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Legalize Psychedelics

Guests:

For the motion: Rick Doblin, Bia Labate
Against the motion: Kevin Sabet, Jeffrey Lieberman
Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS

Before the debate:	After the debate:
74% FOR	62% FOR
11% AGAINST	30% AGAINST
15% UNDECIDED	8% UNDECIDED

00:00:00

Sarah Rose Siskind:

Hello and welcome to the Intelligence Squared debate, "Should Society Legalize Psychedelics." Hosted, like I said Intelligence Squared, intelligence for squares. Now I'm actually a huge, huge fan of this debate series, so if I know the Intelligence Squared audience, you guys were debating between watching this and 60 Minutes reruns on CBS. So thank you for choosing us.

On to tonight's debate topic: "Should Society Legalize Psychedelics?" Now I'm not trying to say I have a bias, but I am a psychedelic comedian, which means I'm only funny when you're on psychedelics. You know, I'm not an academic, I'm not a professional expert, but if there were a doctorate in how to not take psychedelics, I would have that. And I do want to say I actually oppose drug deals, or more specifically that they're called deals because drugs are expensive and there aren't usually any deals.

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You know, I actually feel like people do cocaine on mirrors to feel like they have twice as much cocaine. I'm just kidding, of course. I just get high on life and ketamine. So I get why people are skeptical about psychedelics. It could be another medical fad and there have been a lot of those. Like 150 years ago doctors would say things like, "I'm sorry you're dizzy, sir. You have ghosts. You should take tinctures of arsenic and one dram of cocaine. And then you go to, like, 100 years ago and doctors are saying things like, "Hmm, your wife wants to vote. She has lady

hysteria. You should try giving her day heroine.

Then you go to the 1950s and doctors are saying things like "Hmm, your wife doesn't want to clean the house. She needs pep. Try meth. Then you can calm down afterwards with a nice refreshing smoke and a ham salad.

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You know, medical fads they're not all winners. And, you know, in the war on drugs it seems today the drugs are winning. A lot of studies allege that psychedelics can cure anything from anxiety to depression, OCD to PTSD, and worst of all NBH: not being high. It's a very serious condition. But whether you're pro-psychedelics or you want to keep them illegal, I would like to focus on the things that we can agree on like not using the metric system. You know, whether you're a psychedelic prohibitionist or an exhibitionist like me I think there are things we share in common like being embarrassed about Timothy Leary or loving the show "Narcos."

So even though this a debate, I hope we keep it civil because the most powerful drug of all is love. And love is what I call Ketamine. So with that, I'd like to throw it to our debate host, the most immoderately, moderate moderator I've ever met, and the dad I wish I had, John Donovan.

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John Donovan:

All right. Thank you very much, Sarah. And it's nice that you get to do the amusing part. I will be doing the more serious role. So I won't be as witty or as funny as you, which is not appropriate, of course, given my role as moderator of a serious topic which is what we think we have here. We are digging into a debate that centers on the subject of psychedelics. Psychedelics. What are we talking about? In medical terms these are a rather inexactly defined category of drugs that are known to affect both perceptions and sometimes cognition. And we know that they have been gaining broader acceptance in recent years. Proponents of wider use of psychedelics point to their potential uses in the field of neuroscience and also as presenting a range of potential therapies.

Opponents of their wider use point the dangers of psychedelics and also a lack of data about what broader effects may result from a greatly increases access by the public to these drugs.

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Either way, as with cannabis, the movement for wider use is growing even as we speak. It's an issue that seems ripe for debate. So here it is. The question we are taking on, "Should Society Legalize Psychedelics." I'm John Donovan, and this is Intelligence Squared.

[music playing]

John Donovan:

So let's get started with this. It's time to cast your first vote. I'm going to ask you to do that by going to IQ2vote.org. That's IQ, the number two, vote dot org.

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And I'll give you just a second to pull that up in a new tab. And you can do this from any browser, you can do it on your cell phone. IQ, the number two, vote dot org. When you get there, you will be given the option to cast your vote on the resolution, legalize psychedelics for, against, or undecided. And in our view, these are all entirely respectable points of view. That's why we've brought in debaters on two of these sides. But undecided is also a respectable point of view from which to start. We're going to ask you to do this again after you have heard the debate. And again, it's going to be the side that sways the most minds between the first and the second vote, in percentage point terms, that will be our winner. So if you haven't already gotten your first vote in, go to IQ2vote.org. I'll give you a couple more seconds to get that first vote in.

All right, then, time to meet our debaters.

Arguing for the motion, "legalize psychedelics," is Rick Doblin, founder and executive director or the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.

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His partner, Bia Labate, an anthropologist and drug policy expert and executive director or the Chacruna Institute for Psychedelic Plant Medicines.

Opposing them, Jeffrey Lieberman, former president of the American Psychiatric Association and chair of Columbia University's Department of Psychiatry. And Kevin Sabet, a three time White House drug policy advisor and author of the upcoming book, "Smoke Screen."

All right, so here we all are, our four debaters, I want to welcome Rick and Jeffrey and Bia and Kevin. Thanks so much for joining us on Intelligence Squared.

Rick Doblin:

Yeah, our pleasure.

Male Speaker:

Thanks for having us.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Excited to be with you, John, and talk about this interesting subject.

Bia Labate:

Yeah!

John Donovan:

It's great to have you all. You're spread all around the country. And it's wonderful that we can all come together in this way to take on this really, really interesting topic. And the way we're going to do this, we're going to go in three rounds.

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The first round will be composed of opening statements from each debater in turn. Those statements will be four minutes each. Our resolution -- our motion is legalize psychedelics. And first up, to be speaking in support of that motion, will be Rick Doblin. Rick, the screen is all yours.

Rick Doblin:

Thank you, John. So the proposition that we're debating today is about legalizing psychedelics. And I'd first like to speak to the areas, I think, where we're going to agree. So I think that Kevin and Jeffrey will agree that if the FDA approves psychedelic assisted therapy on the basis of evidence and makes that into prescription medication, that they would be supportive of that.

I think that they will also agree with the United States Supreme Court that certain religious uses of psychedelics, like the use of peyote by the Native American church and the use of ayahuasca by a church called [unintelligible], that they would agree with that, that those aspects of legalization for medical use and for religious use, I think are going to be non-controversial, although we'll find out about that.

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I think the areas where we're going to be disagreeing are whether individuals should have a right to explore psychedelics for spiritual purposes without being part of a group or a religion, whether that extends to individuals. And I think we'll also disagree potentially on whether people who don't have a medical diagnosis could access psychedelics in a legal way for a whole range of things, for personal growth, for celebration, for couples therapy, for a whole range of things.

And I think we may also disagree on what are the appropriate punishments, you could say, for if people are going to be supporting criminalization -- or not legalization, what kind of punishment should there be for people who break these rules?

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But first, now that we've established that, I want to explain the vision that we have for legalization. And actually, I think that alcohol is regulated too lightly, I think marijuana is regulated too lightly, and the form of legalization that I'm talking about is called licensed legalization, where you have a license to do these drugs. And if you misbehave, you get punished for your misbehavior, for your behavior, but not for the state of consciousness that you were in or the drugs that were -- that you had taken.

And that you could lose the license for a period of time as well, and then you would have to go to classes, education. So, for example, we all know that drunk drivers often lose their driver's

license for driving under the influence, but then they can go and buy alcohol, they get back in their car, and they kill people. So I think we should make it harder for people who misbehave to get access to these drugs.

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Now with this kind of license legalization, there's a series of policies that should go along with it. And the first of these policies is honest drug education. You know, my kids have gone through the DARE program -- I didn't want them to not go through that -- but they got education that was twisted and not very honest. I think we need honest drug education. We also need access to pure drugs. We know that a lot of drugs are adulterated through the black market. So legalization will permit these drugs to be available in a pure way.

We also need harm reduction techniques, which, for example, where -- a fiscal sponsor for an 800 number for people to call if they have difficult trips on the phone. We do psychedelic peer support training. We need to embed in the culture the knowledge of how to help people who have difficult experiences.

And then in addition to all these policies, we need to have treatment on demand.

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And I think that that's really important and that will be paid for by the taxes from people that are buying these drugs. And for minors, it should be forbidden except if they get permission from their parents. And 23 states are like that for alcohol, that parents can override the laws against minors. So for that, I hope you will vote for the legalization of psychedelics licensed legalization in the way I just described. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thanks very much, Rick Doblin. Our next speaker will be arguing against the motion legalize psychedelics. Here is Jeffrey Lieberman. Jeffrey. The screen is all yours.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Thank you, John. Well, I want to make clear that I'm really a proponent and an advocate for the exploration of psychedelic substances to the extent that they can be useful for humankind. And in legal terms, what that means is that I advocate strongly that they be allowed to be studied and for medical research to see what their therapeutic indications are and how they can help us to understand the brain and the mind.

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I also think they should be decriminalized. But in terms of legalization, I am against that. Now, Rick has introduced a nuance here about licensed legalization, which we can get into during the discussion. But I'm against legalization for the following reasons.

Now, first, let me in full disclosure indicate that I'm a pointy headed scientist and a practicing

physician. But I have lived experience, I'm a child of the 60s. And although I didn't inhale like Bill Clinton, I did imbibe various amounts of Blätter or Ousley [spelled phonetically] or other types of mescaline, psilocybin, so I've had actual experience.

I also want to say that during the 35 to 40 years that these substances were banned for further research and potential use, I commend the advocates, and particularly Rick and MAPS, for keeping the faith and staying the course. However, now that they've been rehabilitated, to some extent, I'm concerned about the process that's been instigated and that we don't screw this up a second time and have these banned and, you know, have to forgo what would be their -- for their potential benefits.

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And if you look at the mission statement and the MAPS website, it says some things which I have problems with. One, it says to develop psychedelics and marijuana into prescription medicines. Well, maybe there are therapeutic uses that can be eventually found in the substance for treatment of various specific medical conditions. But to be clear, this is really a ruse.

This is a way to get around their prohibition by saying, "Well, maybe they're useful for some medical reasons and therefore should be available." So it's trying to get a foot in the policy door. A second point of their mission is to train therapists and establish treatment centers. What's the methodology?

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I mean, there's no established methodology which shows how they should be used or what they should be used for or what patient population for whom they would be indicated or counter-indicated. This is something that's all potentially feasible, but it doesn't exist at this point.

The third point on their website is that they support scientific research into neuroscience, which I fully concur with, but also spirituality and creativity. Well, maybe these drugs are gateways to a creative use or spiritual plane, but they also could be illusions. I mean, virtual reality is an illusion. And maybe these drugs give you an inner state of mind, which makes you think you're connected to the Godhead or to the universal fundamental plane of existence, or that -- your creator.

And then, finally, they said they envision a world where psychedelics and marijuana are safe and legally available for beneficial uses, where research is governed by rigorous scientific evaluation of risks and benefits.

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Well, that's not what's happening now. It's not being done in a rigorous way in the way that the kind of usual important topics governing research into cancer, cardiovascular disease, infectious disease, and brain disorders is usually done. Now, first thing that I would ask in terms of clarification is that when psychedelics first became known to the popular culture way after LSD

was synthesized by Albert Hofmann and Sir Humphrey Osmond coined the term psychedelics mind manifesting, it applied to a specific set of substances that had a similar pharmacologic activity by targeting a specific serotonin receptor and produced a certain subjective state of mind. The definition has been broadened into include dissociative drugs like ketamine and secluding and pathogen's like MDMA or ecstasy and deliriums. And there's no basis for this. So I think it's going to be reckless to legalize them, and I encourage you to vote no.

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John Donovan:

Thanks very much, Jeff Lieberman. Okay, so everybody, you've heard the first two opening remarks, and now we move on to the third and next on screen with her opening statement in support of the motion, here is the Bia Labate.

Bia Labate:

Hello, everybody, it's an honor to be here, and we're discussing whether psychedelics should be legalized, and I say, "Yes, psychedelics should be legalized." And I'm going to explain very briefly why. First, historical and cultural foundations. Two, the absolute failure of the drug war. Three, some examples that we can look at. So, history and culture. Drugs have been used by all kinds of populations through all historical periods. There's nearly non-human group that hasn't experimented with altered states of consciousness. More than that, psychedelics have been central to several indigenous groups of the Americas and elsewhere.

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As a matter of fact, psychedelics have been a main way through indigenous people. Their sacred plants have helped them guide their culture, teach the younger generations, create socialization, celebration, identity, territory to explain the very myths of why man is on human planet. And so. But this is -- you don't have to go to indigenous people. You can go to the ancient Greeks and find information with the old elision mysteries or early Christianity. There's a whole speculation on whether early Christians use psychedelics. We have evidence for the presence of cannabis since 10,000 years among the Chinese. We have archeological evidence of the use of peyote for 5,000 years.

My main career, I have studied ayahuasca sacred plants from the indigenous people of the Americas.

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It's said to be used and known since immemorial times. So I just want to say that we're not inventing the wheel here. We're talking about things that have deep roots in our nations and countries and consciousness. And in terms of the drug war, it's a -- it's -- first of all, let's just remind that the current scheduling of drugs is absolutely nonscientific and has a lot of historical, cultural, and social reasons to why the substances are divided in such categories.

The drug war, we all know it's a moral and cultural war. It's a war that lends itself with the

language of religious dogma. You've heard a little bit about this, the idea of verticality, of things that are unreel that are fake, mixed with pathology. So the drug war has always been a war that is a moral war, a war on consciousness, a war on minorities, and a war on people. More than that, the drug war is a racist war.

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It's a way to persecute certain minorities, and we have associated the Chinese with opium. We have associated Mexicans to cannabis. We have associated African-Americans to cocaine. We have associated the Irish with alcohol. And we have persecuted their habits because we can't prosecute them as people. So we all know for a fact that for similar quantities, black and brown folks are incarcerated about three times more than their white peers for use of drugs.

The drug war is a failure. The drug war has innumerable costs and drugs have been used to scapegoat us to attribute all kinds of problems when we should be talking about other things such as education, housing, and health conditions. The drug war is a problematic enterprise that has not proven to work. It has failed. And I want to know what people propose instead of prohibition and criminalization.

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I'm curious to learn. We are in favor of legalization. And I want to say that we have already a few examples that are working fine. And I want to mention the case of Brazil, which we do consider ourselves part of the West, in case you're wondering. But Brazil has used ayahuasca since immemorial times, and the Brazilian ayahuasca religions are plenty incorporated into our societies. Hey, the sky did not fall. We don't have a tragedy going over there. Children go to rituals together with their parents. It's beautiful. The Netherlands legalized truffles and psilocybin mushrooms; the sky didn't fall either. Vote yes to legalize psychedelics.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Bia Labate. Our final opening statement will be against the resolution. Here is Kevin Sabet. Kevin, the screen is yours.

Kevin Sabet:

Thanks so much. Again, it's a pleasure to be here. You know, I think we need to remember what we're debating here and what we're discussing. It's not the war on drugs, which I think most of us can agree had a lot of challenges, and there are a lot of issues there we'd like to discuss.

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But that's not what we're talking about. And we're not talking about the specific limited medical use or research or even the decriminalization of hallucinogens, which would, I think, go a long way in addressing some of those arrest disparities. Although I will note those arrest disparities are not having -- are not happening because of drugs like LSD and MDMA. They're happening because of other drugs, actually, alcohol being the first among them, and alcohol is legal.

I think we need to remember also that we're not talking about ancient plant ceremonies in cultures from ten thousand years ago. I wish we were. I think that would be a lot more interesting. [laughs] We're talking about legalization of hallucinogens in the United States of America, and that is not limited plant ceremonies in the Amazon. That is, unfortunately, Super Bowl commercials. That is major lobbyists who pay -- are being paid millions of dollars to promote an agenda that enriches them.

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That is allowing companies and industries like big tobacco and big alcohol to do what they're doing with cannabis now, which is take over the entire industry, while those who may have been persecuted under previous laws are left with crumbs. They're left with nothing. Just in case you didn't notice, the corner boy from the Bronx is not making money for marijuana legalization right now. But Altria, Philip Morris, is making a lot. In fact, they just invested four billion dollars with a B in that market. So we need to separate these issues of prohibition, which is a separate policy; decriminalization, which would remove criminal penalties and not charge people for low level use or possession for private purposes; the medicalization, which happens to do with research and happens to do with FDA approved medication, scientifically validated medications. I'm a proponent of that. I -- we need as much as we can have -- as much as we can get to relieve pain, to deal with difficult trauma, PTSD experiences.

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I will note, by the way, the largest study looking at that just found that placebo worked better than the actual hallucinogens. In other words, when people thought they were micro dosing that worked as well or better than when they were actually given the drug.

But again, I'm interested in looking at that more. We need to do more research on that. And I think what Rick is doing has the potential to be very good, even though I disagree with him on this debate about legalization. Because legalization is that fourth separate box from prohibition, decriminalization, and medicalization. And legalization, we know very clearly what that is here. It's not what is happening in the Netherlands. It's not what is happening in Brazil, which not many people know about. It is the mass commercialization and promotion of a drug for profit. That is the American way.

When you legalize a drug, we don't have to guess what happens. We have legalized drugs. They're called opioid pharmaceutical drugs.

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They're called alcohol, and they're called tobacco. They kill more people than all illegal drugs combined, partly because they're used more, and why they are used more is because they are promoted and commercialized in this system. So let's pursue the research. Let's be careful about that, make sure people aren't hurt. But this idea that we should turn this over to the legal market, which would again -- is basically the purview of Wall Street and Silicon Valley, it's not the purview of medical laboratories and of careful experimentation or even what Rick is presenting,

which is interesting, a licensing scheme. It's not that, and it's not what the best intentioned academics want. It is what the market wants currently in the United States.

And the market for these drugs is about addiction for profit. It's about pushing the most number of people to use your substance irresponsibly and heavily, because that is how you make money. Think about alcohol. 10 percent of Americans consume 80 percent of the alcohol volume in this country.

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That means the alcohol industry relies on alcoholics for its profit. We do not need to create another industry like that.

John Donovan:

Thanks, Kevin Sabet. And that concludes the first round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is legalize psychedelics. And now we move on to round two and round two is a much more loosely framed round of the debate. It's much more like a conversation which will be led off by questions from me and perhaps some comments from me based on what I heard you say in your opening statements, but also it's your chance to challenge one another and to question one another as well. I want to go first to Rick Doblin. There really is a significant amount of common ground here in that all of you seem to recognize that the government's reaction from the 1960s through about 15 years ago was an overreaction during that period that I think we can call prohibition. You all agree that that was not productive. I think you all agree that the drug war has been not productive and actually harmful.

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I think you all agree that more research on psychedelics is a good thing. Nobody is disagreeing with that. It seems to me what we're talking about and where this divide comes is on the presumption that any individual has a pathway to access these psychedelics without having it to be characterized a religious -- part of a religious ceremony or part of a medical requirement or some sort of diagnosis. And it occurred to me that perhaps just in -- a model -- an analogy would be being able to drive an automobile. It's presumed in society that driving an automobile can be a very dangerous thing. Enormous amount of research and experience has been built up over the -- over time in regard to that. And we all have a path to learn to get licensed for driving an automobile. Therefore, it's a sort of, I would say, mass access to the experience. I want to ask you, Rick.

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Am I capturing the degree of access that you're talking about, the principle of access, the spirit of the kind of access you're talking about?

Rick Doblin:

Yes, definitely. I think that there should be free access for adults with a license to these drugs. Not everybody is going to want to do it, but I think a substantial number of people will. I would

take issue with Kevin saying this is all about addiction for profit. Jeffrey Lieberman -- Jeffrey has talked about how psychedelics -- the classic psychedelics, meaning LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, are not really addictive drugs. But I do believe that there should be access. And I think one of the problems of decrim is that you still don't have pure drugs. And we have a lot of problems with people getting adulterated drugs. Yeah.

John Donovan:

Well, let me -- I just now -- I wanted to get you on the record just establishing the degree of access you're talking about.

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Rick Doblin:

Yes.

John Donovan:

And I put out there the analogy of being able to drive a car.

Rick Doblin:

[affirmative]

John Donovan:

Jeff Lieberman, why is using psychedelic drugs not the same thing as driving a car from your point of view? What's different about the conditions, the parameters that would cause you -- that do cause you to have -- to raise flags about that level of access?

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Psychedelic drugs are a unique class of substances. On the good side, it has nothing to do with the drug wars because they're not addictive drugs in the same way, because they're not euphoricants, and they're not hedonistic drugs. And they offer this subjective, altered state of consciousness that is potentially revealing about people themselves or about the world or about life in general. And we don't know the extent to which that can be put to useful purposes, both for human potential as well as therapeutic uses. The problem is -- and we agree on 90 percent, I think, it's really just terminology -- definitely medical uses, definitely decriminalization.

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I'm not sure quite what licensed use means. But the thing is, is that the knowledge base, the scientific knowledge base about the pharmacology of these substances, how it can be optimized and then applied for human use has barely been touched. The drugs that are currently being tested, both MDMA -- well, let's forget about them, about psilocybin. That is a naturally occurring substance that was selected opportunistically. There's no comparative pharmacology between the various types of psychedelic drugs to see which would be optimal and then how to refine those and administer them. It's being done in a very well-intended, but amateurish and potentially reckless way.

John Donovan:

So Bia, we heard from Jeffrey.

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He's quite skeptical of, sort of drawing comparisons and this is your this is your life's work is drawing comparisons between the United States and also Kevin was bringing some of this in where they're envisioning the provision of psychedelic drugs would be this massive corporate undertaking and that your depiction of the -- both the safety, the and the cultural integrity of the use of psychedelics being demonstrated by ancient cultures and also indigenous cultures having used them, is just not relevant to what psychedelic use would be like in a fully legalized United States production of psychedelics by presumably the pharmaceutical companies. What's your response to that?

Bia Labate:

Well, first of all, let me once again, thank you all. Beautiful gentlemen. It's an honor to be the only woman here, and I might respectfully disagree with my fellow presenters. So Kevin, yes, I strongly disagree that the use of sacred plants by indigenous people is not relevant to what happens in the United States.

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I think maybe you're not really aware of what happens in the United States, but I am because I hang out on those atmospheres. So, first of all, there's a lot of ayahuasca use on the underground in the U.S., both religious and clinical or semi clinical or whatever you want to call New Age spiritual for personal self-growth. There's tons and tons of circles. I think that as we speak, I would bet that there is one circling each in each city in this country. It's really growing strong. And the use of psilocybin, you also have such a strong culture of psilocybin have been used in the United States. The other day I went to the Academy of Science, which is one of my favorite spots here in San Francisco. They had a whole day about mushrooms. And it's not just mushrooms, gourmet, it's also mushrooms, psychoactive. They have Zeins, they have the whole cultural movement. They have transformational festivals all over the United States.

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And you also have a large culture of use of peyote, and you have traveling shamans. And I do think that rituals that happen outside South America are important. And I think Americans like to idealize, mystify, fetishize what happens in South America and think that there is no culture here and that everything is better than --

John Donovan:

But Bia, they're projecting a future where that would not be the situation. The situation would be, but would be would -- well, I'll let Kevin respond.

Bia Labate:

Yeah, but what he says about people and I think there is a fundamental confusion here. So one

thing to say is I'm against the regulation and the other thing is to say regulation will be big pharma. We can create mechanisms to mitigate, to avoid exploitation, to create systems where people that have suffered previous drug offenses are not taken their licenses out.

We can limit government control. We can limit taxes --

[talking simultaneously]

John Donovan:

Let me bring back Kevin, please. Thanks.

00:33:04

Kevin Sabet:

Yeah. So, look, I wish that would happen. I guess I'm just more cynical, having been in three different White House administrations and in every state capital looking and talking about specifically cannabis policy, but also alcohol, a bit in tobacco and other drugs like opioids. We've never really gotten it right. The perfect balance has not happened. And, you know, and again, actually what I'm saying is perhaps they have gotten it right in other places around the world on this, including Brazil and other places. But in the United States, it does become about big business and what I meant by, you know, addiction, for profit and what Rick was talking about, it's not necessarily it's always going to be the addictiveness, but also just the harmfulness that the people that are going to be investing and making money in this unfortunately are not nobody in this debate right now. I can tell you that. They are the people who are operate behind the shadows on this 37th floor of an office building in San Francisco or New York or L.A. or London who run multiple companies that see this as another part of their portfolio?

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John Donovan:

Why does that need to be inevitable? And why is it and it's not inevitable. Does that change your position?

Kevin Sabet:

Well, I think it's happened in every single situation where we've had legalized drugs. So we've never had a counter example, of that. So, I think it's risky to think that that's not going to happen. I also have an issue with this idea that if it were legalized, it would be purer and better. And I think that we can look at -- the tobacco example as a very good example. You know, tobacco killed very few people before the advent of big tobacco. Tobacco has been around for thousands of years. But about a hundred years ago, when Big Tobacco came on board and invented the modern day cigarette, invented the addition of nicotine and other harmful products, even though tobacco was apparently regulated, this happened under our watch and started a much more harmful drug.

John Donovan:

I want to let Rick respond to some to some of this. Rick made some references to cannabis and

it's come up a few times in the conversation now.

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Now, you know, there really is a sense that attitudes and certainly access changed and are changing still dramatically when it comes to cannabis, psychedelics, different class of drugs. But what does the cannabis journey tell us about the psychedelic journey that could come? Is it red flags? Is that smooth sailing? What is -- what are the lessons from that?

Rick Doblin:

All right. So Jeffrey talked about the medical research that we're doing as a ruse, as amateurish. We are working at the highest standards of the FDA. We're in phase three. We've had a successful Phase three study that's about to be published in Nature Medicine. We are working at the same level that Big Pharma works and the same standards that FDA applies to us. So, we do interest -- are interested in medicalization, but we are also interested in access for people without it being a medical condition.

00:36:02

So it's not a ruse. It's not amateur. It's the highest standards of science. What I do think, though, is that this boogeyman of big psychedelics trying to push psychedelics on everybody and somehow or other like tobacco, developing more addictive forms of this, I don't see that happening. I don't quite understand how that was. And I'd say one of the things we've learned from marijuana and this maybe speaks to Jeffrey's point, is that medicalization is necessary as a step to educate people who have been miseducated and lied to and research has been suppressed. So medicalization changes people's attitudes about the risks and benefits of these drugs, and then it leads people to think more about legalization. So we've seen that --

John Donovan:

What's the lie that people have been told about psychedelics?

Rick Doblin:

Well, when I grew up in the 60s, I was told if you took LSD six times in a row, you were certifiably insane.

00:37:03

We were told that LSD caused chromosome damage and you would have deformed babies. We're told that it will --

[inaudible commentary]

Rick Doblin:

Well, I don't know. We've been told by Oprah that MDMA causes holes in your brain. I still come across people who say that they've watched this Oprah show and they believe that MDMA causes holes in the brain. We've been told that MDMA one dose, serious brain damage, major

functional consequences. It should never be researched. These were things that we had to overcome.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Rick. Believe me, we are aligned. But let me ask you a key question. Apart from proving medical uses, which you've done a good job with ecstasy and with PTSD treatment on getting to the FDA, what nonmedicinal purpose do you think it should be made available through whatever means to the general population? What is that? What is the purpose of that?

Rick Doblin:

Well, I think first off, for individual spiritual purposes, for personal growth, for couples therapy, for working with relationships, building relationships --

00:38:10

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Apart from your experience with it, which I've had too -- we should compare numbers of trips. But what is the evidence for that?

Rick Doblin:

What is the evidence for --

Jeffrey Lieberman:

What is the evidence for personal growth, apart from Steve Jobs saying that taking acid changed his life? What is the evidence for personal growth or couples' relationships or anything else?

Rick Doblin:

Well, we okay, so we've done a study with some VA affiliated researchers into cognitive behavioral conjoint therapy, which is where conjoint means couples, where one has PTSD, the other has -- it affects the person in the relationship. And we worked blended that with MDMA. Both people got MDMA. There were all sorts of measures of their relationship. The relationship was increased, but because of the FDA only dealing with medicalized conditions, couples therapy is not going to be something that could be medicalized, who's going to be spending all the money to try to do this research to prove to you that a million anecdotal reports don't count?

00:39:17

[talking simultaneously]

Jeffrey Lieberman:

If you had a modicum of evidence to support that it could be marketed as a nutraceutical or as a supplement. You don't have to go through the rigorous FDA approval.

Rick Doblin:

Not as a controlled substance.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

The problem is for all problems. The problem is, is that practice is leaping ahead of research.

[talking simultaneously]

Rick Doblin:

Let me just say that we have a situation where, you know, where are the resources going to come from for this kind of research that you're speaking about, looking at benefits. It's not coming from the national institutes on drug abuse. It's not even coming from the national institute of mental health. It's coming from companies like maps that are trying to medicalize. So I don't know that we will have this vast --

00:40:02

Jeffrey Lieberman:

The absence of support for research is not a reason to jump ahead and say that you're that my beliefs are true.

Bia Labate:

No, I you know, I want to say to Jeffrey that I understand you're a medical doctor and that you have published many articles on your, you know, science oriented --

Jeffrey Lieberman:

I've also taken psychedelics recreationally.

Bia Labate:

Good. Good for you. I think there's a fundamental mistake that is like confusing reality with research and taking research as the only measure for reality. So, research is this reality is much bigger than this, that, for example, you have thousands and thousands of years of peyote use, ayahuasca use, psilocybin use. And that's not documented in FDA clinical trials. You must remember that clinical trials are something that emerged in the 40s, mainly to treat -- to deal with new drugs.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Yeah, yeah. I don't want to keep the psychedelics locked down to only FDA approved medical uses.

00:41:01

I agree with decriminalization and the underground that has existed, which has administered it under controlled conditions by well-intended people, even if they weren't thoroughly knowledgeable, has been relatively safe. The problem is, is that saying it's been used for thousands of years ritualistically by the Eleusinian mysteries by the Greeks. If it was the original sacrament of the Christians that was replaced by a placebo wafer, that's fine. But people worshiped idols for millions of years too; people thought the earth was flat for millions of years, too. And those things didn't prove to be true. The whole arc of civilization has been guarded by

science, which is verified the assumptions that humans have made. And I'm just saying, before we screw this up again, let's make sure we know what we're doing.

John Donovan:

What happened? What was the first screw up that you're referring to? And please, if you can do it in 35 seconds, because it's not a debate point. This is just an elucidation point.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Well, naturally occurring psychedelic substances had been used, as Bia pointed out, for thousands of years.

00:42:01

But when Albert Hofmann synthesized LSD and it was marketed as Delson in the 1950s, it sort of sprang into the popular culture and LSD plus the naturally occurring psychedelics began to be used in people like Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey spread the tune in, turn on, drop out. And this is the pathway to spiritual enlightenment and happiness. And it got out of control.

Kevin Sabet:

And on that point, I wanted to ask really two things, actually. One is, then why isn't decriminalization enough? I mean, even if we may have some arguments about whether or not there's medical value and whether anecdotal evidence and whether the experience of people thousands of years ago would mean the experience of people living in the 21st century and beyond, which I think there are a lot of questions there. Putting all of that aside, why isn't decriminalization enough? And I would love to hear from Bia or Rick to tell me how many people are actually serving time in prison for using something like LSD or ayahuasca.

00:43:04

I mean, this is obviously happening without people --

John Donovan:

Rick, why is not decriminalization enough? Why go all the way to legalization?

Rick Doblin:

Well, first off, decrim is often associated with fines. It's not legal there are --

Kevin Sabet:

You could change that.

Rick Doblin:

-- penalties, but. Well, that okay, let's talk about that. But the other part of it is one of the biggest dangers of the black market is adulterated drugs. And as long as you don't have legalized commercial sales, you will not have regulation to make sure that the drugs are pure. And as long as you have this kind of decrim, it's quasi, you will still have penalties and fines and things like that. You're not going to have necessarily honest drug education, harm reduction.

Kevin Sabet:
Why not?

Rick Doblin:
Well, I'm glad that you would like that. But we see that legalization really lifts the barrier. We have a lot of negative education for honest drug education.

John Donovan:
And that concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is legalize psychedelics.

00:44:07

And now we move on to round three and round three will be closing statements by each of the debaters. In turn, those statements will be two minutes each. This is their last chance to change their minds. Remember, after this round, you will be asked to vote for a second time and it's your votes that will decide who was the most persuasive and therefore the winning side in this debate. So first, making his final statement in support of the resolution to legalize psychedelics, here is Rick Doblin.

Rick Doblin:
Thank you. So I have been married only once in my life and I've been married for roughly 27 years. And my wife and I have tried to take MDMA together around once a year. And we have found that to be tremendously helpful for our relationship. It helps us to be better listeners and helps us to be more empathic, more sympathetic.

00:45:02

We can hear critical information that we're giving to each other. And I think that that has been a very important part of strengthening our relationship. However, couples therapy or just couples work is not something that we would call religious. It's not treating a disease and it is something that should be available in legal access with pure drugs.

It shouldn't be something that's, quote, decriminalized. And what we really haven't gotten here is this sense of what does decrim really mean? Decrim is usually associated with penalties. We have some sorts of fines with -- it's left in the black market to distribute. Jeffrey was concerned about who sells these drugs. It would be sold by companies. You could say big psychedelic, but it would be regulated. It would be pure. There would be potentially limits on advertising, but that there are a whole host of other uses than just couples therapy, that, you know, people who have benefited from psychedelics.

00:46:10

We have enormous number of reports from people who have talked about their lives were changed because of psychedelic experiences that are outside of religion and outside of strict

medicine. And so I think with proper support and training and understanding of how we can educate people honestly where they'll believe it, that we could have a much better situation and that these drugs should be legally available. And I hope that you will vote yes to say that psychedelics should be legalized.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Rick Doblin. Next, we'll be having a closing statement against the resolution, and that comes from Jeffrey Lieberman. Jeffrey, the screen is yours.

Jeffrey Lieberman:

Psychedelics have been used for centuries, ritualistically in a certain fashion. It was only really in the mid-20th century that they became more widespread and got into popular culture outside of ritualistic use or the nascent medical research that was being done.

00:47:13

And that's when all hell broke loose sociologically, and some people got hurt. And due to the overreaction of the government, they were prohibited from further study until recently. My position is as that they should be available for medical research. They should be decriminalized, but Rick and Bia are sort of arguing for what would be a very dangerous social experiment in social engineering. And if you want to see the good side of that, if the right reads -- read *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley where Soma was given to everybody ritualistically, so they turn into good people. My concern is that it's more akin to Prometheus, the legend of Prometheus, who defied the gods by stealing fire and giving it to humans.

00:48:02

Now Prometheus became a figure representing human striving, particularly for knowledge and the risk of overreaching and its unintended consequences. And he's regarded as embodying the lone genius, the true believer who thinks they know by their true experience or their intuition what's good to improve human existence. Now, parenthetically, Mary Shelley, who authored the book *Frankenstein*, written in 1818, used the subtitle, "*Frankenstein The Modern Prometheus*."

So as George W. Bush tried to say and mangled the quote, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." We don't want to be fooled again and -- or as the rock group says, in terms of The Who, "we won't get fooled again." If we allow this to be let out too quickly without adequate proof, we're risking losing the possibility of their benefits for a long period of time. So please vote no for legalization.

00:49:05

John Donovan:

Thank you, Jeffrey Lieberman. And our next speaker will be speaking in support of the resolution to legalize psychedelics. Here is Bia Labate.

Bia Labate:

Okay, I have shared here my passion for ayahuasca. We named our nonprofit, the Chacruna Institute for Psychedelic Plant Medicines after ayahuasca. I have participated in hundreds of rituals and I sincerely believe that ayahuasca has helped me become a better person, a better daughter, a better spouse, a better member of my community, a better worker.

And the use of ayahuasca has spread significantly to the United States. And except to very specific context, all the other use of ayahuasca continues to be illegal. I think that is unfair. I don't think that people should be kept, you know, without being able to access ayahuasca legally, without knowing where it comes from, without having the chance to acquire this with dignity. I think a lot of what has been said here is based on fear and it's based on, you know, attempts of science to control everything and discredit -- make a kind of narrative that the counterculture was a disaster.

00:50:13

There were a few excesses, but the counterculture was really also wonderful and created big revolutions that make us stand here. I am a foreigner. I immigrated to the United States because to me, I've been here for four years. I immigrated to join the psychedelic renaissance. The Bay Area is the birthplace and, you know, it's where the psychedelic renaissance is blooming. And we are super enthusiastic and positive about this future to come. And I think we're going to look back to this historical period that we're now and we're just going to be ashamed of ourselves like if it was, you know, during the times that we did slavery or women couldn't vote. A time where you shamed people, you stigmatized their practices. You threw black and brown bodies into jail and you told people that their habits were wrong.

00:51:01

So I think the United States is the land of freedoms, the land of hope. I ask you to please join Rick and I in the force and power and beauty of the psychedelic revolution with all its love and with its renewed hope for a better humanity. Please vote yes with us.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Bia Labate. And finally, with our argument against the resolution and our last speaker in this round. The resolution, again, legalized psychedelics he is against. Here is Kevin Sabet.

Kevin Sabet:

I wish I could be more proud of what we created, but I'm not. The outcome of legalization is shameful, hurts people, and we are not safer. What I've changed my mind on, applying current reality, I was too naive to anticipate years ago is the wisdom of a commercialized, for profit, elitist, government protected, privileged, monopolistic industry that perpetuates itself and its obscene profits to the detriment of the public good.

00:52:01

Those were the words of the introduction of a stunning op ed, an admission by the writer of

marijuana legalization in Colorado. Now, fast forward to almost 10 years later, seeing what the effects have been. This is somebody who defended the plant of marijuana for his whole career and still does and uses it but understands that legalization actually was a lot worse when it came to the rights of users, but definitely the rights of non-users.

The drugs that kill the most in our society are legal ones. And it's not because they're necessarily more harmful. Alcohol is not more harmful than heroin, but it's because they are commercialized and normalized in society. It's one thing to advocate for decriminalization, ending the war on drugs. It's another thing to advocate for the commercialization and normalization, which is exactly what would happen if we legalized psychedelics. It's very hard to put the genie back in the bottle despite all of the efforts that are going on.

00:53:01

There are still 420,000 deaths a year from cigarettes, even though use is declining. But we still have lung cancer and other detrimental effects. And that was the goal of this industry, is to make money. And that's what happened with Big Tobacco. And I don't see why we would want to do that again. It does not mean we necessarily want to criminalize people, but the idea that we think we can finally get it right, I haven't seen evidence that shows that that's true. That's why I'm in line with the National Academy of Sciences, with all of the major medical associations with parents who care about their kids.

I think the old adage "hope not dope," I think makes a lot of sense. There might be some limited uses in some special situations with a physician supervising a low dosage within therapy. That's not what we're talking about with American style commercialization. When we're talking about that, we're talking about venture capitalists and banks. And that's why you should vote no on legalizing hallucinogens.

00:54:03

John Donovan:

Thank you, Kevin Sabet. And thank you, everybody. And that concludes the final round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is legalize psychedelics. And now it's time to learn which side you feel has been arguing most persuasively. That means it's time for our second vote. Again, we give victory to the side whose support from you changes in an upward direction the most between the first and the second vote. That's the team that will be declared our winner. So we're going to ask you to vote the second time now by going back to iq2vote.org. It's exactly what you do the first time to cast your first vote at the start of the debate. It's exactly the same URL, and again, you can do it from any browser or on your cell phone, iq2vote.org. I-Q, the number two, vote dot org. Once again, you'll be presented with the same options to vote for or against the resolution or to declare yourself undecided. I also want to point out that unlike in our past debates, what we're going to be doing this time is we're going to be leaving this voting open for seven days so that once the debate is released to the broader public, that public will also get a chance to weigh in and vote so that we can get a -- really more of a sense of what the whole nation is thinking about this argument and whether or not they were persuaded by these debaters.

00:55:20

And at the end of those seven days, we will be announcing the winner on our website, iq2us.org. I want to thank our audience for joining us as well. You know, the goal at Intelligence Squared is to encourage people to talk with one another honestly and forthrightly, but with respect, something that we don't see happening a lot in our political discourse. And it can be a real challenge to find substantive, reasoned competition of ideas from people who have opposing views, but also know what they're talking about and also have the same commitment to intelligence and mutual respect. And that's what we do. It's what we bring you and millions of listeners around the world, real debate through podcasts and television and public radio. And we do it all for free.

00:56:00

And now for the live roundtable portion of the program where you will get to ask questions of our debaters. Our producers will now be directing you to the roundtable discussion in the chat to the side, I'm John Donovan. I want to thank you so much for joining us.

[end of transcript]

This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.