

New poll: MPs think drug policy is not working

- Over three quarters of 150 MPs polled think the UK's current drug policies are not effective.
- Policymakers should also make more use of evidence and research, according to 76% of MPs in poll.
- Poll reveals discontent ahead of major reports on the future of drug policy.

The way the UK tackles illicit drugs is not working, according to most Members of Parliament surveyed in a new poll.

More than three quarters, 77%, of MPs polled said that the UK's current policies are not effective in tackling the problems caused by illegal drugs.

The poll of 150 MPs, weighted to reflect the composition of the House of Commons, found no significant difference between coalition and Labour MPs, with only 18% of MPs from coalition parties agreeing that current policies are working.

The poll, conducted by ComRes for the UK Drug Policy Commission, also revealed MPs' concerns about how drug policy is made. Over three quarters of MPs polled said that drug policy does not make enough use of evidence and research and two thirds said a change in how policy is made is needed to tackle drug problems.

The results show political concern about drugs ahead of a period when policy will come under unprecedented scrutiny.

A series of major reports are due to be published in the autumn, including the findings of the Home Affairs Committee's drug policy inquiry and the final report of the respected UK Drug Policy Commission. The British Medical Association is also expected to publish a report on drugs of dependence.

The reports are likely to tackle controversial issues, including whether the drug laws should be changed, how decisions are made about classifying new drugs, and what treatments should be available for people who are addicted to drugs.

They are also expected to make recommendations about wider factors that shape the effectiveness of drug policy. This is likely to include questions about the future of evidence and scientific advice to government, the consequences of increased local control over policy, and whether the Home Office should continue to lead the government's drug policy.

The poll suggests most MPs would resist a change in the drug laws, however. According to the poll, only 31% believe that they should consider relaxing the law so that possession of small quantities of currently controlled drugs would not be treated as a criminal offence.

Roger Howard, Chief Executive of the UK Drug Policy Commission, said:

"We knew that the public think that drug policy isn't working well enough. Clearly, many MPs now also think the same.

"Drug policy in the UK has had some good achievements, like keeping HIV rates low among drug users and getting more people into treatment. But it's now clear to many people that we need some fresh thinking.

"UKDPC will look at how we can tackle drug problems and get better value for public money when we publish our report next month on the future of drug policy."

Notes to editors:

1. The poll was conducted from 22nd May – 22nd June 2012 by ComRes on behalf of the UK Drug Policy Commission. ComRes interviewed 150 MPs, including 62 coalition MPs and 80 Labour MPs, by self-completion postal and online questionnaires. Data were weighted by party and region to reflect the exact composition of the House of Commons. The ComRes panel is configured as far as possible to be representative of all parliamentarians but excludes those holding positions in Government. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.
2. The UK Drug Policy Commission is an independent charity that provides objective analysis of the evidence concerning drug policies and practice. It is finishing its work at the end of 2012 and will publish its final report in October 2012.
3. The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee is currently holding an inquiry into drug policy. The inquiry has been running since January 2012 and is expected to publish its results later this year.
4. The British Medical Association is currently developing a report on drugs of dependence and is expected to publish this report soon.
5. The full results of the survey of MPs was as follows:

Among all surveyed MPs (base size = 150)

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't know
The UK's current policies are effective in tackling the problems caused by illegal drugs.	1%	16%	62%	16%	5%
	Total agree: 17%		Total disagree: 77%		
Policy about illegal drugs is such a controversial issue, it can be difficult to have an objective debate about the best solutions.	15%	60%	18%	4%	2%
	Total agree: 75%		Total disagree: 22%		
The process of making policy about illegal drugs in the UK should make more use of evidence and research than it currently does.	17%	59%	15%	1%	6%
	Total agree: 76%		Total disagree: 16%		
If we are to improve the way we tackle illegal drug problems, we need to change how we make policy about illegal drugs.	9%	58%	18%	2%	10%
	Total agree: 68%		Total disagree: 20%		
We should consider changing the drug laws so that possession of small quantities of currently illegal drugs for personal use only should not be treated as a criminal offence.	7%	24%	34%	23%	12%
	Total agree: 31%		Total disagree: 57%		

Among surveyed coalition MPs (base size = 62)

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't know
The UK's current policies are effective in tackling the problems caused by illegal drugs.	2%	17%	66%	10%	6%
	Total agree: 18%		Total disagree: 76%		
Policy about illegal drugs is such a controversial issue, it can be difficult to have an objective debate about the best solutions.	16%	59%	19%	7%	-
	Total agree: 75%		Total disagree: 25%		
The process of making policy about illegal drugs in the UK should make more use of evidence and research than it currently does.	18%	52%	19%	2%	7%
	Total agree: 69%		Total disagree: 22%		
If we are to improve the way we tackle illegal drug problems, we need to change how we make policy about illegal drugs.	11%	59%	18%	3%	7%
	Total agree: 70%		Total disagree: 21%		
We should consider changing the drug laws so that possession of small quantities of currently illegal drugs for personal use only should not be treated as a criminal offence.	9%	21%	29%	32%	10%
	Total agree: 30%		Total disagree: 60%		

Among surveyed Labour MPs (base size = 80)

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't know
The UK's current policies are effective in tackling the problems caused by illegal drugs.	-	17%	53%	23%	5%
	Total agree: 17%		Total disagree: 76%		
Policy about illegal drugs is such a controversial issue, it can be difficult to have an objective debate about the best solutions.	16%	64%	16%	1%	2%
	Total agree: 80%		Total disagree: 17%		
The process of making policy about illegal drugs in the UK should make more use of evidence and research than it currently does.	17%	66%	10%	-	6%
	Total agree: 83%		Total disagree: 10%		
If we are to improve the way we tackle illegal drug problems, we need to change how we make policy about illegal drugs.	9%	56%	18%	1%	15%
	Total agree: 65%		Total disagree: 19%		
We should consider changing the drug laws so that possession of small quantities of currently illegal drugs for personal use only should not be treated as a criminal offence.	5%	30%	36%	11%	16%
	Total agree: 35%		Total disagree: 47%		

Full data will be published on the UKDPC and ComRes websites.

6. The poll was commissioned as part of a study looking at how drug policy is made in the UK. The report of this study will be published later in 2012.
7. For details of UK public attitudes to drug policy, see: http://cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/yg-archives-pol-yougov-drugs-130611.pdf
8. For more information and interviews, contact **Leo Barasi**, lbarasi@ukdpc.org.uk, **020 7812 3792 / 07988 054241**.