



Marijuana Is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink?

Steve Fox , Paul Armentano , Mason Tvert

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Nationally recognized marijuana-policy experts Steve Fox, Paul Armentano, and Mason Tvert compare and contrast the relative harms and legal status of the two most popular recreational substances in the world--marijuana and alcohol. Through an objective examination of the two drugs and the laws and social practices that steer people toward alcohol, the authors pose a simple yet rarely considered question: Why do we punish adults who make the rational, safer choice to use marijuana instead of alcohol?

Marijuana Is Safer reaches for a broad audience. For those unfamiliar with marijuana, it provides an introduction to the cannabis plant and its effects on the user, and debunks some of the government's most frequently cited marijuana myths. For current and aspiring advocates of marijuana-law reform, as well as anyone else who is interested in what is becoming a major political battle, the authors spell out why the message that marijuana is safer than alcohol must be a prominent part of the public debate over legalization.

Most importantly, for the millions of Americans who want to advance the cause of marijuana-policy reform--or simply want to defend their own personal, safer choice--this book provides the talking points and detailed information needed to make persuasive arguments to friends, family, coworkers, and elected officials.

Marijuana Is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink? Details

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Dirk says

An interesting strategy for moving the decriminalization/legalization of marijuana forward. The message that marijuana is much safer than alcohol has apparently helped further the cause of the anti-prohibition movement with some near successes in Colorado and other locales. There is no doubt that convicting 20 million Americans for pot related offences (mostly simple possession) since the prohibition began is a tragedy. The 'war on drugs' (with respect to marijuana) is more accurately the 'war on citizens'.

Margus Mith says

Great book, great examples and case studies. Eye-opening.

Isaac says

I have a habit of going through non-fiction books half way and then getting side tracked by a new one I see on the library shelf. Such was the case with this one, though I would highly recommend it to someone looking for inspiration for a paper on the subject, or someone looking to shape future public policy. This book emphasizes the fact that there is growing support for legalization from members of law enforcement organizations, a fact which may eventually play a key role in determining marijuana's legal future. Also addressed are the numerous studies showing that while alcohol often plays a role in cases of violent crime - particularly domestic abuse and assault - marijuana rarely does.

Mark Flowers says

Paul's a friend, and I didn't really need any convincing, but I still found this to be a fascinating book, with an incredibly important message. I think their policy argument - that the best way to approach legalization is to stick to the message that MJ is safer than alcohol - to be particularly interesting, especially the results that the campaign had in Colorado.

If you have any interest in the topic at all, I recommend this book, and if you feel like you need some convincing, talk to me.

Dale White says

I don't drink alcohol or smoke pot, but I have always wondered why alcohol is legal while marijuana is

illegal. There is nobody out there who can deny the individual and societal problems that have occurred from people drinking. Lost productivity. Health issues. Domestic abuse. Car accidents. On any objective measure, marijuana does not come anywhere close to causing those problems. Yet we continue to spend millions on arresting and incarcerating pot users while alcohol (ab)use continues. We know that alcohol will never be made illegal so the obvious question becomes why is marijuana illegal?

Marijuana is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People To Drink tries to address this question and they come to the argument from several angles. They show the illogical history of pot prohibition. They show the illogical response to athletes who are criticized for mild marijuana use compared to the accepted alcohol culture in professional sports. (They even suggest that advertising/sponsorships by beer companies plays a part in these responses.) They wonder why binge drinking on campuses seems to be a rite of passage while small amounts of pot use become grounds for suspension. But their most persuasive arguments deal with the comparison of the effects of alcohol to the effects of marijuana use both individually and socially.

After reading this book, it is difficult for anybody to objectively support the notion that marijuana should continue to be illegal. But it continues to be illegal and while the authors suggest several things that readers can do to advance the cause, they are up against one huge obstacle (that they try to address). Where is the political will to make the necessary changes?

I am from the generation that popularized marijuana use in the '60s. That generation wields the most power politically as the vast majority of politicians right now come from the boomer generation. That generation also wields the most power in the voting booth as we are more likely to vote. Yet, when a younger politician like a Justin Trudeau suggests that marijuana should be legalized, he is demonized by those older than he is as some drugged out hippie.

On top of that, legalizing marijuana isn't really a game changing issue that would encourage someone to vote differently in an election. So for most political parties and politicians it becomes a no win situation, very little to gain and a lot more to lose.

I am assuming that success or failure of the decision of the voters in Washington and Colorado to legalize marijuana will determine whether other jurisdictions will make the change.

Erika says

A must-read! This excellent book is extremely well-written, well-researched, and well-documented. Check it out... it may just change your mind about marijuana, or give you the facts to advocate for what you already knew to be true: marijuana IS a safer choice than alcohol. Rather than adding another vice, marijuana legalization could provide a safer alternative to alcohol, helping ameliorate some of the many societal ills caused by booze.

Stacy Burke says

Nothing new for marijuana enthusiasts, but a must read for all the people brainwashed by the stigma our society has attached to pot. Citing studies, Marijuana is Safer proves that if any substance should be banned between alcohol and marijuana, it's alcohol, not that the authors would want it to be banned. They understand

that not only is marijuana use much safer for individuals and society as a whole than alcohol but prohibition doesn't work.

Blarg says

This book was startlingly good. I picked it up expecting a pure libertarian argument and was overwhelmed by the coherence and rigor of the authors' central argument: Because marijuana is far safer than alcohol, many lives will be saved (and improved) when we legalize marijuana. We should make it available to all adults and encourage many of them to choose it over alcohol.

The numbers on deaths (and injuries) from alcohol, including sexual assaults, were really quite startling. The correlation between alcohol and violence is as strong as it is weak for marijuana.

A good question the authors asked: If you were walking down the street at night with a friend, would you prefer to encounter a group of men who had been drinking or a group of guys who had been smoking marijuana?

Overall, highly recommended.

Cristina Hutchinson says

This book was surprisingly good. I was a little leary at first, but the information is organized and well presented. The theme of the book is simply - marijuana is safer. It's an in depth look at the differences between weed and alcohol.

The ideas presented evidently work as this was the basis on the reform to legalize marijuana in Colorado. The authors break down myths on weed and explore the benefits of making a less harmful than alcohol substance available legally for adults.

A compelling read that supporters of legalization will find interesting, but more importantly, those on the fence or opposed to legalization need to read this book so that they are at least making an informed decision.

Jesse says

I think this is a must-read for everyone in today's society, but especially anyone who consumes any drug, whether it be alcohol, caffeine or marijuana. It's not as pushy as you'd think and offers a lot of history and facts, with the real political push saved till the end. Just read it with an open mind and really consider the message.

Justin says

This well-written book systematically breaks down the flawed drug laws of this country, in which a substance that is demonstrably worse for the individual and society is not only legal but celebrated, while a safer substance is arbitrarily deemed illegal and its users vilified whether criminally or via an unfounded social stigma.

It thoroughly explores and compares the effects of alcohol and marijuana, details the expensive burden of marijuana prohibition on our country's legal system, and highlights the enormous economic gain that would come with the legalizing, regulating, and taxing of marijuana. By prohibiting pot and glorifying alcohol, our society pushes people to drink, leading to problems of addiction, violence, sexual assault, severe health effects, and other ills for the individual and society at large.

For me, this book was preaching to the choir but it was great to get armed with facts, statistics, and history to back up what I already knew - when it comes to recreational substance use, marijuana is a better, smarter option than alcohol.

Chris says

This is a great reference for both "the converted," and parents who worry that legalization and regulation of cannabis will lead to increased usage among teens. In today's climate of marijuana prohibition, your average American teen can acquire pot faster than a Domino's pizza. "Drug dealers don't card."

At the core of this book is a persuasive argument, and a challenge to our society, which is to recognize the prevalent hypocrisy on the war against drugs, and acknowledge that one of the most dangerous drugs, alcohol, is legal. Or as the late Bill Hicks said, "... it's OK if you DRINK your drug!."

Brenton says

A quick (pardon the pun) distillation of the argument: The two most popular recreational nervous system depressants are alcohol and cannabis. One is legal, the other is not. The legal drug can affect the brain stem and thus cause death by asphyxiation, the illegal one cannot. The legal drug is associated with aggressive acts like assault and rape, the illegal one is not. By discouraging cannabis use, society is pushing people toward a drug that is more dangerous for the individual and the public. Legalizing the private use of cannabis by adults would decrease the use of alcohol, freeing up law enforcement resources, raise tax revenue, and improve the public health.

Overall I found this book thought-provoking in a good way, though I take issue with a couple of their chief assumptions. First, I question the percentage of the public who actually view alcohol and cannabis as substitutes. Perhaps they are similar chemically, but I find it hard to believe that many people drink solely for the chemical effect. Legalization might increase the number of people who see the two as substitutes, but the authors made no effort to answer that question, produced no studies or statistics despite this being a key point of their entire argument. Second, the authors argue that legalization will put an end to some of the drug violence currently happening along the US-Mexico border. The logical problem there is that so long as there is a price incentive to operate on the black market such markets will continue to work, and plans I have heard

would levy taxes that would actually raise the price of marijuana above what its current black market price is. If the price on the black market is less than the legal price, it's likely that many people will continue to turn to the black market.

Still, just the way the book was organized was very intellectually stimulating. It's not a comparison I've drawn before (I tend to link marijuana and tobacco in my mind, due to the similar delivery method), and even if you don't fully believe every claim the authors make about marijuana's health effects, it's hard to believe they stack up against the littyany of alcohol-related ills. I highly recommend this book, whatever your current stance on marijuana is.

Emily says

While I have no dog in this fight and my life will not change in any significant way if (WHEN) marijuana is legalized, I really enjoyed this book and am glad to have plenty of evidence to support legalization. A few of the chapters in the middle were preaching to the choir, as I don't believe marijuana is unsafe and I am already aware of the racist implications of the "war of drugs." But, comparing marijuana to alcohol made many of the arguments much more clear; for example, upwards to 70% of domestic violence occurs after consuming alcohol, while marijuana is linked to barely any incidents.

It's also mind-boggling how our society pushes people to drink despite the numerous health issues that accompany alcohol abuse (not to mention domestic violence, fights, property destruction, and sexual assault). For example, the public shaming of Michael Phelps after a photo was taken with a bong forced him to apologize, yet there is an "official beer" of the Olympics.

So many people have bought into the notion that marijuana is bad- for you, for society, for children- that convincing them of the truth is the biggest step. The second edition includes information about Colorado in 2012 and the amount of work that went into the campaign to legalize marijuana. It's really a no brainer, and I look forward to reading more about how legalization plays out in Colorado and Washington. Hopefully these two states can demonstrate the positives and push other states to do the same.

Barb Crumb says

The book presents facts and studies indicating that, unlike alcohol, marijuana use seldom results in the kind of aggressive and abusive behavior associated with drinking alcohol. It explains how people can wind up with serious criminal records that will effect the rest of their lives for possession of small amounts of marijuana, but are able to drink heavily with no legal repercussions. Thus, people concerned about the public results of their actions will forgo marijuana for alcohol for recreational use after a hard days work. Well-documented sources are provided for the issues presented.
