

Americans Much More Positive About Progress on Drugs



BY JUSTIN MCCARTHY

Story Highlights

- Surge in Republicans' perceptions of progress drives the national trend
- More still see drug problem as serious nationally than locally
- Broad support for legal marijuana has narrowed slightly vs. recent years

WASHINGTON, D.C. — After plunging to a record-low 24% in 2023, the percentage of Americans who believe the nation has made progress in dealing with the problem of illegal drugs has jumped to 45%, the highest Gallup has recorded since 2000. At the same time, the proportion saying the nation has lost ground has dropped from a record-high 52% to a record-low 23%.

The net result of these changes is that Americans have shifted from being the most pessimistic they've been about the nation's drug problem in Gallup polls since 1995 (-28 net negative) to ranking among the most optimistic (+22 net positive) Gallup has measured in the past 30 years, along with 1999 (+20) and 2000 (+18). The average net optimism score since 1995 has been +3.

Gallup also asked this question three times in the 1970s, with the results more moderate than today's. In that period, a low of 27% and a high of 40% believed progress had been made, while between 35% and 41% thought the country had lost ground.

Gallup's annual Crime poll, conducted Oct. 1-16 this year, finds that 10% of Americans believe the U.S. has made "much" progress in coping with the problem of illegal drugs, the highest in the trend by four percentage points. Another 35% perceive "some progress" has been made, while 28% say it has stood still and 15% think it has lost some ground. The 8% saying it has lost much ground is the lowest in the trend by three points.

Americans' relatively strong sense of progress on dealing with illegal drugs comes as President Donald Trump has designated drug cartels as terrorists, imposed tariffs on and cut aid to countries he has accused of not doing their part to stop drug trafficking, and more recently authorized strikes on boats in international waters that his administration claims were drug smugglers.

The increase in perceived progress on coping with illegal drugs is driven largely by a surge in optimism from those in the president's own party. Three in four Republicans (74%) now say much or some progress has been made, up 62 points from 2023 (when the question was last asked) and marking a new high for this group. Perceptions of progress are up by a much smaller 13 points among political independents and are down by seven points among Democrats.

Many More View Illegal Drug Problem as Serious Across U.S. Than Locally

As Gallup has found in the past, Americans are more likely to view illegal drugs as a serious problem nationally than in their local area.

Roughly seven in 10 describe the drug problem in the U.S. as extremely (36%) or very (35%) serious, while 29% describe the problem as extremely (11%) or very serious (18%) in their local area.

The latest combined extremely/very serious figures are about average for their respective trends since 2000. However, these obscure substantial decreases in the percentages describing national and local drug problems as *extremely* serious, both of which hit record highs in 2023. Compared with this recent high point, perceptions of national drug problems as extremely serious are down nine points, while similar perceptions of local drug problems are down eight points.

Unlike the overall figures, perceptions that national and local drug problems are extremely serious are down across all three party groups. The one exception is among Democrats when asked about their local area, which is stable from the prior measure.

Republicans (51%) remain more likely than independents (34%) and Democrats (22%) to describe the national drug problem as extremely serious, but the three groups are all similarly likely to describe local problems this way.

Support for Legal Marijuana Remains Broad, but Lower Than Recent Heights

Sixty-four percent of U.S. adults think the use of marijuana should be legal, a slightly lower level last seen in 2019. Between 2020 and 2024, the percentage in favor of legal marijuana was a bit higher, ranging between 68% and 70%.

The decline in support for legal marijuana is driven by Republicans, whose support has fallen 13 points over the past year. That is the lowest level of support for legalization among this group in a decade.

Large majorities of Democrats (85%) and independents (66%) support legalization — and at similar rates to what Gallup has recorded in recent years.

Bottom Line

Americans are more encouraged about the nation's progress in dealing with the problem of illegal drugs, but this mainly reflects improved Republican perceptions under Trump and his aggressive actions to limit the entry of drugs into the U.S. The White House has used the issue as justification for actions in various international dealings since Trump's inauguration — from tariffs to military strikes to foreign aid — and this seems to be resonating with the president's base, even though the impact of these actions on drug imports, sales and addiction in the U.S. is unclear so far.

While Republicans are heartened by this perceived progress, many in the party have backed away from supporting legalizing marijuana. After climbing in the 2010s, Republican support for legalization had stalled at around 50% before retreating sharply this year — [another policy area in which there has been a reversal of Republicans' recent movement toward more progressive attitudes.](#)

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