

Effect of Drug Law Enforcement on Drug-Related Violence: Evidence from a Scientific Review

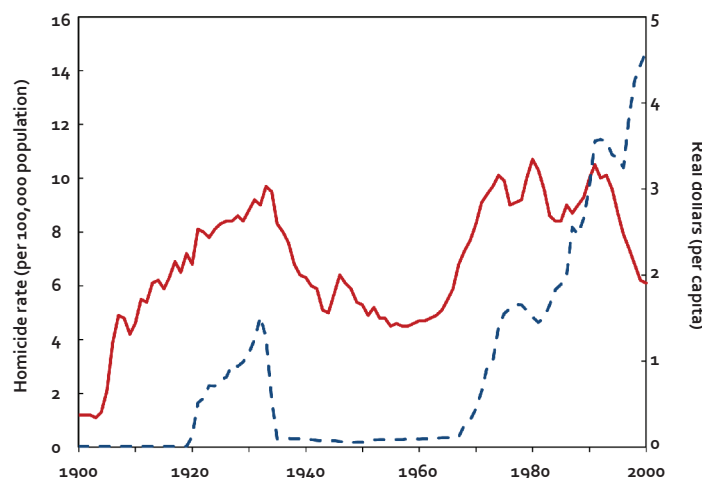
Werb D, Rowell G, Kerr T, Guyatt G, Montaner J, Wood E. Vancouver: International Centre for Science in Drug Policy

Importance of this scientific review

- The illicit drug trade is a key cause of violence, particularly in urban areas.
- Recently, Mexico has been experiencing extreme levels of drug market violence. This has involved the killing of over 17,000 individuals since the country's nationwide counternarcotics campaign was launched in 2006.
- Governments have primarily relied on increasing drug law enforcement in an effort to reduce drug market violence. However, the impact of this policy on reducing violence has not been systematically evaluated.
- To address this gap, a systematic review of available English language scientific literature was conducted to answer the question: Does drug law enforcement affect levels of drug market violence?

Does drug law enforcement affect levels of drug market violence?

Historical trends in drug enforcement expenditure (blue line) and homicide rate (red line) in the United States, 1900-2000



Sources: Vital Statistics of the United States (US Census Bureau, 1975), Statistical Abstracts of the United States (US Census Bureau, various issues), Eckberg (1995), and Annual Budget of the United States, as described in Miron (1999)

How the review was conducted

- To undertake a comprehensive review of existing scientific research, a search of all relevant electronic databases and the Internet was conducted.
- The methods used are consistent with the leading scientific protocol for transparent systematic reviews, known as the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).

The available scientific evidence suggests that drug law enforcement efforts will not meaningfully reduce drug supply or drug-related violence and may paradoxically increase violence in communities.

What the review found

- Among the 15 studies that evaluated the impact of drug law enforcement on violence, 87% (13 studies) concluded that drug law enforcement was associated with increased levels of drug market violence.
- The available scientific evidence suggests that law enforcement efforts are unlikely to reduce drug market violence (*for an example, see figure above*).
- On the contrary, drug law enforcement practices aimed to disrupt drug markets may have the unintentional effect of increasing levels of drug market violence.

What this means for public policy

- Drug market violence appears to be a natural consequence of drug prohibition.
- Alternative models for drug control may need to be considered if drug supply and drug-related violence are to be meaningfully reduced.

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