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## ILLEGAL DRUG FIGHTING IN USA

Drugs abuse is today one of the most serious problems facing political leaders and law enforcement officials in the United States of America. It was an important issue in the 1988 Presidential election, as well as in many state and local political contests. Drug smuggling is a major concern, especially in southern Florida and the south-western states. Cannabis cultivation is a major component of many state economics, including those of California, Oregon and Kentucky. Drug-related youth gang violence threatens many areas, particularly Los Angeles and other western cities. Drug-related murders at Washington, D.C" which were high in 1988, have already increased another 50 per cent in 1989. The United States Supreme Court has recently ruled on two cases pertaining to drug testing of employees, although the legality of random drug testing is still undetermined. The focus of this article is on contemporary law enforcement strategies for countering illicit drug problems. Before turning directly to this topic, it may be helpful to describe briefly the United States law enforcement system and the scope of the drug problem in the United States.

It is generally accepted that the United States is the world's leading consumer of illicit drugs [1]. This drug consumption results in a variety of social problems and conditions: Sixteen per cent of Americans consider drugs the nation's number one problem [2] , up from only 2 per cent in 1985 [3] ;The annual cost of illicit drug use and related crime is estimated to be \$US 59 billion [4] ; In samples of arrestees in 1986, nearly three out of four at Washington, D.C. [5] , and over 80 per cent in New York [6] , tested positive for illicit drugs, mostly cocaine; Forty-three per cent of state prison inmates reported having used illegal drugs on a daily or near-daily basis during the month before their most recent offence [7] ; Over 60 per cent of high school students reported having used illicit drugs at some time in their lives [8]; In 1987, 937,400 arrests were made in

the United States for crimes involving the possession or sale of illegal drugs.

These figures, frightening as they are, fail to fully describe the effects of extensive drug abuse on American society. Thousands of people die each year of drug overdoses and many more live in misery. Thousands of families are torn apart. Young people with potential slip into despair and promising careers are ruined. Schools find it more difficult to educate and business productivity suffers. The limited government resources available must be spent on drug enforcement, education and rehabilitation rather than on other pressing needs. Whole communities deteriorate from the effects of drug abuse, open drug dealing and pervasive fear. Intravenous drug abuse fuels the spread of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) virus. Even United States foreign policy is affected, as crop eradication and smuggling control become national security issues and as international narcotics trafficking and terrorism become more intermingled.

The American approach to drug control is conditioned by several national characteristics, including fragmentation of the law enforcement system, a 12,000-mile international boundary and a legal system that restricts police authority to search, arrest, detain, eavesdrop and maintain intelligence files. Drug problems in the United States, though, are by all accounts greater than in any other country. Enforcement has traditionally emphasized street-level arrests, investigation of distribution networks, crop eradication and smuggling interdiction. These practices can be shown to produce arrests and seizures, but there is little evidence to show that they reduce drug supply or drug abuse. More contemporary and promising approaches include community policing, problem-oriented policing, financially oriented investigations, increased international cooperation and a renewed emphasis on drug demand reduction. The most pressing needs in law enforcement are (a) improved intelligence-gathering and analysis and (b), research on the illicit drug industry and on the effectiveness of drug control strategies. While it is extremely difficult to identify and summarize the enforcement practices of over 15,000 police agencies, traditional drug enforcement in the United States seems to have relied primarily upon five strategies: street-level enforcement, mid-level investigation, major investigation, crop eradication and smuggling interdiction [9].

### Reference list

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