

**Forum:** Seoul Model United Nations Conference  
**Question of:** Establishing measures to ensure the safe consumption of marijuana.  
**Student Officer:** Aashna Parikh, Assistant President

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## Introduction

Marijuana, a drug derived from the cannabis plant, has been widely used for both medicinal and recreational purposes for millenia. Despite numerous efforts to manage the consumption such as criminalization, marijuana addiction is a severe issue that must be addressed worldwide, with many cases beginning as recreational or medicinal usage that devolves into dependency. In the long-term, this may begin to interfere with the daily lives, physical health, and psychological wellbeing of the individual and their loved ones. The leading causes of unsafe consumption of marijuana are the following:

In their 2014 study, behavioral scientist Joan S. Tucker and colleagues examined the influence of peers on teenage marijuana usage within different types of friendships. They found that the following two factors may increase a teenager’s likelihood of using marijuana: (1) usage within mutually-reciprocated friendships that are “likely characterized by closeness and trust” and (2) usage as a “strategy to attain social status.”<sup>1</sup> In essence, substance use amongst adolescents is often linked to influence from peers in the form of the desire to “fit in” and increase one’s social status.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, marijuana dependence occurs “when the brain adapts to large amounts of the drug by reducing production of and sensitivity to its own endocannabinoid neurotransmitters.” Those with marijuana dependency may feel symptoms of withdrawal when not using the drug, such as irritability, physical discomfort, restlessness, and more, in turn making it more difficult to quit once dependent. Marijuana dependency devolves into addiction insofar as the individual cannot stop using the drug despite its interference with various aspects of their daily life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tucker, Joan S., Kayla de la Haye, David P. Kennedy, Jr. Harold D. Green, and Michael S. Pollard. “Peer Influence on Marijuana Use in Different Types of Friendships.” *The Journal of Adolescent Health : Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 2014). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.07.025>.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Is Marijuana Addictive?” National Institute on Drug Abuse, July 2020. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive>.

Several studies suggest that marijuana usage “is likely to precede use of [and addiction to] other licit and illicit substances.” For example, one study examined the phenomenon of “cross-sensitization” in rats, finding that rats exposed to tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) showed “heightened behavioral response ... when exposed to other drugs such as morphine.” Moreover, another study finds that adolescent rats who were exposed to cannabinoids display “decrease[d] ... reactivity [in] brain dopamine reward centers later in adulthood.” Together, these findings suggest that, if applicable to humans, those using marijuana as adolescents are not only more likely to grow addicted to the drug later in life, but also to have an enhanced response to other substances, supporting the idea that marijuana may serve as a “gateway drug.”

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Like most drugs, marijuana is highly addictive, resulting in addiction within 1 in 10 people who use the substance and 1 in 6 for teenagers, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration. One may become physically-dependent on marijuana, causing an inability to cope without it. Additionally, marijuana is associated with “depression, anxiety, suicide planning, and psychotic episodes.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, according to the WHO, marijuana has a range of negative impacts on physical health, including increased likelihood of cardiovascular and pulmonary conditions, increased likelihood of stroke, impaired cognitive development, and decreased psychomotor performance.<sup>5</sup>

In ancient times, marijuana was primarily used for medicinal and spiritual purposes. In 1,000 BC India, a mix of marijuana and milk was used in a popular drink called “bhang.” The drink had religious and medicinal significance, as the Hindu God Shiva was referred to as the “Lord of Bhang,” and the Vedas described how cannabis can be used for relieving anxiety.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, in Islam, the Quran prohibited intoxicating substances such as alcohol but not specifically marijuana. Around 500 BC, various ancient cultures in Asia grew cannabis for medical purposes, which had significantly lower levels of THC

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<sup>3</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Is Marijuana a Gateway Drug?” National Institute on Drug Abuse, July 2020. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-gateway-drug>.

<sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. “Know the Risks of Marijuana.” SAMHSA, 2022. <https://www.samhsa.gov/marijuana>.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. “Cannabis.” WHO. Accessed July 5, 2022. <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/alcohol-drugs-and-addictive-behaviours/drugs-psychoactive/cannabis>.

<sup>6</sup> Tackett, Brittany. “The History of Marijuana: Learn About The Origin of Marijuana.” Recovery.org, November 20, 2017. <https://recovery.org/marijuana/history/>.

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compared to modern forms.<sup>7</sup> Between 800 AD and 900 AD, the Arabs used marijuana to treat physical conditions such as pains, migraines, and syphilis.<sup>8</sup>

It was not until the 19th century, once recreational usage became prevalent, that marijuana faced notable regulation. Napoleon banned the drug in the year 1800 following his invasion of Egypt, Singapore banned it in 1870, and Greece banned it in 1890. With the turn of the 20th century, numerous other countries began severely regulating marijuana or banning the drug altogether.<sup>9</sup> For example, after immigrants during the Mexican Revolution introduced recreational cannabis to the United States in the early 1900s, its use was criminalized in 1937, due in part to mounting resentment of Mexican citizens during the Great Depression.<sup>10</sup>

The 21st century marked the beginning of a shift toward marijuana legalization in several nations around the globe. In 2013, Uruguay became the first to legalize marijuana in all its forms. Since then, the push for the legalization of cannabis has only increased, with Canada completely legalizing the drug in 2018.<sup>11</sup> As of 2022, marijuana is illegal in over 130 countries worldwide and legal to some extent (e.g. in certain states or districts) in nine countries.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, marijuana has become increasingly potent in recent years, with the THC concentration in samples rising from less than 4% in the 1990s to over 15% by 2018.<sup>13</sup> Questions have been raised regarding the physical and neurological consequences of increasing marijuana potency, making it an important topic for further research.

In the past, efforts to address the unsafe consumption of marijuana have largely centered around criminalization and regulation. In 1925, the League of Nations signed a treaty that restricted marijuana usage to solely medical purposes, causing lasting effects on the legality of the drug around the globe and the current prevalence of marijuana bans.<sup>14</sup> In 1971, U.S. President Richard Nixon declared the “War on Drugs”—an ongoing effort to decrease drug addiction through criminalization and law enforcement.<sup>15</sup> It

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<sup>7</sup> History.com Editors. “Marijuana.” *History*, May 31, 2017.  
<https://www.history.com/topics/crime/history-of-marijuana>.

<sup>8</sup> Tackett. “The History of Marijuana.”

<sup>9</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Timeline of Cannabis Law.” Wikipedia, June 30, 2022.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_cannabis\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_cannabis_law).

<sup>10</sup> History.com Editors. “Marijuana.”

<sup>11</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Timeline of Cannabis Law.”

<sup>12</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Legality of Cannabis.” Wikipedia, July 3, 2022.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legality\\_of\\_cannabis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legality_of_cannabis).

<sup>13</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Is Marijuana Addictive?” National Institute on Drug Abuse, July 2020.  
<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive>.

<sup>14</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “International Opium Convention.” Wikipedia, May 31, 2022.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Opium\\_Convention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Opium_Convention).

<sup>15</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. “War on Drugs.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 23, 2020.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-drugs>.

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was only until the 21st century that the idea that marijuana legalization may help decrease unsafe consumption began to take root. Since then, several countries have made changes or are considering making changes to their marijuana policies, signaling the beginning of a larger global movement.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, with the increase of public empathy for those facing addiction, the approach of treatment as opposed to punishment has become common in recent years, and is visible in the form of drug rehabilitation centers, increased education on safe usage, and more.

In terms of social impact, many regard criminalization efforts such as the War on Drugs to have intentionally and disproportionately affected people of color. In the United States, black people are almost 4 times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white people, even though usage of the drug is largely the same regardless of race. Furthermore, high incarceration rates for drug charges have contributed to disparities between white communities and communities of color.<sup>17</sup> In terms of economic impact, some argue that the legalization of marijuana will lead to economic gain—something governments are looking for amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the vast majority of U.S. states where marijuana is legalized benefit from the essential business the drug provides during the pandemic, given that the American marijuana industry employs over 400,000 full-time employees as of 2022.<sup>18</sup> This pattern is reflected in countries worldwide, making economic benefit a major incentive for nations to legalize cannabis.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Addiction**

Addiction has been described as the “compulsive psychological need for and use of a habit-forming substance,” and the continued use of a substance “even though it interferes with many aspects of his or her life.”<sup>19</sup> Marijuana addiction has been associated with various physiological consequences.

### **CBD**

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<sup>16</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Timeline of Cannabis Law.”

<sup>17</sup> American Civil Liberties Union. “A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform.” American Civil Liberties Union, 2020. <https://www.aclu.org/report/tale-two-countries-racially-targeted-arrests-era-marijuana-reform>.

<sup>18</sup> Barcott, Bruce, and Beau Whitney. “The US Cannabis Industry Now Supports 428,059 Jobs.” Leafly, February 23, 2022. <https://www.leafly.com/news/industry/cannabis-jobs-report>.

<sup>19</sup> Merriam-Webster. “Definition of Addiction.” Accessed July 5, 2022.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/addiction>; National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Is Marijuana Addictive?”

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Cannabidiol. It has many benefits such as relief of insomnia, anxiety, pain, epilepsy, and more, and has been used for medicinal purposes. Unlike THC, CBD does not cause a “high” sensation.<sup>20</sup>

### **Criminalization**

The act of making something illegal or against the law. Marijuana has been criminalized in most countries around the globe for decades, making users in countries that ban marijuana liable to criminal prosecution.

### **Gateway drugs**

The idea that the “use of one particular substance will lead individuals to subsequently be at a greater risk to abuse other substances.”<sup>21</sup> Scientific evidence suggests that marijuana has the potential of serving as a “gateway drug” in this respect.

### **Hard drugs**

Strong, highly-addictive, illicit drugs that may cause severe dependence, such as heroin and cocaine. While marijuana may act as a gateway to “hard” drugs, the majority of marijuana users do not end up using “harder” substances.<sup>22</sup>

### **Legalization**

The act of making something legal, or permitted by the law. There has been a shift toward legalization in recent years, and nine countries have legalized marijuana to some extent.<sup>23</sup>

### **Marijuana**

A drug derived from the cannabis plant. Other names include: weed, pot, dope, herb, grass, and more. Marijuana is used for both recreational and medical purposes. It is native to Central and South Asia. It gives users a feeling of euphoria and relaxation that can cause a high within minutes.<sup>24</sup> On its own, marijuana has over 100 active components. Marijuana can be consumed in teas or within other foods and

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<sup>20</sup> Shannon, Scott, Nicole Lewis, Heather Lee, and Shannon Hughes. “Cannabidiol in Anxiety and Sleep: A Large Case Series.” *The Permanente Journal* 23 (January 1, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/18-041>.

<sup>21</sup> American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff. “The Truth about Gateway Drugs and Addiction.” American Addiction Centers, July 31, 2018. <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/the-addiction-cycle/gateway-drugs>.

<sup>22</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Is Marijuana a Gateway Drug?”

<sup>23</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Legality of Cannabis.”

<sup>24</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Cannabis (Drug).” Wikipedia, July 3, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis\\_\(drug\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis_(drug)).

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is often called “edibles.” It can also be smoked through cigarettes, pipes, and other devices, and in recent years it has been contained within e-cigarettes, or vapes.<sup>25</sup>

### **Medical Marijuana**

The usage of marijuana for medicinal purposes, such as pain management or relief of anxiety. Medicinal marijuana is legal in 44 countries and 37 U.S. states.<sup>26</sup>

### **Overprescription**

The act of prescribing a drug in greater or more frequent dosages than necessary. Studies in the United States have found that medicinal cannabis has often been prescribed to “patients who have conditions for which cannabis is contraindicated,” while, in 2017, the “average daily dose of prescribed medical cannabis in Canada was 2.3g,” exceeding the recommended maximum of 700 mg.<sup>27</sup>

### **Recreational Marijuana**

The usage of marijuana for recreational purposes. There has been increasing debate as to whether recreational marijuana should be legalized, taking into account its varying economic, social, and physiological impacts.

### **THC**

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol. It is the main psychoactive ingredient of marijuana that causes the sensation of a high. In recent years, questions have been raised surrounding how the increasing concentration of THC in marijuana could be associated with negative health effects, sparking debate about regulating potency.

## **Timeline of Key Events**

### **1839 - Cannabis Introduced to Western Medicine by William Brooke O’Shaughnessy**

William Brooke O’Shaughnessy was the first to introduce the idea of using cannabis for medical purposes to the West. During the 1830s in Calcutta, India, O’Shaughnessy conducted experiments on a variety of animals using cannabis extracts, such as administering “ten grains of Nipalese [sic] Churrus,

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<sup>25</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “What We Know About Marijuana.” CDC, April 22, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/what-we-know.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Legality of Cannabis.”

<sup>27</sup> Kahan, Meldon, Anita Srivastava, and Sarah Clarke. “Cannabis Industry and Medical Cannabis Clinics Need Regulation.” *Canadian Family Physician* 65, no. 12 (December 1, 2019). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6907381/>.

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dissolved in spirit” to a “middle sized dog,” before providing cannabis to patients suffering from various diseases and ailments. Regarding the drug’s occasional failure to cure an illness, O’Shaughnessy argued that “at least one advantage was gained from the use of the remedy -- the awful malady was stripped of its horrors.” He eventually published his findings in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1839.<sup>28</sup>

### **June 30, 1906 - The U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act**

The Pure Food and Drug Act in the United States was the nation’s first attempt at regulating drugs, such as marijuana, within products. The Act prevented “the manufacture, sale, or transportation of adulterated or misbranded or poisonous or deleterious foods, drugs, medicines, and liquors,” and required the accurate labeling of active ingredients on packaging. Setting the precedent for future marijuana regulation and bans, the Pure Food and Drug Act was a milestone in changing the legality of cannabis in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

### **February 19, 1925 - Second International Opium Convention Regulates Cannabis**

The Second International Opium Convention, a 1925 conference under the League of Nations, proposed measures to control the use of Indian hemp, or hashish, which is derived from the cannabis plant. A sub-committee in the conference outlined that Indian hemp “may only be authorized for medical and scientific purposes” while the drug, when intended to be used for other purposes, “may not be produced, sold, traded in, etc., under any circumstances whatsoever.” Though the restrictions did not necessarily impose on the internal use of marijuana within individual countries, such as its use for religious purposes in India, the proposed measures were the first international effort to regulate the use of cannabis.<sup>30</sup>

### **October 1, 1937 - Passage of the U.S. Marijuana Tax Act**

In response to increasing usage of marijuana in the 1930s, the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 was introduced to the United States under the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, imposing a tax on both those dealing and prescribing cannabis. The Act was enacted despite facing opposition from the American Medical Association (AMA), who claimed that the “burden of [the] bill is placed heavily on ... doctors and pharmacists.” However, in 1967, the “insignificant amount of revenue” the Act gathered and the

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<sup>28</sup> Mukherjee, Sujaan. “W. B. O’Shaughnessy and the Introduction of Cannabis to Modern Western Medicine.” The Public Domain Review, April 20, 2017.

<https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/w-b-o-shaughnessy-and-the-introduction-of-cannabis-to-modern-western-medicine>.

<sup>29</sup> Heyburn, Weldon. The Pure Food and Drug Act, Pub. L. No. S. 88 (1906).

<https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/artifact/s-88-bill-preventing-manufacture-sale-or-transportation-deleterious-foods>.

<sup>30</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “International Opium Convention.”

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“insignificant number of marijuana transactions” it exposed were recognized, contributing to its eventual overruling in 1969. The Marijuana Tax Act was replaced by the Controlled Substances Act, which is the existing framework for regulating substances in the United States.<sup>31</sup>

### **1940s - 1990s - Milestones in Cannabis Research**

In 1940, Adams and Todd independently became the first to isolate cannabidiol (CBD) from cannabis in their respective laboratories in the US and UK. In 1964, Mechoulam, a pioneer in marijuana research, became the first to isolate delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) from cannabis in his laboratory in Israel.<sup>32</sup> Since then, research on marijuana has skyrocketed, along with recreational usage of the drug. Numerous studies in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated the possible efficacy of CBD in treating epilepsy, anxiety, and psychosis. With regards to THC, Mechoulam explained in an interview how at the time “[they] knew quite a lot about the effects of THC but didn’t know how it exerted its effects,” as they hadn’t yet considered the idea of cannabinoid receptors—a discovery that only occurred in the early 1990s.<sup>33</sup>

### **June 18, 1971 - Ongoing - The U.S. War on Drugs**

In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared the War on Drugs in response to drug abuse in the United States, which he regarded as “public enemy number one.” The Drug Enforcement Administration was formed in 1973, and was responsible for enforcing laws against drug abuse and shutting down smuggling practices. Additionally, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, passed under the Presidency of Ronald Reagan, implemented “mandatory minimum” sentences for drug-related charges and allocated an additional \$1.7 billion to the War on Drugs.<sup>34</sup> As of 2021, nearly 500,000 people are incarcerated for drug-related charges in the United States, with government spending on drug-related incarceration exceeding \$3 billion annually.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the War on Drugs in the United States continues.

### **November 5, 1996 - Compassionate Use Act Legalizes Medical Cannabis in California**

The U.S. Compassionate Use Act of 1996, or Proposition 215, legalized the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes in the state of California. Ballot arguments were made in favor and against the

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<sup>31</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “Marihuana Tax Act of 1937.” Wikipedia, June 13, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marihuana\\_Tax\\_Act\\_of\\_1937](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marihuana_Tax_Act_of_1937).

<sup>32</sup> Pertwee, Roger G. “Cannabinoid Pharmacology: The First 66 Years.” *British Journal of Pharmacology* 147, no. Suppl 1 (January 1, 2006). <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.bjp.0706406>.

<sup>33</sup> International League Against Epilepsy. “The Discovery of the Endocannabinoid System: Centuries in the Making.” *Newswise*, January 27, 2019. <https://www.newswise.com/articles/the-discovery-of-the-endocannabinoid-system-centuries-in-the-making>.

<sup>34</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. “War on Drugs.”

<sup>35</sup> Farber, David. “The War on Drugs Turns 50 Today. It’s Time to Make Peace.” *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/06/17/war-drugs-turns-50-today-its-time-make-peace/>.



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proposition, and various political and social factors—such as the ongoing AIDS epidemic and the fact that the state was largely Democratic—contributed to its eventual passing with support from 55.6% of voters. The Act was the first attempt to decrease regulation on marijuana at the state level, and it caused a ripple effect across North America for the legalization of medical marijuana.<sup>36</sup>

### **2013 - Legalization of Marijuana in Uruguay**

In 2013, Uruguay became the first country to legalize marijuana for both medicinal and recreational purposes. The change was not unprecedented: Uruguay’s approach to drug policy has been relatively liberal in the past, and the president at the time, José “Pepe” Mujica, was in favor of the legalization of cannabis, even though two-thirds of the general populace opposed it. All commercial cannabis is facilitated by a monopoly of the state, and there are still restrictions in place that discourage cultivation and possessing large amounts of the drug. Since Uruguay’s legalization of marijuana in 2013, numerous other countries have followed suit, demonstrating the increasing global push for legalization.<sup>37</sup>

### **April, 2022 - Thailand Decriminalizes Cannabis**

In April 2022, Thailand decriminalized the use of cannabis, making it the first Asian nation to do so. With medicinal marijuana now legal, the nation looks forward to benefits such as releasing existing prisoners, dropping charges related to cannabis, and significant economic gain, according to Thailand’s Public Health Minister, Anutin Charnvirakul. As a result of decriminalization, many have been flocking to cafes selling cannabis-containing goods that were previously illegal, attracting the attention of foreign tourists. That being said, restrictions on smoking marijuana in public and possessing extractions with over 0.2% of THC are still strictly maintained, making Thailand’s drug policy less liberal than nations such as Uruguay and Canada.<sup>38</sup>

## **Position of Key Member Nations and Other Bodies**

### **United States of America**

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<sup>36</sup> Contributors to Wikimedia projects. “1996 California Proposition 215.” Wikipedia, June 28, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1996\\_California\\_Proposition\\_215](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1996_California_Proposition_215).

<sup>37</sup> Walsh, John, and Geoff Ramsey. “Uruguay’s Drug Policy: Major Innovations, Major Challenges.” Brookings, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Walsh-Uruguay-final.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> The Associated Press. “Thailand Decriminalizes Marijuana, but Not the Strong Stuff.” *NPR*, June 9, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/09/1103878929/thailand-decriminalizes-marijuana>.

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Though the United States has criminalized marijuana on the federal level, 19 states have legalized recreational use of the drug while 37 have legalized medicinal use.<sup>39</sup> The four main positions that different states favor are as follows: “prohibition of all supply, decriminalization, legalization for medical purposes, and legalization for recreational purposes.” Additionally, some states regulate based on THC content, with either only permitting “low-THC, high-CBD products” or having THC limits in certain situations, such as while driving. Between 1969 and 2019, public support for marijuana legalization has increased from 12% to 66% of the general population, and this upward trend has appeared to continue.<sup>40</sup>

### **Canada**

The Cannabis Act of 2018 legalized the possession, consumption, trade, and cultivation of marijuana in Canada in both recreational and medicinal forms, making it the second country to legalize the drug completely. Through the Cannabis Act, the nation aims to achieve the following: “keep cannabis out of the hands of youth,” “keep profits out of the pockets of criminals,” and “protect public health and safety by allowing adults access to legal cannabis.” Furthermore, Canada strictly regulates the production and sale of marijuana, ensuring that packaging is not done in a way that appeals to the youth, cannabis is not sold through self-service, the use of certain ingredients is prohibited, and the amount and potency of cannabis served is standardized, amongst other requirements. From a social perspective, Canada has dedicated nearly \$46 million to education on marijuana, and has significantly reduced the number of individuals receiving criminal records for possessing cannabis as a result of legalization.<sup>41</sup>

### **Uruguay**

As the first nation to completely legalize cannabis, Uruguay, like Canada, has a liberal attitude with regards to marijuana usage, with drug policy being a topical issue of debate since the country’s transition to democracy in 1985. From 2004 onwards, the government has focused on harm reduction and taking steps toward decriminalization, but the cultivation of marijuana remained heavily penalized until its legalization in 2013. Uruguay’s former president José “Pepe” Mujica was a major driving factor behind the legalization of cannabis, despite the decision to do so being opposed by the two-thirds of the general population. Under the new law, individuals could (1) “purchase up to 40 grams of the drug,” (2) “grow up to six female flowering cannabis plants” under monitoring of the Institute for Regulation and Control of Cannabis (IRCCA), or (3) “join cooperatives to collectively grow cannabis,” which became

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<sup>39</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. “State Medical Cannabis Laws.” NCSL, June 14, 2022. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-medical-marijuana-laws.aspx>.

<sup>40</sup> Haffajee, Rebecca, and Amanda Mauri. “Cannabis Liberalization In The US: The Policy Landscape.” Health Affairs, July 1, 2021. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20210518.36548/full/>.

<sup>41</sup> Canadian Department of Justice. “Cannabis Legalization and Regulation.” Department of Justice, July 7, 2021. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/cannabis/>.

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known as “cannabis clubs”; however, the policy states that “acquiring psychoactive cannabis from more than one of the above sources is prohibited.” Uruguay’s marijuana policy is characterized by the following having heavy state regulation, enforcing an “exclusive methods of access,” permitting home-growing, being less commercially-driven, imposing minimal taxes, focusing on improving public health, and restricting cannabis use in public and during transit.<sup>42</sup>

### **United Kingdom**

Although the United Kingdom has legalized the medicinal and industrial use of marijuana under the license of the UK Home Office, recreational marijuana is still not permitted, and cannabis is currently classified as a Class B drug. Whether or not marijuana should be legalized in the UK has been a prominent topic of debate in recent years, with proponents arguing that legalization could allow for better regulation of cannabis products and THC content, save hundreds of millions of pounds in costs related to criminalization, and provide individuals with greater freedom of choice. Proponents also cite the current prevalence of marijuana use amongst the UK population as evidence that the law against the drug has lost credibility, and should be removed. Meanwhile, opponents raise concerns with the possibility of marijuana serving as a “gateway” to harder drugs, the addictive nature of the substance, and the rising THC content of the drug, which could lead to psychological harms. In terms of the general population, 59% support marijuana legalization while 31% oppose it. Politically, the Liberal Democrats and Green Party both support the legalization of cannabis.<sup>43</sup>

### **India**

Traditionally, the consumption of marijuana is deeply rooted in Indian culture. Despite this, the nation only permits the use of marijuana for medical and scientific purposes under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. On the state level, governments are allowed to “permit, control and regulate the cultivation of any cannabis plant, production, ... purchase, consumption, or use of cannabis (excluding charas)”—a variant of hashish—“for medical, scientific, and industrial purposes.” For example, the State of Uttarakhand has permitted the cultivation of industrial marijuana, with hemp-based products being available online and in the market. Additionally, regulations often differ based on the part of the cannabis plant in question, and bhang is not regulated under the NDPS Act, unlike other

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<sup>42</sup> Walsh, John, and Geoff Ramsey. “Uruguay’s Drug Policy: Major Innovations, Major Challenges.”

<sup>43</sup> Politics.co.uk. “Cannabis Laws UK - All You Need to Know.” Politics.co.uk, May 15, 2022. <https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/cannabis/>.

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forms of the drug such as ganja and charas. Consumption of marijuana for recreational purposes is not permitted in India.<sup>44</sup>

### **Mexico**

Having legalized cannabis in 2021, Mexico became the one of the largest cannabis markets in the world. The law allows for the personal use of marijuana, production and sale of the drug for commercial purposes, and, with a permit, its cultivation at home. However, the change faced significant opposition from the local people, nearly two-thirds of which opposed legalization, with many believing that the law will have little impact on reducing drug cartel-related violence. Others argue that legalization is an important step toward recovering from the drug war that deeply affected the nation, however there remains debate as to whether Mexico's legislation will achieve the goals that it aims to achieve.<sup>45</sup> Notably, issues such as police extortion, in which officers may claim an individual possesses more than the 28-gram limit imposed by the law, may disproportionately affect the low-income population and limit the benefit of legalization for decreasing marijuana-related criminal charges. That being said, part of the government incentive behind legalization was the significant economic gain it could yield for the nation in the form of job opportunities and tax revenue.<sup>46</sup>

### **Thailand**

Becoming the first Asian nation to decriminalize cannabis in 2022, Thailand has taken significant steps toward drug reform. Still, the nation maintains strict restrictions on smoking in public and possessing cannabis with concentrations of THC greater than 0.2%, such as extracted oils, making their policy stricter than those of nations that have legalized the drug altogether. On the ground, marijuana use has become commonplace, and the drug's prevalence in local cafes has attracted tourists from around the globe. The range of possible economic and social benefits from marijuana decriminalization are sought after by the Thai government, given that industries such as tourism is central to the nation's economy. Additionally, the new legislation allows for the release of those who have been imprisoned for cannabis-related charges—at least 4,000 individuals. According to Public Health Minister Anutin

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<sup>44</sup> Press Trust of India. "No Complete Ban on Cannabis, Medical Use Allowed: Centre to Delhi HC." *India Today*, January 11, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/no-complete-ban-on-cannabis-medical-use-allowed-centre-to-delhi-hc-1898486-2022-01-11>.

<sup>45</sup> Lopez, Oscar. "Mexico Passes Bill to Legalize Cannabis." *The New York Times*, March 11, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/10/world/americas/mexico-cannabis-bill.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "Mexico's Cannabis Legalization, and Comparisons with Colombia, Lebanon, and Canada." *Brookings*, March 30, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/03/30/mexicos-cannabis-legalization-and-comparisons-with-colombia-lebanon-and-canada/>.

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Charnvirakul, an advocate for progressive marijuana policy, “if [they] have the right awareness, cannabis is like gold, something valuable, and should be promoted.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Singapore**

Singapore maintains a strict prohibition on the “trafficking, possession, consumption, and import and export of illicit drugs, including cannabis and cannabis products.” The nation is committed to remaining “drug-free,” and hence imposes harsh punishments on any individuals found to be in possession marijuana—“up to 10 years of imprisonment or \$20,000 fine, or both”—and, “depending on the amount of cannabis, ... the death penalty” for illegal trafficking, importing, and exporting of the drug. Additionally, Singaporeans and Permanent Residents found to have consumed marijuana outside of the country “will face the same penalties as the offense is committed in Singapore.” Citing evidence of cannabis being addictive and damaging to health, along with the lack of evidence on the “safety and efficacy of raw cannabis use,” the nation has adopted one of the strictest anti-drug policies in the world.<sup>48</sup>

### **Brazil**

Medical marijuana is permitted in Brazil, and may be produced and sold after manufacturers obtain permission from the Brazilian National Agency for Sanitary Surveillance (ANVISA). Only those with a prescription may receive marijuana for medical purposes, and recreational marijuana remains banned under the Brazilian Federal Law. Companies may only import marijuana-based products with CBD and THC concentrations under 30mg/ml from other countries for industrial purposes. Although recreational use is not permitted, marijuana is still prevalent and easily accessible by the general public.

### **Australia**

Recreational marijuana law in Australia varies from region to region, but medicinal marijuana, when authorized by a license, has been permitted since 2016. Possession of small amounts of marijuana has been legalized in the Australian Capital Territory, while other regions may require mandatory counseling, fines, or criminal charges for individuals found to be possessing marijuana based on the amount. Parts of the nation have decriminalized the use of cannabis, meaning that one may receive a warning but not a criminal charge when found to be possessing the drug, but the consequences for unauthorized marijuana cultivation remain severe. Measures such as roadside saliva testing have also been implemented in New South Wales, where individuals who test positive for cannabis may be “banned

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<sup>47</sup> The Associated Press. “Thailand Decriminalizes Marijuana, but Not the Strong Stuff.”

<sup>48</sup> Central Narcotics Bureau. “Singapore’s Anti-Drug Laws on Cannabis.” CNB, 2021.

<https://www.cnb.gov.sg/educational-resources/myths-and-facts-about-drugs/cannabis/singapore's-anti-drug-laws-on-cannabis>.

from driving for 24 hours,” and utilizing devices for smoking cannabis such as bongs makes one subject to criminal charges in regions including South Australia, Queensland, and Western Australia.<sup>49</sup>

## Suggested Solutions

There are numerous different courses of action that the international community can take to address the issue of ensuring the safe consumption of marijuana. The broad approaches are as follows: (1) maintaining criminalization on the usage of marijuana, (2) regulating marijuana usage on parameters including THC potency, age, and prescription dosage, (3) legalizing the drug for medicinal and/or recreational purposes, (4) implementing measures to prevent addiction such as education and mental health support, and (5) establishing systems to treat addiction such as rehabilitation centers. Each proposed solution is elaborated on in greater depth below.

Countries may choose to maintain or tighten criminalization of marijuana, with some examples being Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Proponents of this solution may argue that for situations in which drug-use is already controlled, it is in the nation’s best interest to continue restricting drug use due to the range of negative physical and psychological consequences that marijuana has been associated with—the stance that the Singaporean government has taken, for instance.<sup>50</sup> If marijuana is not readily accessible, maintaining criminalization may result in fewer people using the drug compared to if the government were to legalize marijuana altogether. Meanwhile opponents may argue that criminalization could put immense pressure on the criminal justice system, who have to facilitate the punishment and imprisonment of all those with cannabis-related charges. Additionally, harsh criminalization means the government loses the benefit of regulating the flow of cannabis, leading to existing users accessing the drug through the black market, where it may be laced with other, more harmful substances.

Countries may also choose to decriminalize marijuana but maintain regulations on certain key parameters, such as ensuring THC concentration is below a certain limit, that individuals under a certain age are not permitted to use the drug, and that only those with a doctor’s prescription may use medicinal forms. For instance, Thailand does not permit the use of cannabis products with THC concentrations about 0.2%, which is the component of cannabis that causes a “high” sensation.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, all nations

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<sup>49</sup> Australian Criminal Law Group. “Cannabis Law Australia.” *Australian Criminal Law Group*, January 13, 2020. <https://aclawgroup.com.au/blog/law-explained/cannabis-law-australia/>.

<sup>50</sup> Central Narcotics Bureau. “Singapore’s Anti-Drug Laws on Cannabis.”

<sup>51</sup> The Associated Press. “Thailand Decriminalizes Marijuana, but Not the Strong Stuff.”

regulate cannabis accessibility based on age, the most common restriction being that individuals under the age of 18 may not legally possess or consume marijuana. Additionally, nations may choose to only permit clinics to prescribe medical marijuana after obtaining a license from the government, and only allow those with a doctor's prescription to be provided the drug. One key incentive for regulation-focused drug policy as opposed to criminalization is that the government retains the ability to regulate the drug, reducing the harms of the black market trade. Governments may also choose the extent to which they will regulate the drug, and, in some cases, legalization and regulation may go hand in hand. For example, Canada has legalized both recreational and medicinal marijuana, but maintains restrictions on age and packaging.<sup>52</sup>

Countries may also choose to legalize marijuana for specific purposes; for example, legalizing the drug for medicinal use but not recreational, or legalizing all forms of the drug, including recreational marijuana. Additionally, some countries may choose to legalize the marijuana for industrial purposes, such as that used in certain items of clothing. Examples of nations which have legalized marijuana include Uruguay, Canada, and Mexico. Before choosing to legalize the drug, countries must consider the current state of drug abuse in the nation and weigh the costs of legalization with its benefits. Additionally, legalization is often an approach that goes hand in hand with a treatment-focused policy, which could entail the rehabilitation of those affected and the provision of safer forms of the drug to users by regulating ingredients in marijuana products. Countries choosing to legalize marijuana in all its forms may also benefit from increased tourism and economic gain from the trade of cannabis, making it a possible option for nations that heavily rely on such industries.

Given that marijuana addiction results in a range of negative repercussions, the issue of preventing it is one that all countries must confront themselves with. Options to do so include raising awareness through increased education about marijuana use and its effects. For example, schools could require all students to undergo a course on avoiding drugs/responsible drug use. Additionally, countries may consider increasing the accessibility of mental health support for the general public, as those suffering from mental health issues may be at a greater risk of suffering from an addiction. For many, being well-integrated into society and having external responsibilities can serve as strong prevention factors for out-of-hand drug use. Additionally, decreasing marijuana potency by regulating THC content could help reduce the number of people addicted, and legalizing only CBD—which doesn't cause a high sensation—may further accomplish this as well. Essentially, governments may utilize measures such as

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<sup>52</sup> Canadian Department of Justice. "Cannabis Legalization and Regulation."

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education on drugs from an early age, support for other aspects of well-being such as mental health, and regulation on the potency and type of marijuana available.

Countries may also adopt a treatment-based approach and focus on mitigating the health effects of marijuana addiction. This can be through establishing rehabilitation centers and increasing access to clean forms of the drug by limiting marijuana laced with other harmful substances. When choosing to create rehabilitation centers, countries must consider their cost, accessibility, and effectiveness for the population of those suffering from addiction, as the goal is to reach the greatest number of people. Another benefit of a treatment-focused approach is possibly decreasing the negative stigma associated with drug addiction, and thus encouraging those addicted to openly seek help—a critical step in improving the health and well-being of both the affected individuals and their families. Adopting a treatment-focused policy would likely go hand-in-hand with legalization; however, countries who decriminalize marijuana may also be able to benefit from this approach. For example, nations could require mandatory rehabilitation for all those found possessing or using marijuana.

In sum, there are a range of different approaches that countries may take to ensure the safe consumption of marijuana. Some possible approaches include maintaining criminalization, regulating marijuana based on certain parameters, legalizing the drug for medicinal and/or recreational purposes, preventing marijuana addiction through means such as education, and making treatment accessible for the affected population through rehabilitation. Each decision must be made on a case-by-case basis depending on factors such as the nation's current situation with drug abuse and their various social and economic needs. Regardless of which method is chosen, all countries must carefully consider the pressing issue of marijuana addiction, along with the possible benefits that marijuana trade may bring, and make their decisions in a way that is beneficial for the people, the government, and the nation as a whole.

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