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## Ending the War on Drugs- But how?

*The war on drugs sent shockwaves across marginalized communities, and there is growing consensus that we need to tackle its devastating impacts on our poor and non-white communities and end the era of mass incarceration. The question is: How? Should we decriminalize all drug use and possession in the United States, and replace our punitive measures with health responses? Or would that exacerbate the problems of addiction, poverty, and crime, and instead, we should change our policing techniques and work to end racial profiling and heavy policing of minority neighborhoods, but keep drug use a criminal offense?*

The United Nations, alongside many human rights and criminal justice organizations have been advocating for the complete decriminalization of drug use and possession (NOT of trafficking, trade, manufacturing, and sale of drugs). The police in the USA make over a million arrests related to drug possession alone. With the war on drugs, and since the 1980s, police have been making [6x more arrests on possession](#) than drug sale/manufacturing. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other UN agencies [support the decriminalization of all drug use and possession](#) worldwide, and in the USA in particular. [They argue](#) that the decriminalization of drug use in other countries have lowered conviction rates, changed the approach from punitive to health measures, and ended the vicious cycle of crime. In addition, they argue that evidence from other countries show no increase in rates of drug use following the decriminalization. Because drug offense, especially use and possession, [are very racialized and classed](#), meaning they target the poor and non-whites unequally, ending them would bring more justice to the criminal justice system. Drug use is a public health problem, not a criminal matter. We would just be dealing with drug offenses like we dealt with the recent Opioid crisis. Team 7, that's you.



Opponents to this argue that the decriminalization of drugs is too radical, and will normalize the use of drugs in our society. Maybe it worked in other countries, but who says it will in our own country? Also, if using drugs is decriminalized, wont that encourage traffickers to increase their trade and further target our youths? Furthermore, the decriminalization of drug use, they argue, is an extreme measure to deal with inequalities. Why not ensure that we do better about policing society in ways that do not engage in [racial profiling](#) and the criminalization of the poor? They point to the fact that the problem of mass incarceration will not be solved by eliminating our drug offenders. Drug offenses



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might make up [40% of all federal inmate offenses](#), but they only make up about 1/5 or [20% of offenses](#) committed by inmates in state and local prisons and jails. In other words, decriminalizing drugs is not the way to deal with mass incarceration, or with racial and class inequality in the CJS. Instead, we should train our officers and law enforcement to eliminate their racial biases, restructure policing to alleviate the heavy policing of poor and minority (especially Black) neighborhoods, and instead advocate for changing unfair laws that target minority men, such as three-strikes and mandatory minimums. That's you, Team 8.