Decriminalization of Drugs and the Support for Free Markets in the United States

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	For nearly 250 years, Americans have been able to ponder on their relatively short, but extensive ideological history. The United States was founded upon a number of ideals, but arguably the most predominant and preceding has been freedom. Heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, the U.S. founders laid the propositions protecting natural rights, while limiting governmental authority to retract upon these so-called "God-given rights." The country's roots lie in classical liberalism, and free markets have been an integral mechanism since 1776, through the championing of private property rights and economic freedom. However, since the War on Drugs, political discourse has distorted our historical vision and validated governmental coercion in criminalizing drug consumption and production whether that was for personal pleasure or legitimate medical reasons. The paper investigates this conflict of ideology and principle through the analysis of literature and survey data. The quantitative analysis revealed a negative relationship between support for free markets and drug decriminalization. The findings imply a substantial role of two-party politics in the U.S. in determining political beliefs outside of a clear ideology particularly related to issues like the War on Drugs.

1. Introduction

Classical liberalism is an ideology generally characterized by limited government intervention, individual liberties, economic freedom, and private property rights. The central mechanism of liberalism is the free market process. A free market is an economic system in which individuals are free to make their own decisions on both the supply and demand side of the market; that is, agents engage in the voluntary exchange of goods and services (Prasch, 2008). In accordance with this position, it can be assumed that, normatively, free agents should be able to partake in both the production and consumption of any drug. In this paper, we analyze the consistency of this assertion among the population in question.

The popular literature referencing this issue often employs the terms "decriminalization" and "legalization." It is essential to note the distinction between the terms, as they are not used interchangeably in the U.S. legal system. Decriminalization is the act of removing criminal

sanctions for an activity, such as drug use. For example, a decriminalized drug remains illegal, but possession under a certain stated amount is not prosecuted. Instead, there would be light consequences, such as civil fines, education, treatment, or even no penalty. Legalization, however, is the process of removing any prohibition of the act. This paper will use the term "decriminalization" as this is the logical next step in the legal process. One can assume, by transitivity, that anyone who supports the legalization of an activity will also support the decriminalization of that activity.

2. Theoretical Framework

It is vital to address this issue of decriminalization primarily through the scope of American ideals of freedom and individualism, as to examine the consistency of these values with respect to this issue in the United States. Boaz (2015) argues that the United States' foundations lie prominently in the values of libertarianism, or, as he puts it, "the philosophy of freedom." Boaz also acknowledges that voters have historically agreed on classical liberal fundamentals, including free speech, private property rights, and egalitarianism, tying these values directly to the Declaration of Independence. The founding document states, "(All men) are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…" The sole purpose of a governmental institution, as defined by the founding fathers, is to guarantee individual liberties and rights to its citizens. Ebeling (2016) explains that these rights and freedoms are not given to citizens, but precede government altogether, and that government loses its moral legitimacy when it violates these ideals. Ebeling emphasizes the hefty influence of John Locke on the founding of the United States, arguing that even a governing authority that pursues the will of the governed body majority must have limitations. Otherwise, he argues, majorities have unlimited power to impose their will on minority groups. In Locke's own words,

> The legislature [cannot be] absolutely arbitrary over the lives and fortunes of the people… This power … is limited to the public good of the society. It is a power that hath no other end but preservation, and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the subjects…" (Locke, 1689)

Ebeling also expresses how little these ideals are understood and appreciated in contemporary America.

Doherty (2007) explains that libertarian ideals date back far beyond the Declaration of Independence. A disciple of Confucius, Mencius, wrote that "in a nation, the people are the most important, the state is next, and the ruler is the least important." However, Doherty argues that the United States took these practices the furthest, sparking a modern libertarian movement. Early American literature is characterized by individualism and contempt of government. As Thomas Paine writes in his notorious pamphlet, *Common Sense*, "Society is produced by our wants, and government by wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices" (Paine, 1776). Fears (2007) explains the distinctiveness of the United States' founding in that no other country was birthed from a set of principles. Many countries have association through language or nationality , but to be an American means adopting certain principles as recorded in the Declaration of Independence, he argues. He also concludes that national freedom in the United States is an absolute truth, as the Declaration of Independence is characterized by absolute rights and wrongs. The word "freedom" can sometimes seem ambiguous in a political sense.

Cognitive scientist, George Lakoff (2004), describes how the term freedom can become manipulated for political purposes. For example, he argues that politicians such as George W. Bush have overused the term in a hypocritical sense, tarnishing its reputation. Patterson and Fosse (2019) found that during the second Obama administration, when individuals were asked about their level of freedom relative to the past, there was a clear political divide in responses. Individuals who voted for Barack Obama in the 2012 election perceived a greater relative freedom than those who voted for Mitt Romney. This study also found that perceived freedom increases with income.

3. Literature Review

The implications that the principle of freedom has on drug use must also be discussed. Bandow (2012) looks at the relationship between freedom and drug use with the presumption that "individual liberty is the paramount political value" (p. 25). Many laws that prohibit one's freedom, though many are understood to be necessary for keeping with a humane and liberal society, such as laws preventing fraud and murder. However, Bandow argues that as long as they accept the consequences of their actions, moral agents should generally be free to act as they please. He also argues that drug use should be treated as a legal right, not to encourage substance use, but to limit governmental ability to restrict activity, foolish or not. Many people would counter that drug use creates a negative externality on others in society, increasing crime and imposing various costs on the public related to those crimes. The same, however, can be said of activities like alcohol and tobacco use, excessive gambling, and extreme consumerism, Bandow argues. Why should a governing authority prohibit an activity that produces less external harm than another popular, legal, and culturally destigmatized substance?

Prof. David Nutt et al. (2010) conducted a multicriteria analysis of drug harm and found that alcohol was the most harmful drug, both overall and on external individuals. In fact, in both measures, alcohol achieved a higher harm score (1-100) than heroin and crack cocaine by around 20 points. The era of alcohol prohibition (1920 - 1933) in the United States is a familiar historical period. This indisputably failed experiment is one that can be scrutinized and learned from. Thornton (1991) reminds us of the spikes in organized crime and corruption, as well as the bombardment of the court and prison system. Alcohol consumers were often led onto substitutes, switching to other potentially dangerous and addictive substances: tobacco, marijuana, hashish, and narcotics. Prohibition also saw medicinal alcohol, sacramental alcohol, and patent medication (containing high alcohol concentration) consumption increase drastically, despite dramatic increases in regulation. Thornton argues that the intended social benefits were never to be seen, tax revenue decreased, and alcohol consumption per capita recovered after the short-lived drop. He explains that entrepreneurs, á la market forces, supplied the lasting demand for alcohol, which characterizes Thornton's central argument. That is, by economic theory, "prohibition of mutually beneficial exchanges is doomed to failure." As coined by Richard Cowan in 1986, "The Iron Law of Prohibition" asserts that as prohibition enforcement increases, so does the potency and danger of such prohibited substances. Even drug smugglers face transport and logistics costs, and thus there is a cost-effective strategy: pack the strongest punch in the smallest volume. Thornton emphasizes that although beer was the drink of choice in pre-prohibition America, hard liquor consumption increased dramatically as a proportion of overall alcohol consumption.

Economic signaling additionally finds its way into the modern-day drug war, most notably in the modern-day opioid crisis in the United States. Drug overdoses took the lives of 52,000 Americans in 2015, an increase of more than 300% since the start of the new millennium. The most significant component of these deaths is driven by the opioid crisis, which takes 100 lives

daily in the United States (Rudd et al., 2016). The initial leading cause of these deaths has historically been over prescription of opioid medications (Park and Bloch, 2016). To combat these deaths, lawmakers have intervened on the supply side, cracking down on unprincipled providers and nudging prescribers to decrease quantity and dosage (Alpert et al., 2017). While these measures have reduced overdose mortality (Patrick et al., 2016), this move did not account for opioid-dependent individuals who experienced decreased availability. These dependents were forced toward the black market for cheaper, more potent alternatives to meet their addictions. In the aftermath, heroin use spiked, along with the infectious diseases inherent to injection drug usage. And thus, these heroin users also began to overdose, retriggering and worsening the issue at hand (Cicero et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2017). Fentanyl, which is easily and cheaply synthesized, also poured in from Chinese cryptomarkets and Mexican drug trafficking cartels. From 2014 to 2015, deaths attributed to fentanyl analogues saw a 72% increase to nearly 10,000. Substitution therapy (Caplehorn et al., 1996) and drug monitoring programs (Gellad et al., 2017) are evidence-based solutions to the opioid crisis, yet most governmental efforts are focused on supply interventions rather than harm reduction on the demand side (Beletsky and Davis, 2017). Hari (2015) argues that these deaths are often avoidable if we would be open to changing policy.

There are clear logical inconsistencies in the nature of the U.S. drug policy, which stem from status quo bias. However, policy makers would be keen to further analyze the costs and benefits that are inaugurated with a war on drugs. Schlag (2020) highlights that the most common drug use pattern is both intermittent and nonproblematic. Of the estimated 5% of illicit drug users globally, only about 11.6% are considered problematic users. The substance with the highest proportion of problematic users (about one third) was found to be far and away tobacco users. The War on Drugs campaign has been based on the extreme worst-case-scenario, and that rhetoric has imposed a social cost far worse than any drug use has. In fact, the vast majority of drug-related deaths are related to the actual drug laws themselves, not the drug use itself. Husak (2002) points to the overreliance on anecdotal evidence for drug policy development, arguing that proper evaluation of the risks and attributes inherent with drug use has been all but present. This failure of rationality has led to a phenomenon of *overcriminalization*. Moore and Elkavich (2008) highlight the research that shows since the War on Drugs began in 1972, incarceration rates have increased by a factor of five despite any convincing prevention of illicit drug use. The authors also mention the complications associated with jail time. The authors noted subsequent social and professional rejection, withdrawal of government assistance associated with zero tolerance laws, decreasing trends of rehabilitation, and the lack of treatment for mental illnesses, not to mention subpar healthcare and routine violence. These factors contribute to high recidivism rates, further stimulating the already bloated failure of the U.S. prison system.

The thought provoking "rat park" experiment conducted by Bruce Alexander et al. (1981) is often cited whilst debating drug use and addiction. Alexander set up two groups of rats: one housed individually with nothing to do and the other housed as a colony with a park built for rats. Each group had the same two sources of water, one being laced with morphine hydrochloride. The rats were free to drink from any source they pleased. After some time, the isolated rats were found to consume more morphine than the colonized rats by a significant margin. Alexander's next step was to move addicted rats to "rat park." After 57 days of morphine habituation, rats were introduced to company and leisure, resulting in stark rehabilitation. The rats were able to end their drug consumption after a few spells of withdrawal. The research of psychologists such as Bruce Alexander have created an unassailable association between drug addiction and social factors.

It is clear that, retrospectively, there has been negligible prudence and calculation in formulating U.S. drug policy. The sentiment and vigor of rhetoric trump any sound logic or rationality in the domain of politics, and the governed face the aftermath along with the pleasure of a fractional say in the matter. O'Malley and Valverde (2004) regard pleasure as an integral component of liberalism and freedom but also as a means of exercising control over individuals in a free society. Political discourse has periodically silenced pleasure or limited it to a "reasonable" expectation. Through this variable discourse, bestial behavior such as addiction and dependency warrant compulsion and intervention.

There have also been international effects of the United States' criminalization of drugs and its broader war on drugs. Though much of the original drug trade came directly from Colombia to Miami, the majority of this trade was shut down. This meant that more of the drug trade would come through Central America and Mexico, greatly enhancing the power of organized crime in these countries. As Sandvik and Hoelscher (2017) highlight, some have sought to reframe the War on Drugs as a humanitarian crisis. Still, they argue this is misguided as it perhaps stops a real move to "reformulate drug policy according to post-prohibition logics" (p. 177). Tellman et al. (2020) describe the environmental impact that the War on Drugs has also caused as much of the land used by organized crime is in more hidden forested areas leading to deforestation and the assault on the sovereignty of indigenous communities. In the U.S. context, with the large scale of immigration from countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the role of the War on Drugs is often not discussed as one of the principal ways to reduce forced migration. However, it plays a central role and has led to terror in Central America (Fryklund, 2021).

Public opinion on the issue of decriminalization/legalization has seen a large directional shift since the War on Drugs was declared. On September 5, 1989, President George H. W. Bush, in his first televised national address, declared drugs to be the nation's greatest domestic threat and announced a tough-on-drugs policy. Polls taken during the time, found that 64% of Americans agreed that drugs were the nation's most important problem, and 7 out of ten people approved of Bush's strategy (Berke, 1989). Polls were conducted every year from 1989 up until 2004 regarding the nation's single most important problem. Drug abuse responses peaked in 1989 at 27% but dwindled until 1997 when it spiked back up to 17%. Responses again stumbled, showing just 1% of respondents answering with drug abuse by 2004 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021).

However, in 2021, 50 years since the advent of the War on Drugs, public opinion has grown scornful of past drug policy. A 2021 poll found that 83% of respondents consider the War on Drugs a massive failure. These views were consistent across Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. 83% of respondents also wished for the federal government to reform its drug policy (Norcia, 2021). A 2019 survey by the Cato Institute found that 55% of Americans favor recategorizing drug offenses from felonies to civil offenses. Democrat respondents had 69% in favor, with Republicans at 40% in favor of recategorization (Ekins, 2019).

Another study measured drug misusers' opinions on legalization, in respective categories. Opioid misusers were asked about their agreement on the legalization of heroin, stimulant misusers on the legalization of cocaine, and marijuana misusers on the legalization of medical and recreational cannabis. Responses were on an 11-point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 11 = strongly agree). The least supportive group was the stimulant misusers, showing a mean score of 4.2 (SEE = 0.5), followed by the opioid misusers (Mean = 4.6, SEE = 0.4), and the marijuana misusers were most in support of their respective drug categories (Mean = 8.2, SEE = 0.3; both medical and recreational) (Hammond et al., 2020), which is very characteristic of both public opinion and recent policy reform in the United States. It must be noted that for this study, the

marijuana users were most representative of their user population, being directly associated with the exact substance, while the stimulant and opioid users only broadly aligned through categorical affiliation. For instance, stimulant misusers may include nicotine and methamphetamine users, who may be less inclined to endorse cocaine use. Pew Research (2014) found that 63% of people thought that alcohol was the greater threat to society than marijuana (23%), with the rest saying both, neither, or they did not know. The same report also found that more than two-thirds of people thought that government drug policy should focus more on providing treatment over prosecuting drug offenders.

In their study of Latin American nations, Bohigues and Fernandez-i-Marin (2022) found that greater education was associated with more support for drug legalization. However, they also found that nations where there were more issues with drug trafficking were less likely to support legalization. They hypothesize that people connect drug use and drug trafficking in their thinking, even if legalization could hypothetically reduce some of the power of drug traffickers. Rouhani et al. (2022) found that 35% of their participants supported drug decriminalization. There was roughly equal support for the measure among black and white participants, but there was less support among Hispanic participants. They did find racial resentment was associated with less support for drug legalization, hypothetically due to drug charges often falling disproportionately on people color.

Felson et al. (2019) provide an in-depth analysis of the drastic change (from three-to-one against to two-to-one in favor) in attitudes towards cannabis legalization in recent years in the U.S.. The authors found that attitudes similarly shifted across all socio-demographic subcategories. They mention, however, that since 2006, Hispanic opinions have changed less than whites, and Democrats began to change attitudes earlier than their Republican counterparts. This attitude change occurred around the same rate in all regions of the country and all birth cohorts. The authors also describe the small but significant role the decline in religious affiliation over time had, accounting for about 12% of the support increase. The study found that this attitude change preceded the general feeling that the criminal justice system is too harsh, and the issues will likely reinforce each other's prevalence in the future. The authors speculate that the shift occurred due to various plausible factors, including increased internet usage, celebrity influence and opposition to the War on Drugs, and changing views on individual liberty and autonomy. Schnabel and Sevell (2016) look closely into the broad shift towards individual autonomy, cross-examining the opinions on same-sex marriage and marijuana legalization over time. The authors find that the opinions are highly correlated and liberalizing at a similar rate across all socio-demographic cohorts, likely reflecting this broad shift towards liberal attitudes.

This shift is also characteristic of state drug policy. Between 2009 and 2013, 40 states took some level of action to repeal drug laws (Pew Research Center, 2014). Despite these shifts, decriminalization is still a slow, trudging process because of several background forces. One such force is the prison-industrial complex, particularly the sector of privately-run prison corporations in the United States. Drug laws and minimum sentences have caused a massive 700% spike in prison populations since the 1970s (Melber, 2013). With limited room to house prisoners, states turned to the private sector to help the overcrowding, essentially selling punishments to corporations, spurring questionable implications. CoreCivic, formerly and better known as Corrections Corporation of America, is the largest private prison corporation in the country. While the company assures the public that it does not engage in lobbying for or against policies concerning whether an individual would be incarcerated, stated in a 2014 annual report was the following:

> "The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by the relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction or parole standards and sentencing practices or through the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by our criminal laws. For instance, any changes with respect to drugs and controlled substances or illegal immigration could affect the number of persons arrested, convicted, and sentenced, thereby potentially reducing demand for correctional facilities to house them…" (LaCapria, 2016)

CoreCivic reported a massive 2.1 million in expenses directly related to lobbying at the federal, state, and local levels in 2019 (CoreCivic, 2019). Almost two-thirds of all private prison contracts require a level of occupancy, usually around 90%, or have taxpayers bankroll the extra empty beds. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement's detention budget also includes a 34,000 quota of immigrants to be detained at all times, at the federal level, no matter the current level of undocumented immigration (Cohen, 2021). The bottom line is that privately-run prisons have clear incentives to keep incarceration rates high and sentences lengthy.

Another powerful force behind drug decriminalization opposition, particularly cannabis, is the alcohol industry. While the competition between marijuana and alcohol seems to be still up for debate, SEC filings have revealed beer companies' fear of losing market share to the up-and-coming cannabis industry. The Beer Distributors PAC, made up of 16 beer companies from Massachusetts, has given $25,000 to the anti-pot Campaign for a Safe and Healthy Massachusetts. The Arizona Wine and Spirits Wholesale Association donated $10,000 to another anti-pot group. (Fang, 2016). Maneuvers have not always been so hostile towards the cannabis industry, however. The legalization movement has also spawned partnerships and acquisitions by established legal addiction companies in the tobacco and alcohol industries, which could work against pushing decriminalization further ahead (Johnston, 2022).

The final oppositional force that will be discussed here is that of the pharmaceutical industry. This story is essentially identical, and the data clearly shows that big pharma has a lot to lose to the cannabis industry. A study found that drug prescription falls drastically in states where medical marijuana has become legal. In 2013, it is estimated that the national Medicare program and its enrollees spent more than $165 million less because of the legalization measures in just 17 states (Bradford and Bradford, 2016). Insys Therapeutics contributed half a million dollars to the anti-legalization movement in Arizona, becoming its largest donor. The company cited its concerns for child-safety, and while child ER visits, under age 10, related to marijuana increased to 2.3 out of 100,000 in 2014, pharmaceuticals send 318 out of 100,000 for children under 5 (Serrano, 2016).

Drug decriminalization can seem messy and convoluted outside the seemingly simplistic scope of individual autonomy, though there are apparent inadequacies with the current state. While this paper has explored various facets of the issue, individualism remains the primary lens. There is an explicit conflict in the nature of the bounds of individual freedom in the United States, and while it is well understood that the government functions as a vital institution, what must also be understood are the underlying implications of a liberal society. A paramount implication is the ability to pursue happiness in whichever way one desires, so long as others remain unharmed. It is this contradiction of liberal ideals that we investigate.

4. Methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between support for free market ideals and support for drug decriminalization. This investigation includes quantitative survey data analysis aimed at understanding variation based on demographics. The data sample is

taken from a nationwide public survey of a population of 307. The survey questions were kept relatively short and straightforward, and the items included endured a pilot study. The original, primary intent of the survey was to gauge the relationship between beliefs in free markets, nationalism, and immigration in the United States Still, the questions cover a variety of topics with respect to free markets and public policy. The survey was conducted in January of 2021.

The survey data was intended to be more representative of a nationwide sample than a university study would have been, though limitations apply. The participants were compensated for their time, so there is limited selection bias in response. However, potential respondents have varying levels of interest, and thus, sampling is not entirely random. Furthermore, as the descriptive statistics will show, the population is not representative of the United States, so the descriptive statistics cannot be generalized. However, inferential statistics can be more generalizable (Nestor & Schutt, 2014).

The data analysis procedure will begin with an examination of descriptive statistics on survey items as well as a comprehensive free market item created through factor analysis. We will then outline the inferential statistics, testing for differences of opinion on decriminalization and free market support. Next, based on categorical demographics of the population, and conducting correlation analysis to measure relationships based on numerical items. Lastly, we will broaden our perspective on the issue through linear regression modeling with several demographic variables as independents.

5. Results

5.1. Demographics

The population sample is somewhat representative regarding gender distribution, with 151 of both male and female identification. Two people identified as transgender and three as "other." Other demographic information, however, is not as representative. 50.5% of the survey-takers are 30 years old or younger, and less than 25% are older than 40, with the mean age being 33.64 and the median 30. Almost three-quarters (74.9%) of the respondents are white, 14% Asian, 8.8% African American, and 9.5% Hispanic/Latin American descent. In terms of a political party, the population is mostly aligned with the Democratic party, with 56% in this category, and only 16.3% identify as Republican. Libertarians made up 7.2%, the Green Party made up 3.3%, and the remaining 17.3% aligned with "other." In this category, individuals identified as communist, socialist, progressive, constitutional, and more, but the largest of these "other" categories were independents. 151, nearly half of the population identified themselves as non-religious. The largest religious group was Protestant, at 20.5%, while Roman Catholics comprised 15.6%.

5.2. Descriptive Statistics

In terms of ideology, on a Likert-type scale of 1-7 (1 being very progressive and 7 being very conservative), the population's mean on this scale is 3.07 (SD = 1.55). On a similar scale about support for classical liberalism (1 indicating strong support and 7 being strong opposition), the mean was 3.61 (SD of 1.45). We can see that the population is mildly progressive and slightly in support of classical liberalism, though more neutral on the latter.

The Likert scale for the following items on the embrace of free markets are the same as the previous about classical liberalism (1-7, 1 being strong support, 7 being strong opposition). The respondents were asked to specify their level of support for the decriminalization of drugs. 76.2% of respondents expressed some level of support for the issue, while only 14.7% opposed

the idea at some level. The mean of responses was 2.60 (SD = 1.68), showing an average between support and mild support, closer to mild (See Table 1). This is almost precisely one point below the mean of the population's support for classical liberalism (See Table 2), implying the participants are slightly more in favor of decriminalizing drugs than they are of classical liberalism. Because there are many criteria involved in classical liberalism, we look closer into the individual free market items in the survey.

When asked about support for rent control, 65.1% expressed some level of support, while only 13.7% had some opposition (Mean = 3.30, SD = 2.07). 54.1% were in favor of an open border system with security checks (Mean = 3.58, SD = 1.92). When asked more broadly about immigration, 35.2% were in favor of tighter rather than looser controls in immigration, with 47.6% in favor of looser controls (Mean = 4.20, SD = 1.90). 83.4% favored minimum wage laws, with only 9.1% being against it (Mean = 2.16, SD = 1.55). 34.9% favored tariffs, and 21.5% were against them, with many remaining neutral on the issue (Mean = 3.82, SD = 1.40). The responses about support for both monetary and fiscal policy were almost identical, with about half in favor and about 40% neutral. An overwhelming 43.6% expressed strong support for government responsibility in providing healthcare, with total support at 75.2% (Mean = 1.46, SD = 1.77). Finally, when asked about owning, accumulating, and selling property with minimal to no government interference, 54.7% were in support, and 26.1 were against it (Mean = 3.34, SD = 1.67).

These individual free market items revealed mixed opinions. However, the majority of the population supports heavier government interference in specific issues such as rent control, minimum wage laws, and government healthcare. To obtain a more explicit understanding of the ideological trend, we conduct a factor analysis to narrow down the items to a group closely aligned with free market ideals. Nine items from the survey were found to be most closely correlated with support for free markets. This combined item holds a scale from 9 to 63, where 9 indicates less support for free market ideals, and 63 indicates more support. This construct as a whole revealed a mean of 28.14 with a standard deviation of 9.16, showing a slight opposition to the free market ideology. The construct included the following items:

1. Rent Control
2. Owning, accumulating, and selling property with minimal government interference
3. Minimum wage laws
4. The use of monetary policy
5. The use of fiscal policy
6. Government extension of unemployment benefits with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic
7. Allowance of people to control their retirement/privatization of social security
8. Government's role to create jobs
9. Government's responsibility of providing healthcare

Drug decriminalization was negatively correlated with the other items and was thus not included in the factor analysis. More open immigration policies were excluded for the same reason, and while the issue of tariffs did show a positive correlation, it was considered too weak of a relationship.

5.3. Inferential Statistics

The differences of opinion on drug decriminalization for gender were significant. A T-test was conducted to measure the difference in support for the issue (t = -2.15, p = 0.03). The mean responses of men were found to be 2.40 (SD = 1.63), and for women, a mean of 2.81 (SD = 1.71), indicating that males in the population were more likely to support decriminalization. The difference in political affiliation/ideology by gender should be noted. 59.6% of females identified as Democrats, while only 17.9% identified as Republicans. In the male category, 52.3% identified as Democrats, with 15.2% identifying as Republicans. Perhaps of more importance, however, is the difference in Libertarianism identification with regard to gender. 11.3% of males identified with this group compared to only 3.3% of females. On the likert scale of support for classical liberalism, males averaged lower than females, (Males: Mean = 3.44, SD = 1.48; Females: Mean = 3.76, SD = 1.40) showing more support for the ideology, which is consistent with their stronger support for decriminalization

One-way ANOVA tests were also conducted to compare the differences in race, political party, and religion concerning drug decriminalization and the free market construct. There was no significant difference in opinion on decriminalization (F = 0.12, p = 0.97) or free market support based on racial category. The Asian group was most supportive of decriminalization on average (Mean = 2.49, on the Likert-type 1-7 scale, SD = 1.40), followed by the multiracial group, the white group, Hispanics, and finally the African American group was the least supportive (Mean = 2.81, SD = 1.75). These results though not statistically significant, do point to the complexity of the issue as racial groups most affected by the war on drugs were not necessarily more in favor of decriminalization.

For political parties, the ANOVA analysis showed that differences were significant (F = 11.88, p =< 0.001) for decriminalization of drugs (Table 2). Supporters of the Green Party were the most in support of decriminalization (Mean = 1.5, SD = 0.97), though only 10 participants identified as such. Libertarians followed close behind with large support (Mean = 1.91, SD = 1.23) followed by Democrats (Mean = 2.27, SD = 1.32) and Republicans (Mean = 3.70, SD = 1.92) (See Table 4). Even as the least supportive group in terms of decriminalizing drugs, Republicans were only slightly against the idea on average. These ANOVA results show a type of alliance on the left (the Green Party) and the right (Libertarians on this issue of drug legalization. For the free market construct, the Libertarian group averaged the most in support, as expected (Mean = 40.05, SD = 9.09). Republicans followed (Mean = 32.76, SD = 6.54) with Democrats (Mean of 27.47, SD = 4.98) and the Green party (Mean = 25.00, SD = 6.57) with the least support for these free market ideals. These differences were also found to be statistically significant (F = 27.87, p < 0.001). When an independent t-test was run between just Republicans and Democrats, the results showed a significant difference (t=2.95, p=<.01).

Pearson correlation analysis was also conducted to measure the relationship between support for decriminalization and the following items: age, political ideology, nationalism, and the free market construct described earlier. The Likert-like scale from 1-7 was used for decriminalization support, with lower numbers being more supportive of the idea. For age, there was a weak, insignificant positive correlation, with older individuals being less supportive of decriminalizing drugs (r= 0.08, p = 0.16). When it was a simple t-test between those under 30 and over 30, there was not a significant difference (t=1.24, p=.217). For political ideology (lower numbers are more progressive and higher more conservative), there was a strong, significant positive correlation, with more conservative individuals being less supportive of decriminalization (r = 0.44, p < 0.001). For nationalism, there was a strong negative correlation, with more nationalist-oriented individuals being less supportive of decriminalization (r = -0.34, p < 0.001). Finally, for the free market construct, there was a strong, significant positive

correlation, with more free market oriented individuals being, surprisingly, less supportive of decriminalizing drugs ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$). The correlational statistics can be found in Table 3 in the Appendix.

5.4. Linear Regression

A linear regression model (Table 5) was created with drug decriminalization as the dependent variable. When controlling for age, gender, race, ethnicity, political party and ideology, and free market support, the only variables that were found to be valuable predictors were gender and political ideology. The overall model, however, was found to be statistically useful ($F = 9.74$, $p < 0.001$). According to the model and sample population, a female is expected to be 0.58 points higher (less supportive) than males on the Likert-type scale of drug decriminalization ($t = 3.361$, $p < 0.001$) when controlling for these other factors. Also, for each point increase on the Likert-like scale (higher on the scale means more conservative, lower means more progressive), one is expected to be 0.35 points higher (less supportive) on the decriminalization scale ($t = 4.214$, $p < 0.001$). Another linear regression was conducted with only demographic information but was not considered statistically useful by any means, and was thus excluded. These results do not mean that issues such as race, age, and support for free markets would not be significant with larger samples, but they do indicate that these are factors that are less predictive than the overarching and often all controlling aspect of political ideology.

6. Discussion

The results indicate an apparent inconsistency with regard to support for free market ideals and support for drug decriminalization, with the most prominent indicator being the significant negative correlation between the free market construct and the decriminalization item. The main factors influencing the issue within the sample population appear to be political ideology, political party, religion, gender, and free market support. Politically speaking, the most obstructive group regarding decriminalization were conservatives/Republicans. In Nixon's launching of the War on Drugs, he laid out his premise clearly, framing drug users as criminals that threatened the moral fabric of the United States. His and many of his successors' objective was to contain and punish these threats to American civilization rather than treat or cure them. This rhetoric has plagued the conservative strategy against drug use, accounting for the continued opposition to decriminalization by the group (Dufton, 2012).

Republicans have long been supporters of fiscal conservatism, advocating for limited government interference in the economy and highly valuing the free market's virtue. However, Donald Trump's reshaping of the GOP has elicited strong protectionist ideals, aspiring to be the party of the working class. These ideals, associated with his support for tariffs, quotas, and strict immigration control, can be considered an attempt to secure political power over his opponents. Trump has appealed to a group of supporters that benefit significantly from domestic labor protection and reindustrialization (Bimantara, 2019). Other contemporary Republican politicians have similar reservations about free market capitalism. While Republican voters have remained vaguely inclined towards capitalism, ideological flexibility has revealed a weak grasp of core capitalist principles (Ackerman, 2021).

This confounding of free market ideology by the Republican party is expressed clearly in the results. Republican respondents were far and away the least supportive group of decriminalization but were the second most favorable group towards the free market construct as a whole. Libertarians, on the other hand, were the second most supportive of

decriminalization (second to Green Party respondents) and by far the most supportive of the free market construct.

The War on Drugs also saw the dawn of supply-side economic policy in the United States. Economic principles suggest that because drug consumption is inelastic (consumption is relatively undeterred regardless of a price change), a decrease in supply while causing a comparably small decrease in quantity consumed will increase supplier revenue and encourage resistance against law enforcement. This type of policy fails to acknowledge the incentives associated with higher drug prices in the illegal market. Thus, supply-side drug war policies have accelerated cost and violence (Powell, 2013). Enforcement of the War on Drugs has had a history of targeting black and Latino communities. However, for over twenty years, whites have contributed to drug offenses at higher rates than blacks (Rosino & Hughey, 2018).

Marijuana legalization in recent years has been met with surges in respective state tax revenues, as combined, cumulative tax revenue from legal cannabis sales was reported to be $10.4 billion as of December 2021. This number does not include increased revenue associated with medical use, additional income taxes produced by cannabis industry workers, licensing fees, or additional corporate taxes paid at the federal level. Taxes and fees are often steep for the amateur industry and are as high as 37% at retail in the state of Washington. Though its population is considerably smaller than that of California, Washington has brought in nearly the same amount of tax revenue, nearly $3 billion (Marijuana Policy Project, 2022). It can be tempting to overestimate the demand inelasticity of such a product, but the illegal black market serves as incessant competition. Higher tax rates will only increase tax revenue until an optimized point, in which consumers will either deem their lifestyle too expensive or turn to cheaper alternatives on the illicit market. After this point, tax receipts will decline, and illegal drug consumption, and production, will increase due to the tax disincentive. Federal drug control spending amassed over 40 billion dollars in 2021 (Statistica, 2021). Legalization could also ease violence related to drug trafficking around the Mexican-American border. Lower violence rates would reduce the amount of illegal immigration, an issue that the contemporary GOP has been particularly wary of (Miron, 2010).

A notable contention was observed between males and females on the issue of decriminalization. Males were found to be more supportive of decriminalization. In the survey population, women were more often Democrats, and men were more often Republicans; however, when controlling for a political party, males were still more likely to support the issue. Males did identify as Libertarians more often than females did, and they were more likely to support classical liberalism. This contention, however, has been observed in other surveys. While both genders have increased their support on the issue, the gap between the groups has remained consistent. The best explanation has been shown to be the difference in marijuana use, as men report higher marijuana usage than women. Psychological research has also found that risky and deviant behavior is more common in males, so as marijuana becomes more commonly legal and destigmatized, the gap will likely decrease (Elder & Greene, 2018). This gender phenomenon can be linked to historical social standards. In the late 1800s, before prohibition, strict societal norms segregated drinking activity by gender. Men engaged in alcohol consumption nearly anywhere, while women had few such options. This masculine aspect associated with drinking drove the prohibition and temperance movement in the decades to come, more often promoted by women (Baker, 2006). In more recent years, we can look to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), for the longevity of these norms.

It should be noted that libertarians did have more consistent views in regard to drug decriminalization and free markets with a higher percentage of them supporting decriminalization. In contrast, there was a negative correlation between the level of

conservatism and support for drug decriminalization. Likewise, most libertarians did not identify as conservative (only 27.3% compared to 50% who were neutral and 22.7% who identified as progressive). Though in some sectors of the American discussion, libertarians are portrayed as the most conservative/right wing, the actual beliefs of those who identify as truly libertarian are more complex.

On the issue of drug decriminalization, those who identified as belonging to the Green Party and the Libertarian Party had fairly similar beliefs. Though in a linear way of looking at politics, this "far left" and "far right" group would seem to have nothing in common, the relationship is much more dynamic with actual overlap and willingness to question the status quo on some issues like drug legalization, military spending, power of the police, etc. This has become known as the horseshoe theory that was popularized by the French philosopher Jean Pierre-Faye, where the far right and far left are actually closer together than we perceive, ironically coming closer together in overreaction to one another (Dholepat, 2020). This may often be talked about negatively, with communists and fascists sharing tendencies, or like the case in France in 2017, where the far left helped strengthen the far right (Patrikarakos, 2017). This could be seen in anti-free market ways For example, Trump and left-leaning congressional leaders like Bernie Sanders agreed on greater trade restrictions. However, this same trend can also be seen in more libertarian perspectives on issues like drug decriminalization, where there can be common ground between politicians who may disagree on economic policy.

7. Conclusion

Much of what the United States was originally founded upon has been lost to the boundless and ever-expanding nature of government, especially following the War on Drugs and 9/11. Of course, individual autonomy will always contend with subjection and collectivism. However the political landscape regarding drug decriminalization is one that continues to shift in a way that grows more and more resentful of the coercive War on Drugs. This shift is likely unrelated to any traditional ideological shift. That is, there is no meaningful correlation with an underlying appreciation of free market principles. Instead, we find that individuals most consistently align themselves with the current, more complex political climate, in that increases in social programs may correlate with inclusive immigration, and protectionism correlates with gun-ownership rights.

While conservatives and progressives have their fair share of gripes with classical liberalism, there is a uniform shift in sympathy towards certain issues such as decriminalization and same-sex marriage. While conservative Republicans will likely continue to trail as the least supportive, our survey results showed only slight opposition to decriminalization on average. The recent GOP shift towards a more populist pseudo-capitalism indicates that there is no clear ideological compass, but it is likely an attempt to appeal to the masses. Libertarians are, of course, most consistently in support of classical liberalism and free markets, and they tend towards neutrality on the progressive-conservative spectrum of ideology.

A political common ground may find its way into a discourse regarding decriminalization, especially as the population grows dissatisfied with drug policy, criminal justice, corporatism, and health mandates in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of all states have decriminalized marijuana. While actors, such as the alcohol industry, the prison-industrial complex, and big pharma, are working against this movement, there are clear fiscal incentives to follow the trend. States have already generated billions of dollars in additional tax revenue through the process of legalization, and numbers are increasing each year. While states hold a sizable amount of power regarding the issue, there is much to be done at the federal level to decrease spending and reduce coercion. Individuals should have the right to conduct

themselves freely, so long as they respect others' rights. This is the foundation of the American principle and should be protected accordingly.[1]

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[1] The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendix

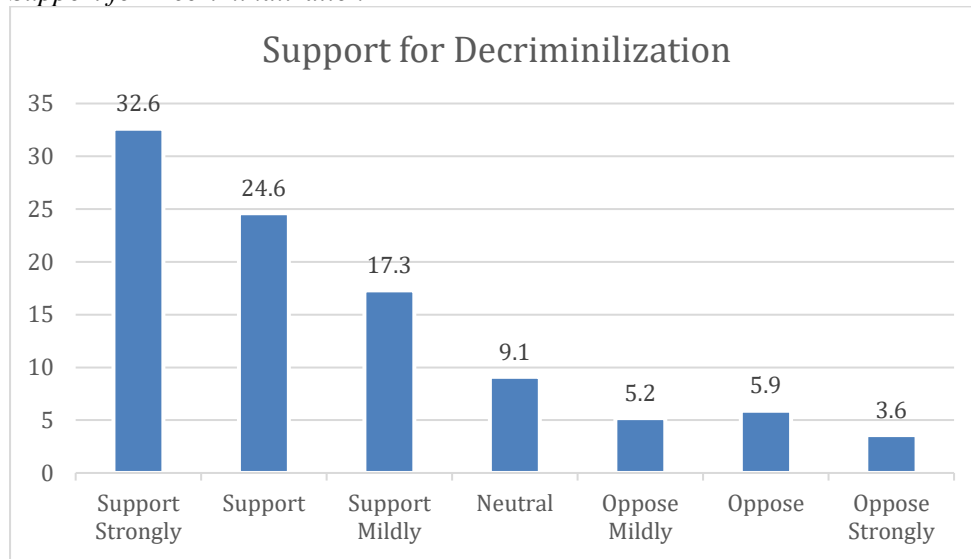Table 1.
Support for Decriminalization
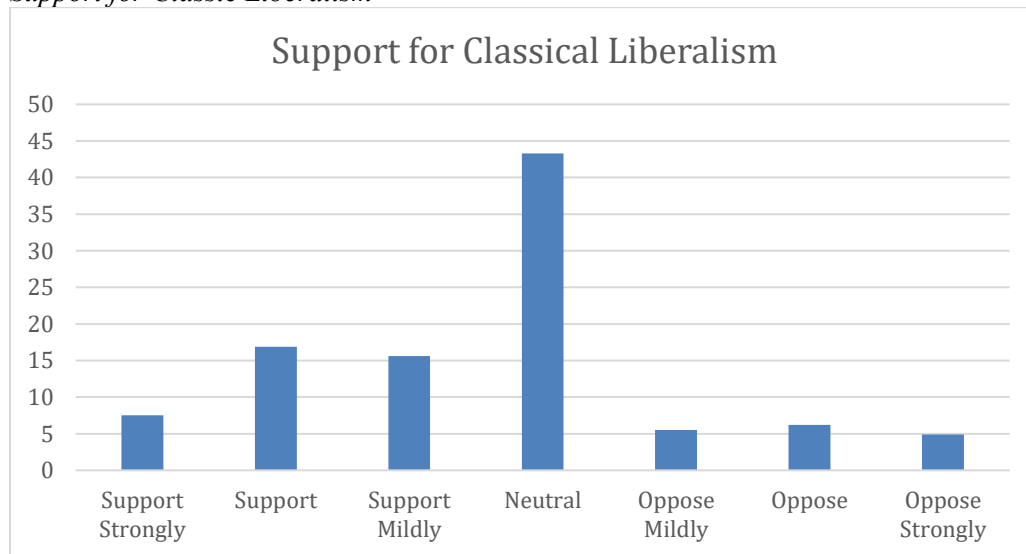

Table 2.
Support for Classic Liberalism

Table 3.
Correlation analysis of beliefs in drug decriminalization

		Decriminalization of drugs
Political Views (Progressive)	Pearson Correlation	.443**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	307
Nationalism	Pearson Correlation	-.337**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	307
Age	Pearson Correlation	.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.162
	N	307
Free Markets	Pearson Correlation	.289**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	307

Table 4.
ANOVA Analysis-Attitudes towards Drug Decriminalization

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Republican	50	3.70	1.919	.271
Democrat	172	2.27	1.319	.101
Libertarian	22	1.91	1.231	.262
Green	10	1.50	.972	.307
Other	53	3.13	2.085	.286
Total	307	2.60	1.678	.096

	Sum of Sqares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	117.129	4	29.282	11.877	.000
Within Groups	744.591	302	2.466		
Total	861.720	306			

Table 5.
OLS Linear Regression for Drug Decriminalization

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.498[a]	.248	.222	1.480

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.804	.795		2.270	.024
	Female	.583	.174	.174	3.361	.001
	White	-.402	.354	-.104	-1.136	.257
	African American	-.230	.413	-.039	-.558	.577
	Hispanic	-.362	.354	-.063	-1.023	.307
	Asian	-.189	.384	-.039	-.493	.623
	Age	.002	.008	.017	.303	.762
	Republican	.439	.261	.097	1.680	.094
	Political Ideology	.355	.084	.328	4.214	.000
	Free Market Beliefs	.009	.012	.050	.765	.445
	Nationalism	-.043	.029	-.100	-1.507	.133