

THE “WAR ON DRUGS” AT A GLANCE

- There is a drug arrest every 19 seconds in the U.S. Of the more than 1.6 million drug arrests in 2009, 82 percent were for possession alone.ⁱ
- The U.S. government estimates that more than 118 million Americans above the age of 12 (47 percent of the population) admit to using illegal drugs.ⁱⁱ
- One out of every 100 American adults is behind bars in jail or prison,ⁱⁱⁱ and the U.S. houses nearly 25 percent of the world’s prisoners^{iv} despite having less than five percent of the world’s total population.^v
- In four years, more than 35,000 people have been killed in violence related to Mexico’s war against the cartels that control the illegal drug market.^{vi}
- The Department of Justice says that the illegal drug market in the U.S. is dominated by 900,000 criminally active gang members affiliated with 20,000 street gangs in more than 2,500 cities,^{vii} and that Mexican drug cartels now directly control illegal drug markets in at least 230 American cities.^{viii}
- Al Qa’ida and nearly half of all U.S. State Department-listed Foreign Terrorist Organizations have ties to the illegal drug trade.^{ix} For example, the Taliban and Afghan warlords collect nearly half a billion dollars a year from illicit drug farming, production and trafficking,^x while the FARC in Colombia finances its activities with \$300 million a year in illegal drug sales.^{xi}
- According to the federal government, 23.5 million Americans are in need of substance abuse treatment, but only one in 10 receive it.^{xii}
- 48 percent of U.S. high school students have used illegal drugs by graduation.^{xiii}
- Teens say obtaining illegal marijuana is easier than buying legal, controlled and age-regulated beer.^{xiv}
- National drug control spending on harsh enforcement strategies grew by 69.7 percent over the past nine years, while spending on treatment and prevention only grew by 13.9 percent. While President Obama often talks about drug abuse as a health – and not just a crime – issue, his administration reports that federal resources devoted to supply-reduction efforts (arrests, punishment and eradication) are now nearly double those for demand-reduction programs (such as treatment and prevention).^{xv}
- Conservative estimates say that legalizing and regulating drugs could boost the U.S. economy by \$88 billion a year in law enforcement savings and new tax revenue.^{xvi}
- Three out of four American voters say the “war on drugs” is a failure.^{xvii}

- In a survey by the National Association of Chiefs of Police, 82 percent of police chiefs and sheriffs said that the “war on drugs” has not been successful in reducing drug use.^{xviii}
- According to a Gallup poll, 46 percent of Americans now favor legalizing marijuana, the largest amount of support in the firm’s over 40 years of asking the question.^{xix} Other polls show that a majority of Americans (52 percent) now support legalizing and taxing marijuana.^{xx} In 2010, over 4.6 million Californians (46.5% of the midterm electorate) voted for a statewide marijuana legalization ballot initiative.^{xxi}
- African Americans, 13 percent of the U.S. population,^{xxii} proportionately account for 13 percent of the nation’s drug users,^{xxiii} but are 34 percent of those arrested for drug offenses^{xxiv} and 45 percent of those held in state prisons for drug offenses.^{xxv}
- On average, it costs \$25,251 to incarcerate a federal prisoner for one year.^{xxvi}
- There are at least 346,605 people serving sentences in state and federal prisons for drug possession or sales in the U.S. (including more than half the entire federal inmate population).^{xxvii}
- There were also 767,620 inmates held in local jails in the U.S. in 2009,^{xxviii} and in 2002 (the most recent year offense data was collected), possessing or selling drugs was the most serious crime committed by a quarter of jail inmates.^{xxix} (An unknown number of additional persons are incarcerated for crimes that occur due to the currently illegal and unregulated nature of drug markets, such as property crimes used to pay for illegal drugs or violent disputes for control of the market).
- In 2009, there were an additional 582,759 adults on probation and 261,666 adults on parole for drug law violations in the U.S.^{xxx}
- Every day, more than 50 people die of unintentional drug overdoses in the U.S.^{xxxi}
- While Mexican drug cartels traffic heavily in cocaine and methamphetamine, law enforcement officials estimate that 65 to 70 percent of their profits come from illegal marijuana sales, although it is inherently difficult to study illegal markets.^{xxxii}
- In the U.S.’s overburdened criminal justice system, nearly four of ten murders, six of ten rapes and nine of ten burglaries go unsolved.^{xxxiii}

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- ^v U.S. Department of Commerce. Census Bureau. (August 2010). *U.S. & World Population Clocks*. <http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html>
- ^{vi} Los Angeles Times. (May 2011). *Mexico Under Siege: The Drug War At Our Doorstep*. <http://projects.latimes.com/mexico-drug-war/>
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