegal drug use](#) among teens in the country declined and rates of new [HIV infections](#) caused by sharing dirty needles also dropped (by 17 percent), while the number of people seeking treatment for drug addiction doubled.

In fact, after decriminalization, the amount of money saved on law enforcement actions and jail allowed the country to increase funding for drug-free treatment also and to reach its central goal in the experiment: no net rise in drug use.

Who might take notice of these figures? The U.S., which has some of the world's harshest penalties for drug possession and sales, as well as the highest rates of cocaine and marijuana use globally. While experts agree that the difference in size and temperament means that the Portuguese model might not work in the U.S., a small-scale philosophical change already seems afoot after decades of hard-line policy.

States such as New York, California and Massachusetts are reconsidering harsh drug laws and two senators recently recommended creating a [national commission](#) like Portugal's to look at prison reform and an overhaul of drug-sentencing policies.

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