

The Cannabis Policy Debate: Renaissance or Reform?

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Abstract

Survey data indicate that cannabis is the most widely used illegal drug in the developed world. In these countries a substantial proportion of young adults have used cannabis at some time in their lives. The widespread use of cannabis and the relatively modest public health impact of the negative effects on health have prompted debates of reform today as much as in the past. While 20 or 30 years ago the issue was on prohibition and the relaxation of criminal penalties for cannabis use, today's debates are centred on a cannabis market that is regulated by national laws as the markets of other commodities such as alcohol or tobacco. Some critics argue that international treaties have constrained national policy experimentation and that these treaties need amendment in order to adopt national policies to the risks of different drugs and the effectiveness of controls. To this end, the presentation aims at reviewing different streams of research on cannabis. It focusses on the question of whether legal regulatory approaches to non-medical cannabis use can reduce negative social and health consequences more effectively than current approaches. And finally, it will discuss whether global and European experience in regulating tobacco and alcohol can provide a blueprint for legal regulatory cannabis policies.