



Image from: [The harsh penalties of the War on Drugs have... in Encyclopedia of Drug Policy: "The War on Drugs" Past, Present, and Future](#)

Summary Article: **“War on Drugs”**

from *Encyclopedia of Drug Policy: "The War on Drugs" Past, Present, and Future*

Richard Nixon first used the term *War on Drugs* in 1969 as an attempt to elevate the drive for drug prohibition to the same status of Lyndon Johnson's “War on Poverty.” The initiative set forth a volley of policies and laws intended to discourage targeted substances’ production, distribution, and consumption. This attempt to define and address the illegal drug trade lasted 40 years, was endorsed by multiple administrations, and encompassed programs that affected the United States’ domestic and foreign policy. While the program achieved certain successes, it also garnered a great deal of criticism from observers concerned with states’ rights, inequities in enforcement, and the program's overall efficacy. As of 2009, the Obama administration, through the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), indicated that the term would no longer be used as it was counter-productive and inhibited the use of substance abuse treatment programs.

Domestically, the “War on Drugs” has resulted in a concerted effort to eradicate personal use of any drug contrary to law. A special emphasis has been placed on prohibiting the use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, although recreational use of otherwise legal pharmaceuticals is also proscribed. This has resulted in the incarceration of approximately one million Americans per year. Over 225,000 individuals are charged annually in the United States with the possession of marijuana.

The War on Drugs has resulted in a dramatic increase in the U.S. prison population. During the 1980s, for example, the number of arrests for drug offenses rose 126 percent. In addition to the increase in the incarcerated population, the War on Drugs has also focused upon publicly funded advertising that has advocated anti-drug messages.

The War on Drugs has also had a tremendous effect on U.S. foreign policy. Beginning in September 1969, the Nixon administration launched Operation Intercept, which sought to reduce the amount of marijuana imported to the United States from Mexico and Central America. The 20-day initiative, which led to intense scrutiny at border checkpoints, was intensely unpopular in border states because of the resulting near-paralysis of cross-border traffic. In 1989 nearly 28,000 members of the U.S. Army invaded Nicaragua as part of Operation Just Cause, a project designed in part to combat drug trafficking. Operation Just Cause resulted in the arrest and conviction of General Manuel Noriega on drug trafficking and money laundering charges. During the late 1990s, the Clinton administration began Plan Colombia, designed in part to eradicate coca production in Colombia to reduce the amount of cocaine imported into the United States. Plan Colombia, which was continued under the administration of George W. Bush, enjoyed bipartisan support. After 2000 the U.S. government also increased the number of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents stationed in Mexico, chiefly to fight growing drug-related violence near the border.



The harsh penalties of the War on Drugs have meant that about 1 million Americans serve time for drug offenses every year.

The War on Drugs has been criticized on several grounds. Civil libertarians believe it constitutes an illegal prohibition that violates the U.S. Constitution's goal of limited government.

Others disapprove of inequities in how the prosecution of drug-related crimes is handled, alleging that this tends to lead to results that are racially biased against ethnic minorities. Finally, the efficacy of the War on Drugs has been questioned, with the efforts to stop drug usage and smuggling, both domestically and abroad, being questioned as either inefficient or inadequately evaluated.

See Also:

Anti-Drug Operations, 1960s, Anti-Drug Operations, 1970s, Anti-Drug Operations, 1980s, Anti-Drug Operations, 1990s, Anti-Drug Operations, 2000s, Armed Forces, Drug Policy Effects on Rates of Use, Nixon Administration, Richard, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Reagan Administration, Ronald, Vietnam.

Further Readings

- Caulkins, Johnathan P., Petter, Reuter, Martin, Iguchi, and James, Chiesa. *How Goes the "War on Drugs"? An Assessment of U.S. Drug Problems and Policy*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005.
- McWilliams, J. C. "Through the Past Darkly: The Politics and Policies of America's Drug War." In *Drug Control Policy: Essays in Historical & Comparative Perspective*, W. O. Walker III, ed. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.
- Musto, David G. *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotics Control*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Provine, D. M. *Unequal Under Law: Race in the War on Drugs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Trebach, A. S. *The Great Drug War: And Rational Proposals to Turn the Tide*, 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: Unlimited Publishing, 2005.

Schroth, Stephen T.
Helfer, Jason A.
Kizior, Daniel W.
Knox College

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Schroth, Helfer, Kizior, D. W., & Kizior. (2011). "War on drugs" In M. Kleiman, & J. Hawdon (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of drug policy: `thewar on drugs"past, present, and future*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/war_on_drugs

 Copyright © 2011 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

 Copyright © 2011 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

APA

Schroth, Helfer, Kizior, D. W., & Kizior. (2011). "War on drugs" In M. Kleiman, & J. Hawdon (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of drug policy: "thewar on drugs"past, present, and future*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/war_on_drugs

Chicago

Schroth, Helfer, Daniel W. Kizior, and Kizior. "'War on Drugs'" In *Encyclopedia of Drug Policy: "The War on Drugs" Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Mark Kleiman, and James Hawdon. Sage Publications, 2011. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/war_on_drugs

Harvard

Schroth, Helfer, Kizior, D.W. and Kizior. (2011). "War on drugs" In M. Kleiman & J. Hawdon (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of drug policy: "thewar on drugs"past, present, and future*. [Online]. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/war_on_drugs [Accessed 27 June 2019].

MLA

Schroth, et al. "'War on Drugs'" *Encyclopedia of Drug Policy: "The War on Drugs" Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Mark Kleiman, and James Hawdon, Sage Publications, 1st edition, 2011. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/war_on_drugs. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.