

Five Things We Can Learn from New Zealand's Innovative Law to Regulate New Drugs

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New Zealand has seen the enactment of revolutionary policy changes to the norm of drug prohibition that no other country has experienced.

While the U.S., Uruguay, and certain European states have taken recent strides in reforming marijuana policy, New Zealand focused on newer, less-known substances. In July, the parliament passed the **Psychoactive Substances Bill** which allows for the strictly regulated, but legal, sale of a number of synthetic narcotics commonly known as 'legal highs' or 'party pills.'

So, what can New Zealand's new approach teach the rest of the world about reforming drug policy?

1. Drugs are safer to consume if they are legal

One of the biggest risks with consuming any illegal substance is the question of purity. Cocaine, MDMA, ketamine, and many of the substances colloquially referred to as 'bath salts' all come in the form of an indistinct white powder. The Psychoactive Substance Bill ensures that newly-legalized drugs are rigorously tested, have their contents clearly detailed on packaging, and that purity is guaranteed.

2. Regulation protects children and educates users

The Psychoactive Substance Bill restricts sale of drugs to individuals 18 or older. Unlike licensed stores, illegal drug dealers don't ask for ID, and are unlikely to forewarn their customers of the safest methods and doses of consumption. The new system of regulation reduces the accessibility of these drugs to minors, while educating users about the risks of use, including how to avoid overdose. The belief that legalization encourages drug use among young people is largely unfounded; **marijuana use among teens is higher in the U.S. than it is in the Netherlands** – where it is legally available but restricted to adults.

3. Sale of a legal drug does not fund criminal enterprise

The new legislation will allow the entire supply chain - production, transport, and sale - of many synthetic narcotics to be taxed and regulated. Unlike with the sale of illegal substances, the profits earned from selling these legal drugs will be directed to legitimate businesses, as well as to government initiatives via tax. This will lead to a reduction in the violent crime that stems from the drug trade, as the profits from synthetic drug sales won't be empowering violent gangs.

4. Criminalizing synthetic drugs is a futile battle

Synthetic drugs are man-made. Therefore, under traditional prohibition, when the government outlaws a synthetic drug, manufacturers simply have to make a slight alteration to the product's chemical composition to avoid the law. The profitability of the trade motivates producers to continue creating new and different substances faster than the law can catch up. New Zealand's reform has allowed the parliament to avoid the need for constant legislation, and allows consumers to properly understand the range of narcotics that are available.

5. Effective drugs laws give people faith in the system

"Nothing is more destructive of respect for the government," said Albert Einstein, "than passing laws which cannot be enforced". How can the government expect to be trusted by the people if it openly, and expensively, fails at protecting them? 82 percent of Americans believe that their country is losing the drug war, and they're right – prohibition has not reduced drug use or trafficking. New Zealand's strategy indicates a new frontier in the international fight against criminality, and creates hope for a fairer future for drug policy.