

Project Details	
Project Code	MRC22PHSBr Maynard
Title	Framing the drug debate: identifying cognitive and affective attitudes to drug policy reform and framing campaigns to change attitudes and behaviour
Research Theme	Population Health Sciences
Summary	The War on Drugs has failed. Legal regulation of drugs, alongside new treatment and harm reduction policies can reduce the health and societal harms caused by current drugs policy, but these changes require public and policymaker support. By working directly with drug policy advocacy organisations, this PhD uses innovative psychological approaches to examine how the framing of information can influence affective and cognitive attitudes towards drug policy reform.
Description	<p>In recent years we have seen significant developments in drug policy across the world, including both decriminalisation and the legal regulation of drugs such as cannabis. In the UK, debates on drug policy reform are gathering momentum, and there are particular tensions around harm reduction interventions such as overdose prevention centres; Boris Johnson recently stated that he is “not in favour, instinctively, of encouraging people to take more drugs” in reference to these centres. This response exemplifies how affective attitudes, based on moral, emotional and social resistance, often guide responses to drug policy, rather than evidence-based cognitive attitudes led by logic or reason. Support, both from policymakers and the public will be critical in enacting drug policy reform. Our recent research has started to look at how framing of overdose prevention centres can shape the policy views of both the public and policymakers. However, there is a lack of research evidence on how problem construction and framing shape views of wider drug policy issues. This PhD aims to understand affective and cognitive responses to drug policy and use this to develop messaging and campaigns promoting a new, safer approach to drug policy. In Phase 1, the student will examine the circumstances under which cognitive versus affective attitudes (and vice versa) influence decisions and behaviours around drug policy. We will consider whether these attitudes differ for different drugs (e.g., for drugs perceived as ‘hard’, or those used by certain groups of individuals) and for different types of policies (e.g., legal regulation versus other harm reduction approaches). This will be achieved through i) qualitative interviews and ii) online and laboratory experiments, both with participants who report being opposed to drug policy reform. The qualitative interviews will elicit important affective attitudes (i.e., feelings) and cognitive attitudes (i.e., beliefs) about drug policy reform. These will then be used to design a series of experiments (based on a vast literature on attitude change for other health behaviours, including contentious issues such as organ donation), to quantify the relative importance of affective and cognitive attitudes in guiding policy reform intentions and behaviours. The student will have access to a range of different methodological approaches, from online experiments to eye-tracking and electroencephalography. In Phase 2, the student will use what they have learned about cognitive and affective attitudes to consider how campaigns about drug policy reform should be ‘framed’. If affective attitudes are more important,</p>

	<p>campaigns should focus on making people feel more positive (and less fearful) about drug policy reform. If cognitive attitudes are more important, campaigns should focus on creating positive beliefs about policy reform. The message framings examined will also be informed by a student-led literature review, but these could include the information source (e.g., anecdotal versus scientific), the type of information (e.g., providing information about the packaging used for legally regulated products), language used in messaging (e.g., the role of commonly used but stigmatising language) and media portrayals of policy reform. Results here will be used to develop information, messages and campaigns which effectively change attitudes, intentions and behaviours related to drug policy reform. The student can use Transform’s online platforms to conduct randomised controlled trials investigating the impact of framing on actual behaviour (e.g., signing up to a Transform petition, or writing to an MP). They will also be able to choose from a range of other methodological approaches, including qualitative interviews, online and lab-based experiments comparing different approaches and eye-tracking to assess visual attention to different message frames.</p>
--	--

Supervisory Team	
-------------------------	--

Lead Supervisor	
------------------------	--

Name	Dr Olivia Maynard
Affiliation	Bristol
College/Faculty	Life Sciences
Department/School	Psychological Science
Email Address	olivia.maynard@bristol.ac.uk

Co-Supervisor 1	
------------------------	--

Name	Dr Tom Freeman
Affiliation	Bath
College/Faculty	Humanities and Social Sciences
Department/School	Psychology

Co-Supervisor 2	
------------------------	--

Name	Dr James Nicholls
Affiliation	Bristol
College/Faculty	Life Sciences
Department/School	Psychology

Co-Supervisor 3	
------------------------	--

Name	
Affiliation	
College/Faculty	
Department/School	

Co-Supervisor 4	
------------------------	--

Name	
Affiliation	
College/Faculty	
Department/School	