

Forum: *Youth Action Committee (YAC)*

Issue: *The question of how society should respond to the use of recreational drugs*

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Position: *President*

Introduction

The issue of using and legalizing recreational use of drugs is generally a very polarizing issue, with people on both sides having very strong beliefs. Some in society argue that the usage of any drugs for recreational purposes should be strictly prohibited, while others, favor a more lenient government with more freedom. In certain countries, the decriminalization of certain drugs and the introduction of new policies have proven to be effective, however, some solutions may not be applicable for the world to follow.

Many of those who fight for the legalization of drugs believe that there are benefits to legalization, including better quality control to the drugs produced as well as preventing the spread of diseases like AIDs due to medical equipment sharing. Furthermore, many believe that the money could be used more effectively in programs that prevent the exposure and usage of drugs instead of wasteful spending in efforts to suppress trafficking and drug use. Proponents of recreational drugs believe that the rise in the use of drugs stems from economic inequality and negative influences in the community. Pro-drug legalization people also believe that drugs will be prevalent regardless of the legality so instead of having costly efforts to prevent the use of drugs, they can redistribute the resources. More recently, certain cities have even decriminalized the usage of any and all drugs for recreational purposes, with substantial support from the people, while other countries have implemented laws that allowed for even stricter measures to prevent the movement and usage of recreational drugs.

With that being said, this calls for the question of whether or how society should respond to the use of recreational drugs.

Definition of Key Terms

Recreational drug use

According to Merriam Webster, the term recreational drug use can be defined as the usage of a drug without medical justification for its psychoactive effects, often in the belief that occasional use of such a substance is not habit-forming or addictive.

Drugs

Under the Cambridge English Dictionary, drugs can be defined as any natural or artificially made chemical that is used as a medicine. Drugs is a very broad term as it can mean substances that are legally allowed to be prescribed to citizens as well as substances that are prohibited under the law.

Decriminalization

Decriminalization is defined as the reduction or removal of punishments and the criminal classifications under the law according to the Cambridge English Dictionary.

Medical use

The use of a substance strictly to tend or cure a disease or relieve pain. The use of drugs medically is practiced widely in most of the Western world and is often seen as an exception for the use of drugs.

Controlled Substance

Controlled substances are any behavior-altering or addictive drugs whose possession and use are strictly prohibited under the law. Controlled substances vary from place to place, while a drug such as cannabis may be legal in a country, it may be categorized as a controlled substance in another country. Some examples of controlled substances include heroin, cocaine, and morphine.

Gateway Drugs

Controlled substances that supposedly lead the user to harder, more lethal drugs as well as to become heavily dependent on the use of drugs. This term is often used to describe cannabis, as in society there is this prominent belief that the use of cannabis, whether medical or recreational, may lead to the use of more addictive and deadly drugs such as cocaine or meth.

Background Information

United States War on Drugs

The United States (US) President Richard Nixon passed a series of laws, which would change how people in the US use drugs as well as how US society would view the use of drugs drastically. Nixon was not the only US President who would implement laws and programs which changed society's view on drugs, especially those that are for recreational uses.

Controlled Substance Act

The first substantial move in the series of acts was the implementation of the Controlled Substance Act in 1970. The Act categorized drugs into groups by their medical usage as well as the possibility of being misused. Some of the most well-known drugs used for recreation nowadays, such as cannabis and heroin, were put into the first category which was for the substances with the highest possibility of being abused with no substantial information proving its medical effectiveness. This created a strong national sentiment against the usage of recreational drugs and stigmatized the use of drugs in the US. Furthermore, while these laws were supposed to be preventing the use of banned substances, it has been noted that many of the laws specifically targeted minority groups as well as stereotypical groups of people, such as African Americans and Latinxs. The reason these laws target minority groups is due to the enforcement of strict bans against drugs such as crystal meth, which is generally more accessible for poorer populations, like African Americans. On the contrary, regulations regarding drugs that are more commonly used by wealthy white Americans are less enforced and even when caught, the punishments given are severely less than their minority counterparts, with the incarceration rate for drug-related crimes of African American compared to other ethnicities are at a 5 to 1 ratio. Many believe that the policies in place are fundamentally beneficial to society, however, when actually in place, the policies have a way for police to carry out institutional racism.

War on Drugs

In June of 1971, President Nixon officially declared a "War on Drugs" and named the use of drugs as "public enemy number one." The President implemented laws that had stricter laws on violations, including longer jail sentences as well as increasing funding for agencies that prevented the use of drugs. The initiative furthered many people's hard stance against the usage of recreational drugs and most of American society became afraid of the use of drugs, recreational or medical.

'Just Say No' Campaign

Although in 1977 under the Carter Administration, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted and passed a bill that decriminalized up to one ounce of cannabis possession, the Reagan Administration implemented strong initiatives that countered the actions of the past administration. In 1984, Nancy Reagan, the first lady at that time, created the campaign "Just Say No," which intensified the nation's stance against the use of drugs. The impact of these policies can be seen prominently, as many conservatives still maintain the same stance, even though some banned substances, such as cannabis, have numerous studies backing the medicinal benefit from using it.

Drug Production in Afghanistan

The landlocked nation of Afghanistan is currently the world's number one in producing generally universally recognized illegal substances such as opium. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 83 percent of the world's opium is grown in the country. Even though nations such as the US have tried to intervene and prevent the further production of opioids, these attempts have been insubstantial as the country still produces large amounts of banned substances to Europe and the Western world.

Causes of drug production

One of the reasons why Afghanistan is the leader in the production of drugs is because of political instability and lack of government initiatives. Due to the weak and corrupt government of Afghanistan and the immense presence of the Taliban in the region, drug production is difficult to restrict and the government does not have the funding or capabilities to prevent illicit trade. The Afghan economy is heavily reliant on the production of drugs as the demand in the rest of the world is rampant and if the industry were to be banned, many fear that it will cripple the already fragile state. Furthermore, due to the lack of infrastructure and economic opportunity in the country, many farmers in the nation have no other way of earning enough money to live. The poppy plant, which requires little irrigation and thrives in warmer temperatures, makes Afghanistan the ideal place for the production of it, which is another reason why the plant is popular there.

Prevalence around the world

The US and the British Government have worked together to prevent the spread of banned substances, such as providing incentives to growing other crops as well as planning to spray defoliants over major drug-producing regions. However, the majority of these measures

have failed to prevent the growth of drugs. Overall worldwide, annually 585,000 people die due to the use of drugs, with opioids taking the lead for the most deadly substance. Although certain opioids have been proven to be extremely effective in short term relief with the rise in opioid abusers all over the world, many have installed zero-tolerance policies regarding the use of any and all recreational drugs.

Drugs Tolerance in the Netherlands

Currently in the Netherlands, all drugs used for non-medical purposes are illegal under the Opium Law. However, nowadays, it is extremely common to see people in the Netherlands using cannabis for recreational purposes and it generally has been socially acceptable to use soft drugs in the country. This toleration for certain drug use under set circumstances later allowed for gedogen to set in, where certain laws regarding the use of drugs are no longer enforced. In the country, there are coffee shops that sell cannabis for personal use under a certain limit and are not often punished due to the toleration by local law enforcement officers. However, these stores need to follow a strict guideline provided by the government and require a licence.

Division of drugs

One of the steps that allowed for the toleration of certain drugs was the sorting of drugs into schedules, one for hard drugs (Schedule I) another for soft drugs (Schedule II). These laws sorted drugs by their strength, addictiveness, as well as accessibility to the public. Drugs such as cannabis, sleep pills, and sedatives are in Schedule II, while cocaine, heroin, and ecstasy are in Schedule I. According to the Government of the Netherlands, although they do recognize that drugs in Schedule I are less destructive to one's health, they believe that it should still be illegal and anyone caught "selling, producing, and in possession of these drugs are liable to prosecution." The government's purpose of sorting the drugs in schedules was for the purpose of separating and differentiating between drugs that are a threat to society from those with lesser damages.

Coffee shops

Coffeeshops, or licenced cannabis stores are common throughout the Netherlands and due to tolerance policies regarding the sale of soft drugs in coffee shops, cannabis is accessible to people in the country. The toleration policy prevents licenced coffee shops from being prosecuted by the governments regarding the sale of cannabis, even though the sale of soft drugs are technically illegal in coffee shops. These stores are under very strict regulations set by the government including the limit to the amount allowed to be legalized, the prevention of selling

other addictive substances like alcohol, as well as the prevention of advertising to people. These restrictions in place have allowed for the smooth transition of cannabis from being a part of Dutch society, as well as preventing the dangerous use of cannabis.

Social Acceptance

The acceptance of cannabis and other soft drugs in the country came after people in the country realized that it is unrealistic to want a country to be completely void of drugs. Furthermore, they realized that the funding for major projects to prevent the import and sale of all banned substances are not effective and often only arrest those who use and traffic lesser damaging drugs like cannabis. Many believe the funding for these programs should be directed towards the prevention of harder drugs such as heroin being used and trafficked, as it has a more long-lasting impact on the population compared to banned substances like cannabis and sleeping pills. Another way the money could be used is to fund projects that prevent the harms that recreational drugs may cause on the population, like the spread of blood-related diseases due to needle sharing. Although the separation of drugs into different schedules has proven to be effective in the Netherlands, the legality of cannabis, especially regarding the production of it is still highly controversial.

Key Issues

Risks

One of the major reasons people are afraid of recreational drug use is the possible risks that it may inflict on people in society as well as society in general. Studies about the risks of certain types of drugs such as cannabis have often been inconclusive or contradictory when it comes to the link between less dangerous drugs leading to substance misuse disorders. According to a study done by Platt J. Weinberger called "Is cannabis use associated with an increased risk of onset and persistence of alcohol use disorders," the use of cannabis with the addition of having pre-existing alcohol disorders can possibly lead to alcohol substance use disorder to worsen and lead to major damages to one's health. In that study there, the researchers came to the conclusion that cannabis use is linked to nicotine addiction. However, it is important to note that the study did not conclude that cannabis leads to harder substances, as the substances tested were substances commonly available for the public to access. Others have questioned the credibility of the study that concluded that 1 out of 6 young people who try cannabis are addicted to cannabis, as there has been no substantial data to prove the findings in the report. These reports have different conclusions to the studies and currently, new studies are undergoing regarding the

link between cannabis and harder substances like cocaine and heroin. To conclude, there have been no substantial studies to prove that cannabis is a gateway drug, however, there are many studies that prove that there are other negative effects caused by the use of cannabis. To the general public, the risks that the legalization of drugs may bring outweighs the possible benefits of legalization, which is why the majority of the world is against legalization.

Fears of the current situation becoming worse

One of people's main fears with the use of recreational drugs is that it might exacerbate the overdose drug epidemic. The fear that many have is that the legalization of drugs would allow teenagers or at-risk communities to have easier access to drugs and harm their mental development. Furthermore, they fear that the legalization would lead to a society filled with people with underdeveloped mental capabilities. The fear of recreational drugs turning into a gateway drug is also prominent in the US especially with many arguing the legalization would lead to the drug overdose epidemic in the US, which annually takes 50,000 people's lives.

Responsible Use

One philosophy that some hold is the idea of responsible use, which is when a person uses drugs recreationally for the beneficial parts, while also reducing the negative impacts it has on the user. Believers of this idea generally believe that the same principles set on the consumption of alcohol can be placed onto recreational drugs, seeing that more people die from alcohol overdoses than drug overdoses, the responsibility of using drugs responsibly should be on the user themselves, not the government. The argument that if alcohol and nicotine are widely available and have even higher death rates, then certain drugs can also be legalized. This idea has been met with criticism as many believe that the use of drugs recreationally is inherently bad and people who are addicted to substances do not have the capabilities of using drugs responsibly.

Gateway drug

One of the main arguments people against the use of recreational drugs have is that it may be a gateway drug that can possibly lead to the usage of even more deadly and addictive drugs. Many have the strong belief that if cannabis is decriminalized or even legalized, that there would be a tremendous increase in drug use and subsequently the crime rates would increase. Furthermore, in the US, many people are afraid that the US drug epidemic would just continue and possibly even worsen if there were to be legalization.

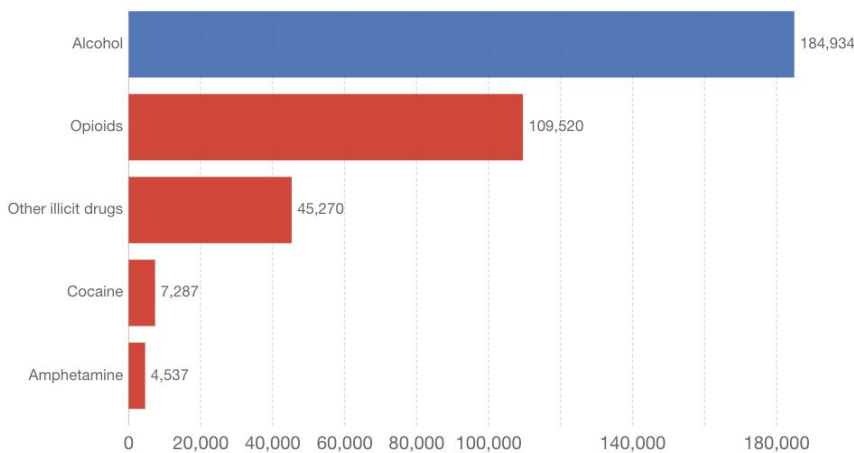
According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, there have been significant studies that show a connection between the use of cannabis with the usage of other drugs and alcohol addiction. According to a study by the National Epidemiology Study of Alcohol Use and Related Disorders, people who use cannabis are more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder within 3 years when compared to adults that haven't been exposed to cannabis.

It is important to note that most cannabis users do not end up using "harder" substances. Moreover, there have been researches that have shown that the use of alcohol and nicotine also can heighten the brain's drug response and often are used before people abuse even stronger, deadlier drugs. Another counter-argument to cannabis being a gateway drug is that often the populations that have the tendency to misuse hard drugs are in the environment where they are already exposed to other drugs and that they would be using harder substances regardless of cannabis. Many argue that the lack of protection of these vulnerable populations and the lack of government support are the reasons why the communities misuse drugs, and not because of early exposure to cannabis. Furthermore, statistics show that alcohol use disorders lead to more deaths than the amount of drug use disorder deaths combined, so many argue that if cannabis is a threat to people, alcohol should be banned too.

Number of deaths from substance use disorders, World, 2017

Substance use disorders refers to direct deaths from drug overdoses. This is distinguished from substance use as risk factor for premature death, which results when alcohol or drug use increases the likelihood of the development of disease or injury.

Substances shown in red are collectively termed 'Illicit drug use' in addition to cannabis, which is not shown here since it is not attributed to direct deaths from usage.



Caption #1: A chart showing the number of direct deaths due to substance overdoses in the world.

New industry

Many people in society are more open to the idea of legalizing the use of cannabis because it is currently a very under-discovered industry and if legalized can be a very profitable industry. In the US where it is still federally illegal to grow and sell cannabis, the legal cannabis industry is estimated to be a

\$13.6 billion industry and, before the COVID-19 pandemic, employed over 300,000 people. The US currently only has 11 states that legalize the use of cannabis and the industry is already a billion-dollar industry, so many argue that if it were to be legalized, the industry would definitely be economically substantial. The creation or expansion of the industry is also one of the reasons that pro-legalization people in the US believe that cannabis should be federally legalized.

Currently in circulation

A problem in many developed nations is that drugs are already in circulation and whether people like it or not, their usage is prominent and in other places, the government does not strictly follow the drug laws allowing people to use it freely. Many argue that since it is already extremely prevalent, that there is no need to take extreme measures to prevent it, under the context that there has not been much research directly linking cannabis to other harder drugs like heroin or cocaine. Many argue that the benefits of cannabis outweigh the disadvantages which is why they believe that society should not criminalize the use of cannabis.

Stigmatization

Often our society stigmatizes people who recreationally use drugs as people who are thugs or gangsters. Many people instantly see people who use drugs as not as good or inferior as they use drugs, which they believe is bad and will poorly influence the people around them. Even in places where certain drugs like cannabis are legal, many people believe that the use of it is the equivalent of committing a crime. Many argue that reducing stigmatization around drug use and making it less of a taboo, will help those in need and prevent further abuses of drugs.

Where to draw the line?

One of the many fears that people have with recreational drugs is what constitutes a drug that society and the government should legalize and what does not. Many are not against the use of cannabis because of the possible side effects it may have but are afraid that if the society normalized the use of it, that many may advocate for other drugs like heroin and LSD to be legalized. They believe that if society views the use of cannabis as normal, in the future, other harmful drugs may be normalized, which may lead to deadly outcomes. On the other hand, many argue that cannabis should be legalized, however, other drugs should maintain their illegal status and society should still be intolerant to other controlled substances.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Pro-decriminalization

One of the largest groups that generally maintains a more non-polarizing stance is the pro-decriminalization group, which vouches for decriminalizing the usage of controlled substances. The decriminalization of the possession of drugs, such as cannabis, has happened all over the US as well as some parts of the western world. In some states, like Oregon have decriminalized all possessions of drugs, which has been met with a variety of responses: some praise the move for decreasing the prison population and allowing people in difficult situations to have better ways to get out of them. They believe that it is not the people's fault for being exposed to the drugs and it is the system that has failed them. These people often believe that the laws in place currently are specifically targeting a group, often minority groups, and the people who are penalized and jailed for the actions are majority African Americans in the US.

Anti-Drug Legalization

The movement against the legalization of any drugs has been prevalent since the nineteenth century, however, only in the past decades have these communities started to vocally voice their stance on the issue. American society started to be extremely against drugs when President Nixon declared drugs and overdoses over drugs as "public enemy number 1," which instilled fear into people's minds about drugs in general and has caused many other controlled substances like cannabis to become antagonized. The declaration of the War on Drugs furthered the idea that all drugs are detrimental if legalized and that it would continue the US' drug overdose epidemic. The fear that government leniency would create more drug abusers is the main reason many fear the use of recreational drugs.

Pro-Drug Legalization

Many people are supportive of the recreational use of it as an industry that can be very profitable and that there could possibly be beneficial to people's health. Many just believe that laws in place target those who are generally poorer and have less power and that in the US, the jails are filled with so-called criminals who were incarcerated for the petty crimes that generally people of white ancestry would get away with. Many believe that legalizing drugs would undermine the current black market for drugs and end further harm to people due to the lack of quality control and the sharing of needles. They believe that a drug-free nation is unfeasible, and the government could spend their money better by helping and preventing people from the health-related damages it may cause to the population. Moreover, they believe that instead of the government spending millions on maintaining jails and continuing expensive programs that target the illegal trafficking of drugs, the government can spend this money on bettering

society and preventing people from needing or wanting drugs in the first place. Pro-drug legalization people generally believe that preventing people from being exposed to these drugs is more important than creating programs and punishments for people caught with drugs. They believe that the government should fund preventative measures for those most vulnerable as well as treatment centers to lessen the current rise in drug use.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
May 1, 1971	<p data-bbox="432 719 1158 745">Controlled Substance Act signed and put into effect</p> <p data-bbox="432 786 1437 913">In the United States, the Controlled Substance Act was signed and put into effect by President Nixon. This move was one of the first of a series of events that historians call the US' War on Drugs.</p>
June 1971	<p data-bbox="432 958 1158 985">President Nixon officially declares the War on Drugs</p> <p data-bbox="432 1025 1449 1153">In 1971, the US President officially declared a War on Drugs and a series of laws that were substantially more strict on the offenders of the laws, such as a minimum jail sentence, as well as other laws.</p>
October 26, 1977	<p data-bbox="432 1193 1273 1220">Senate Judiciary Committee votes to decriminalize cannabis</p> <p data-bbox="432 1261 1481 1433">In 1977, under the Carter Administration, the US Senate Judiciary Committee voted and passed a bill that decriminalized up to one ounce of cannabis possession, which allowed for a more lenient view of the use of recreational drugs.</p>
March 29, 2001	<p data-bbox="432 1496 1417 1574">The passing of the recreational and leisure use of drugs among young people in the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs</p> <p data-bbox="432 1615 1481 1736">The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs passed the resolution which outlined the dangers of exposure to recreational drugs especially vulnerable communities like young people.</p>
November 3, 2020	<p data-bbox="432 1783 879 1809">Oregon decriminalized all drugs</p> <p data-bbox="432 1850 1437 1977">Oregon voted to be the first US state that decriminalized the possession of all drugs, this means that possessing any and all drugs is no longer a criminal offense in the state. This move was heavily favored in the state as many</p>

believed that the measures to prohibit the use of drugs have failed in the US and that the money used to maintain prisoners in jails are often extremely expensive.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, March 30, 1961
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances, February 21, 1971
- UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, December 20, 1988
- Prevention of the recreational and leisure use of drugs among young people, March 29, 2001
(UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs Res. 44/5)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The majority of the nations in the UN currently take a hard stance against the trafficking and usage of recreational drugs, with multiple conventions and agreements on the prevention of drug trafficking and the prevention of recreational use of drugs especially in the more vulnerable communities. However, in recent decades certain nations have started to become more lenient when it comes to certain types of drugs, for example, Canada, South Africa, and certain states in the US have legalized the use of recreational cannabis. Furthermore, multiple states and regions have decriminalized the trafficking and use of drugs, which they believe would be better for both society and the government as maintaining jails and prosecuting people are fairly expensive for the government. The move faced major setbacks when certain parts of the population, such as parents, feared that the decriminalization of the drugs would expose their children to drugs.

Other nations introduced more extreme laws into place in order to combat the trafficking and use of drugs, for example, Singapore. In Singapore, anyone caught with possession of any drugs is sentenced to death and the country adopts the zero-tolerance policy, which means that the country does not give any exceptions to the law and anyone in violation of the law will face punishment. This way also affected how society viewed recreational drug users as people see drugs as a threat to society and something that should not be tolerated by the people.

Possible Solutions

There are many ways in order to deal with the drug epidemic whilst pleasing society when it comes to the recreational use of drugs. The following are some aspects to consider when trying to create a solution that benefits both the government and the views of society.*

Legalize the use of drugs that have medically been proven to be beneficial, however with extreme caution

Many people in society are fully for the legalization of medically proven effective drugs such as cannabis, as it is not as addictive as other drugs used for pain killing. If governments were to legalize the use of certain or any drugs, people in the society should be cautious as drugs still may be dangerous, even if the government were to also implement policies to protect the vulnerable communities. With drugs more prevalent, parents and people should be warned about the negative effects drugs have on people as well as preventing the youth from obtaining drugs as it might have some side effects to a developing brain.

Push for advertising campaigns on the dangers of drugs and the creation of proper treatment and rehabilitation centers

Under the pretense that some or all drugs are legalized, in addition to society being cautious about drugs, it should also push for advertising campaigns about the dangers that drugs may bring to people. Furthermore, the government and society should also discuss how people can responsibly use drugs, like how most people responsibly consume alcohol. Informational campaigns should be prevalent and widely available for the general public to access, in order for the negative effects of drugs to be controlled. Moreover, with the higher assessability of drugs to the general public, the government should also implement measures to prevent the misuse of drugs and have sufficient infrastructure to deal with possible drug disorders. One example of a way the government can help is by providing people with a safe environment to consume or inject their substances in a sterilized and safe place. This practice known as supervised injection sites, is prevalent in countries where it has been socially acceptable to use certain drugs, such as in the Netherlands and in Vancouver, Canada. Projects like these have also been launched by international organizations, who have expanded these supervised injection sites to multiple nations such as Norway, Switzerland, and Australia. These have proven effective and the practice of needle sharing as well as other unhygienic practices have decreased, preventing long lasting health consequences.

Reduction of stigmatization

Seeing as the stigmatization of drugs and drug users is widely prevalent around the world and over the media, society should destigmatize the terms and be properly educated with the right facts. With the people having less negative thoughts when it comes to hearing the term drug user, these people hopefully can receive the help and medical assistance they need, as asking for help is no longer as embarrassing or demeaning.

Zero-tolerance policy

The zero-tolerance policy regarding recreational drug use can possibly be an effective way for society to react to the rise of recreational drugs. With no tolerance regarding any and all drug use, percentages of drug use may decrease and deal with the current drug epidemic. It is also important to note that zero-tolerance policies may cause society to divide up and create rifts between people, as enemies may accuse others of violating laws, creating a trustless society.

**Please note that the aspects are not exclusive to each other and may overlap when trying to create a suitable solution.*

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