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**CANNABIS POLICY: IDENTIFYING THE TRADE-OFFS AND EVALUATING RESULTS
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CANNABIS POLICY: IDENTIFYING THE TRADE-OFFS AND EVALUATING RESULTS

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Background

Purpose is to discuss alternative models of legalization and how to evaluate them

No presumption that legalization is the right policy choice, merely that some nations or states have decided to legalize marijuana

As always, there are multiple goals and instruments

choice is not just strict prohibition or lax commercial availability

Evaluation must reflect the multiple goals

Legalization has many goals

- ◎ 1. Raising tax revenues
 - Black market puts limit on tax levels
 - Very easy to evade taxes on such a compact drug

Legalization has many goals

- ① 1 Raising tax revenues
- ② 2 Eliminating arrests of users
 - Arrests seen as unnecessary and creating inappropriate stigma, disruption to life and (in US) generating non-criminal sanctions

Legalization has many goals

- ⦿ 1 Raising tax revenues
- ⦿ 2 Eliminating arrests.
- ⦿ 3. Undercutting black markets and associated harms from corruption and violence
 - ⦿ Income going to criminal organizations a harm in itself

Legalization has many goals

- ① Raising tax revenues
- ② Eliminating arrests.
- ③ Undercutting black markets
- ④ Allowing criminal justice resources to be redirected toward other priorities
 - ① Police can pursue traffickers, lose tool that is used to control minority groups

Legalization has many goals

- ① Raising tax revenues
- ② Eliminating arrests.
- ③ Undercutting black markets and associated harms from corruption and violence
- ④ Allowing criminal justice resources to be redirected toward other priorities
- ⑤ Assuring product quality
 - ⑥ Avoid most potent and dangerous forms

Legalization has many goals

- ⦿ 1 Raising tax revenues
- ⦿ 2 Eliminating arrests.
- ⦿ 3. Undercutting black markets
- ⦿ 4 Redirecting criminal justice resources
- ⦿ 5 Assuring product quality
- ⦿ 6 Increasing choices for those seeking intoxication.
 - Marijuana less harmful than alcohol

A comparative evaluation 1:

	Safety ratio (Gable 2004)	Intoxicating effect (Hilts 1994)	General toxicity (Roques 1999)	Social dangerousness (Roques 1999)
Marijuana	>1000 sm	4th highest	Very weak	Weak
Benzodiazepines (Valium)	nr	nr	Very weak	Weak (except when driving)
MDMA/Ecstasy	16 or	nr	Possibly very strong	Weak(?)
Stimulants	10 or	nr	Strong	Weak (possible exceptions)
Tobacco	nr	5th highest	Very strong	None
Alcohol	10 or	Highest	Strong	Strong
Cocaine	15 in	3rd highest	Strong	Very strong
Heroin	6 iv	2nd highest	Strong (exc. in therapeutic use)	Very strong

nr = not rated; sm = smoked; or = oral; in = intranasal; iv = intravenous

safety ratio = (usual effective dose for non-medical purposes)/(usual lethal dose)

A comparative evaluation: 2

adverse effects for heavy users of the most common form
(Hall et al., 1999)

	Marijuana	Tobacco	Heroin	Alcohol
Traffic and other accidents	*		*	**
Violence and suicide				**
Overdose death			**	*
HIV and liver infections			**	*
Liver cirrhosis				**
Heart disease		**		*
Respiratory diseases	*	**		
Cancers	*	**		*
Mental illness	*			**
Dependence/addiction	**	**	**	**
Lasting effects on the foetus	*	*	*	**

** important effect

* = less common or less well-established effect

Legalization has many goals

- ① Raising tax revenues
- ② Eliminating arrests.
- ③ Undercutting black markets
- ④ Allowing criminal justice resources to be redirected toward other priorities
- ⑤ Assuring product quality
- ⑥ Increasing choice
- ⑦ Limiting youth access
 - US youth currently have better access to marijuana than alcohol

Control choices

- ⊙ Tax levels
- ⊙ Product regulation
 - THC and CBD levels
 - Specific forms e.g. edibles, vapes
- ⊙ Ownership
 - Commercial
 - Non-profit
 - State operated
- ⊙ Home cultivation?
- ⊙ Promotion restrictions
 - What can be regulated on the internet?
- ⊙ Who adjusts policy?

Evaluation should reflect goals

- ⊙ Adverse health consequences of marijuana and alcohol consumption
 - Hospital admissions
 - Treatment admissions
 - Driving fatalities
 -
- ⊙ Public revenues
 - Including costs of operation, regulation and enforcement
- ⊙ Crime control
- ⊙ Product quality
- ⊙ Prevalence of use among under 21 (or 18)

Conclusions

- ◎ Large uncertainty about consequences of choices
 - How much will demand increase following better access, reduced stigma, lower price?
 - How will more marijuana use affect heavy drinking by young males?
- ◎ The system will need adjustment over time
 - Need to build in the capacity to make changes