



Drug-related police encounters across the globe: How does Australia compare?

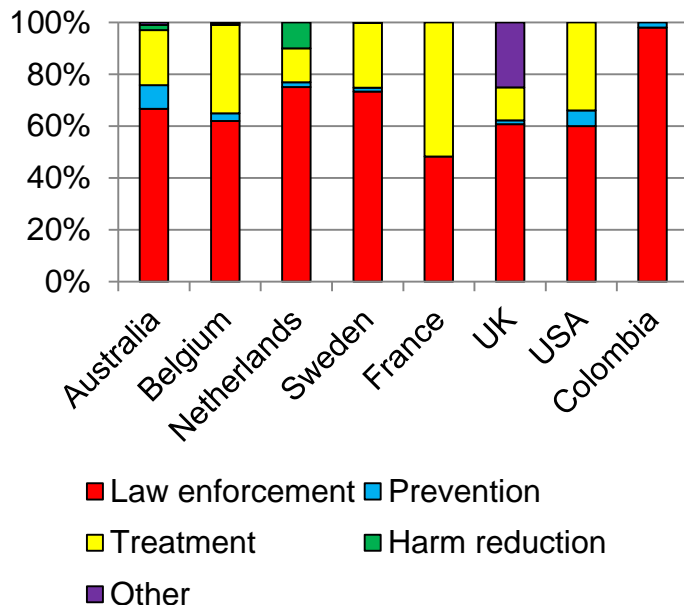
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Background

- Drug law enforcement subsumes the majority of drug policy expenditure across the globe (Ritter et al., 2013)
- Research has shown that much of this investment does not achieve its intended goals (Babor et al., 2010)
- Spurred increasing calls for cross-national comparisons of drug law enforcement approaches (Kilmer, Reuter, & Giommoni, 2015; Reuter, 2017)

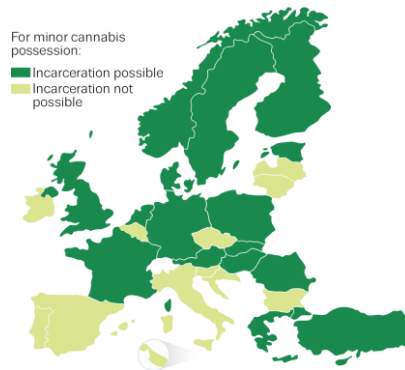
Drug policy expenditure



Sources: Ritter et al, 2013; Ritter
Ritter, Hughes, Hull, 2017.

The potential benefits of cross-national research

- Comparative policy analysis across and within countries is a proven method to show:
 1. Where there are differences and similarities
 2. Worth of different approaches
 3. Why differences have emerged (e.g. Ritter et al, 2016; Burris et al, 2017)
- To date, there has been much attention to mapping and comparing drug laws
- Revealed many new insights:
 1. Shown large variation in how nations construct laws e.g. what drugs are prohibited and legal threshold limits (e.g. Rosmarin & Eastwood, 2013)
 2. Shown that multiple regulatory components can impact on the extent and nature of harms from laws e.g. Pacula et al (2015) highlighted importance of dispensaries in medical marijuana schemes



Towards cross-national comparisons of drug policing

- But, negligible application to drug law enforcement
- This is a significant omission. For example, as argued by Kilmer, Reuter, and Giommoni (2015, p. 279) “focusing on drug law enforcement is much more important for cross-national drug policy comparisons than focusing on drug laws”
- The key stumbling block to cross-national comparative research of drug law enforcement has been methodological (Kilmer et al., 2015)
 - harder to assess what police do, than to assess laws
 - available metrics of drug law enforcement such as on “arrest” are seldom directly comparable across countries
 - no current metrics on any form of pre-arrest activity
- One recommendation for gathering data has been to capitalise upon existing cross-national surveys to ensure the same set of metrics are employed in all nations

Objectives

This study sought to provide the first cross-national comparison of illicit drug-related police encounters amongst people who use drugs, using a new drug policing module added to the 2017 Global Drug Survey

Specifically, the aims were:

1. To compare the incidence and nature of drug-related police encounters
2. To identify which countries have the highest (and least) intense policing responses, after controlling for pre-existing individual and national differences in policing and drug use prevalence
3. To identify how Australia compares

Methods

Methods

- The data were drawn from the 2017 Global Drug Survey (GDS)
- The Global Drug Survey is the world's largest anonymous, annual survey of drug and alcohol use: and has now been running for six years (Barratt et al., 2017)
- The survey is widely promoted through global news and media partners, social media and other agencies
- All participants are self-selected and all data is self-reported
- The Global Drug Survey 2017 (GDS2017) ran from November 2016 to December 2016
- Sample: **45,942** respondents from 26 countries. All aged ≥ 18 years and had used illicit drugs in the last 12 months (mainly cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine)

The drug policing module

- Assessed the incidence and frequency of police encounters in the last 12 months that involved:
 - being stopped and searched for drugs;
 - encountering a drug detection dog;
 - being given a caution or warning for drugs;
 - being charged and arrested for drugs;
 - paying a bribe.

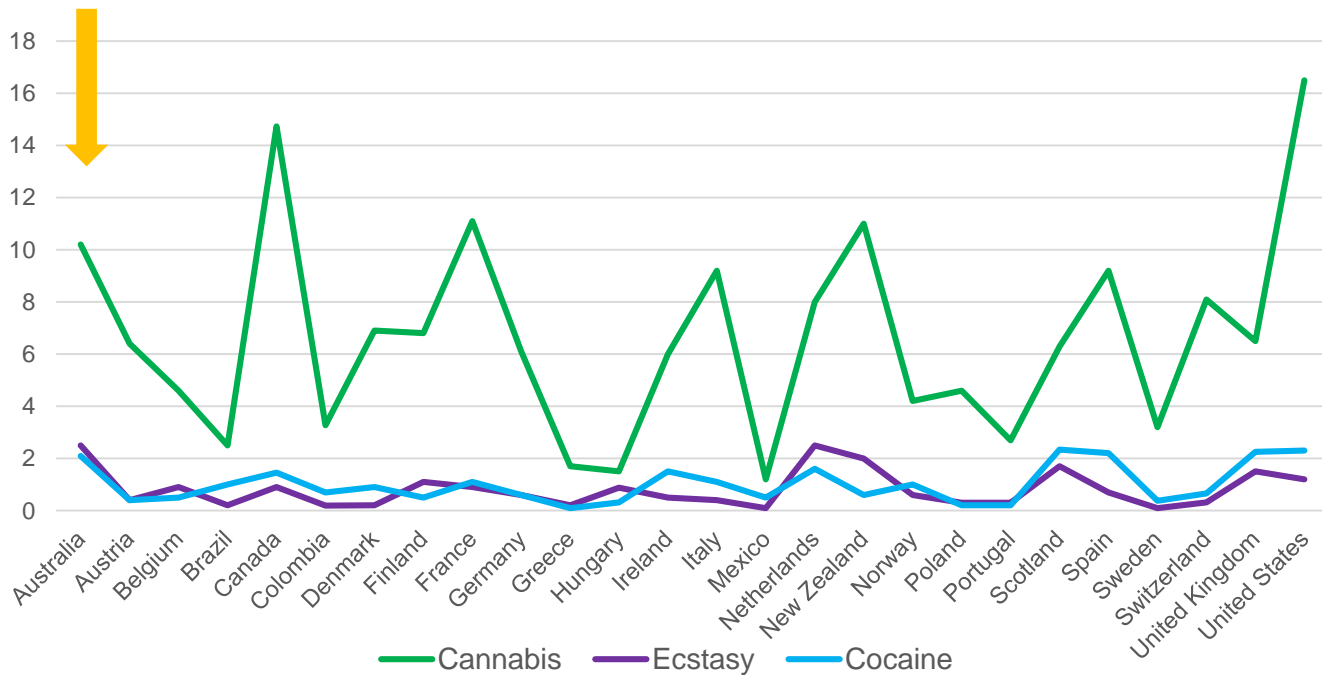
Analyses

1. Chi square: to examine the unadjusted cross-national incidence and punitiveness of drug policing encounters (defined as the proportion of encounters in the last 12 months that lead to an arrest) across countries
2. Multi-level logistic regressions: to examine the probability of drug policing encounters after controlling for individual level factors and country level factors (e.g. prevalence of illicit drugs most commonly used by the sample)

Country level controls

Type of control	Variable	Data source
Drug use	The last 12 month prevalence of cannabis use, in each country amongst the population aged 15-64	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) country profile
Drug use	The last 12 month prevalence of cocaine use	UNODC
Drug use	The last 12 month prevalence of “ ecstasy ” type substances use	UNODC
Policing	The number of police personnel per 100,000 population in each country	United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems
Policing	The aggregate incidence of any police encounters in the last 12 months in each country	The GDS2017 drug policing module

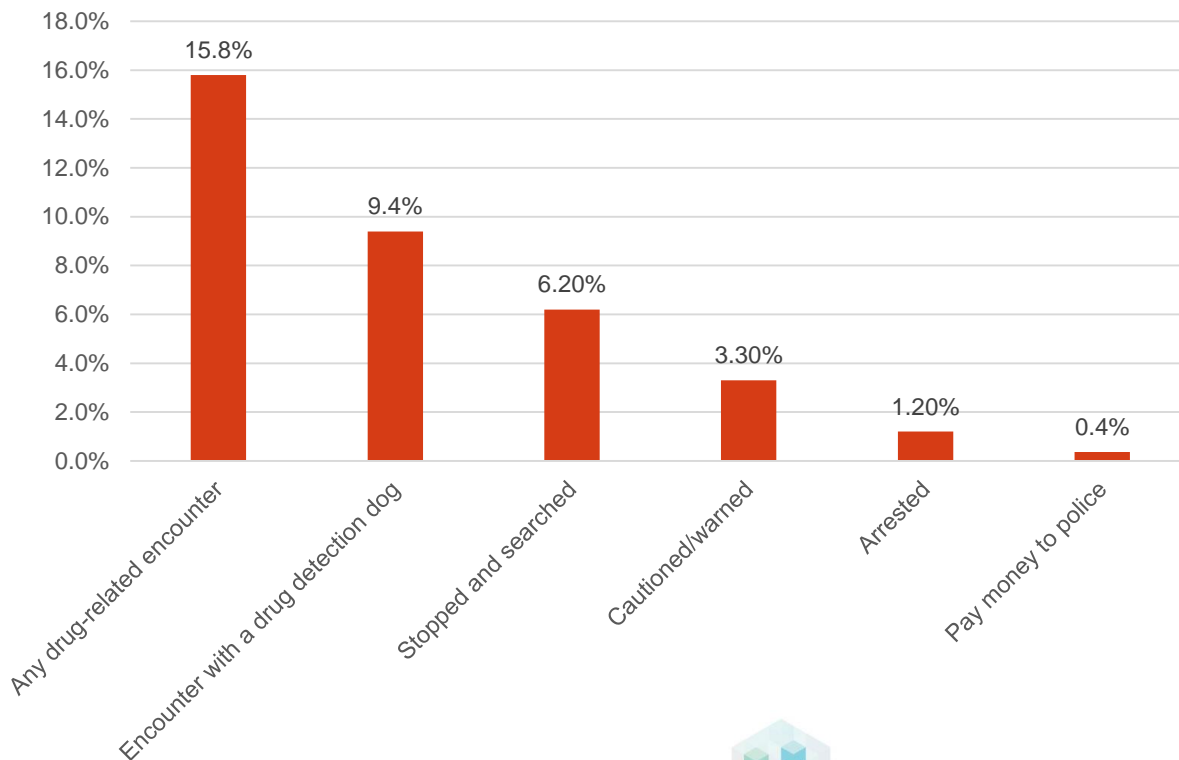
Last 12 month prevalence of use, by drug and nation



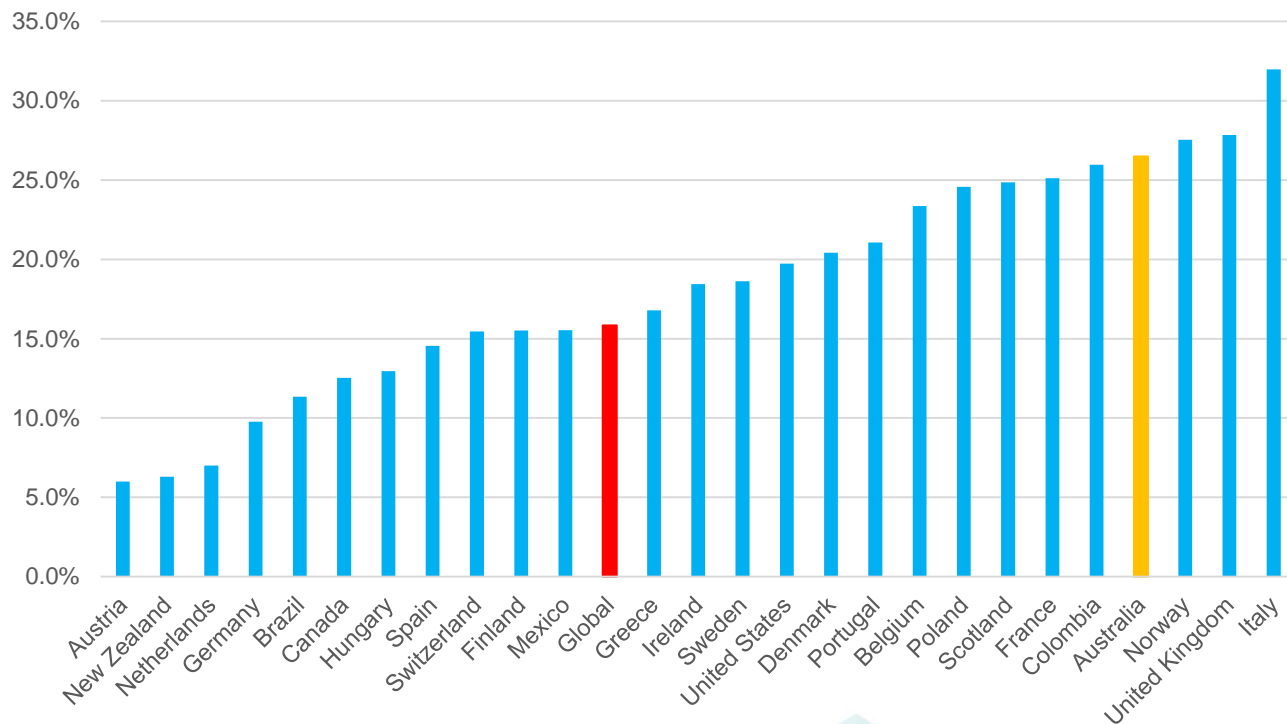
Results

Unadjusted data

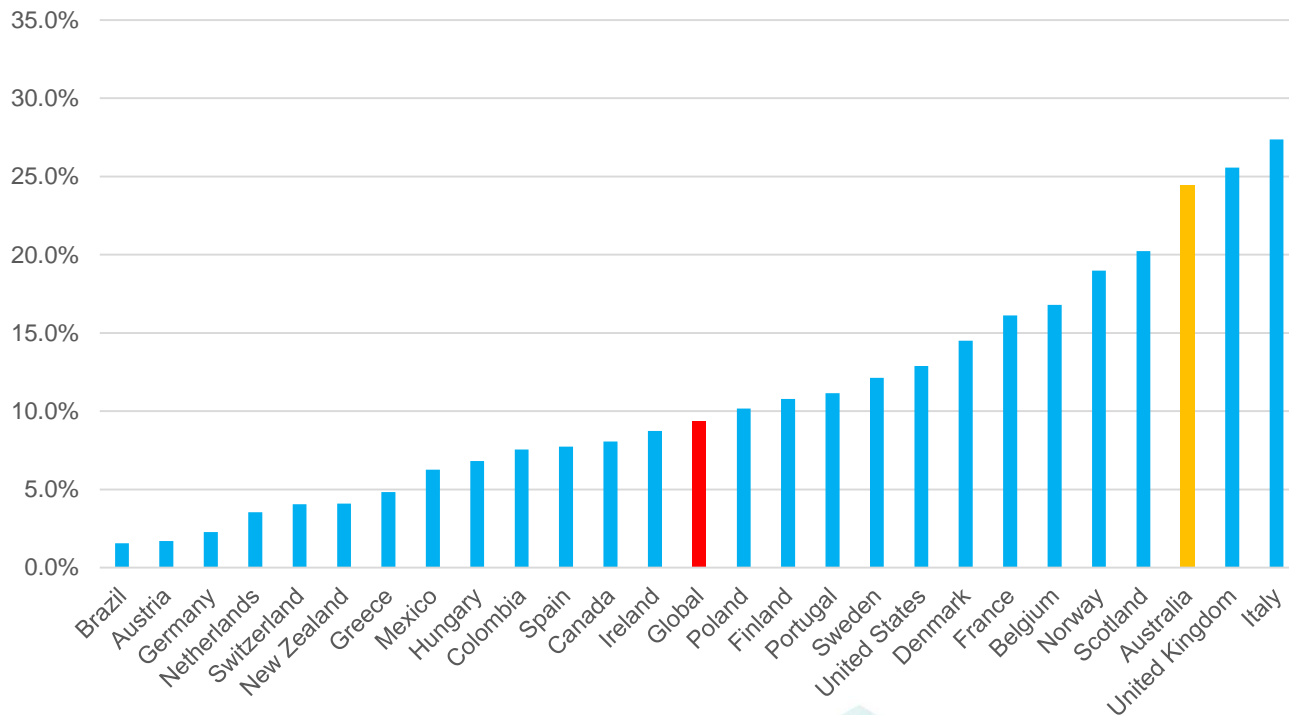
Overall incidence of drug-related police encounters in the last 12 months across the 26 countries



Incidence of a drug-related police encounter, by country



Incidence of police encounter with drug detection dogs

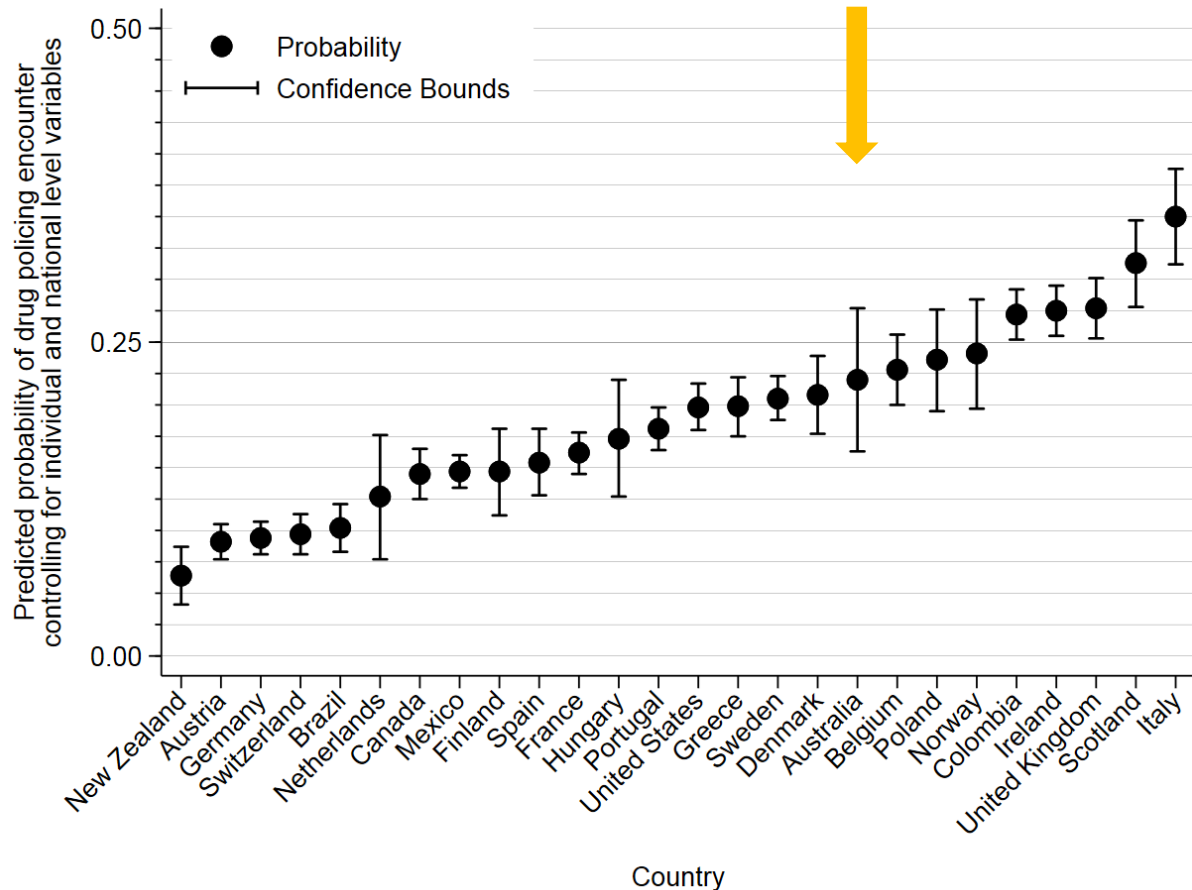


Cross-national comparison, controlling for individual and national factors

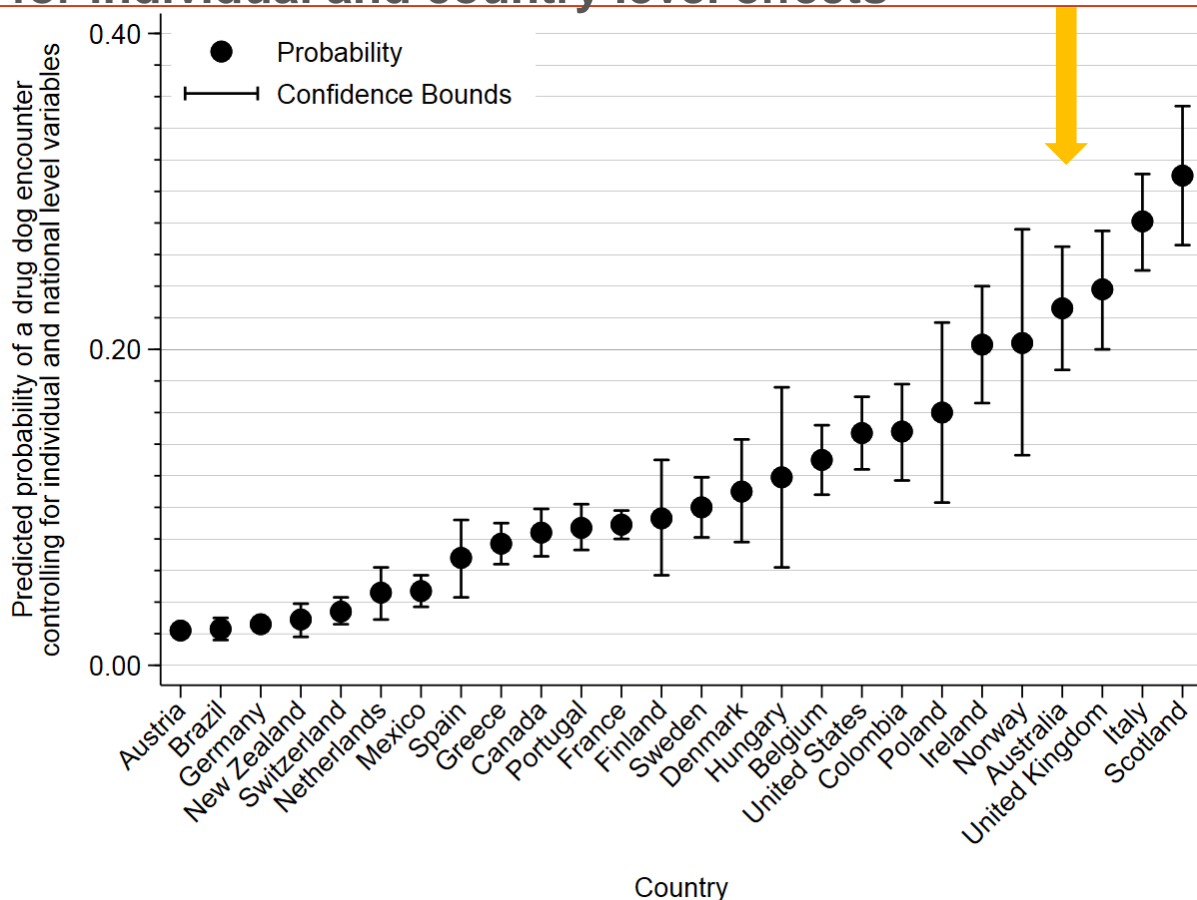
Multi-level model

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Individual level factors		
Sex: Male vs female	1.565 ***	1.202-2.038
Age	0.897 ***	0.865-0.930
Age ²	1.000 ***	1.000-1.001
Residence		
• Regional vs metropolitan	1.153 *	1.015-1.311
• Remote vs metropolitan	1.038	0.903-1.192
Ethnicity: White/Caucasian vs other	0.860 ***	0.784-0.943
Clubbing frequency		
• <4 times per year versus never	1.389 ***	1.205-1.504
• 4 or more times per year versus never	1.674 ***	
Any prior police encounters: yes vs no	1.031 **	1.010-1.051
Country level factors		
• Prevalence of cannabis use	0.952 ***	0.9311-0.974
• Prevalence of ecstasy use	1.112	0.879-1.408
• Prevalence of cocaine use	1.357 ***	1.158-1.591
• Total no. police personnel per 100,000 pop	1.001 **	1.000-1.002
• Aggregate rate any police encounters	1.046 ***	1.033-1.059

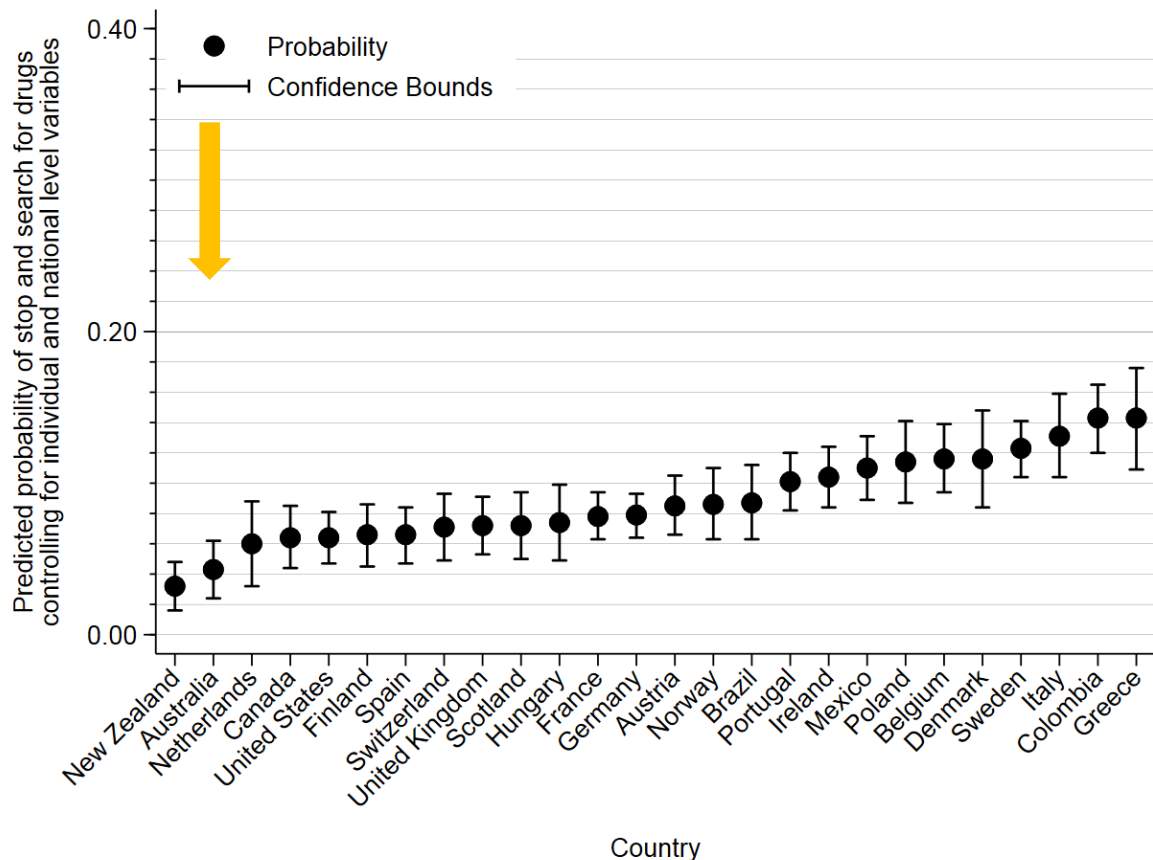
Predicted probability of a recent drug policing encounter, controlling for individual and country level effects



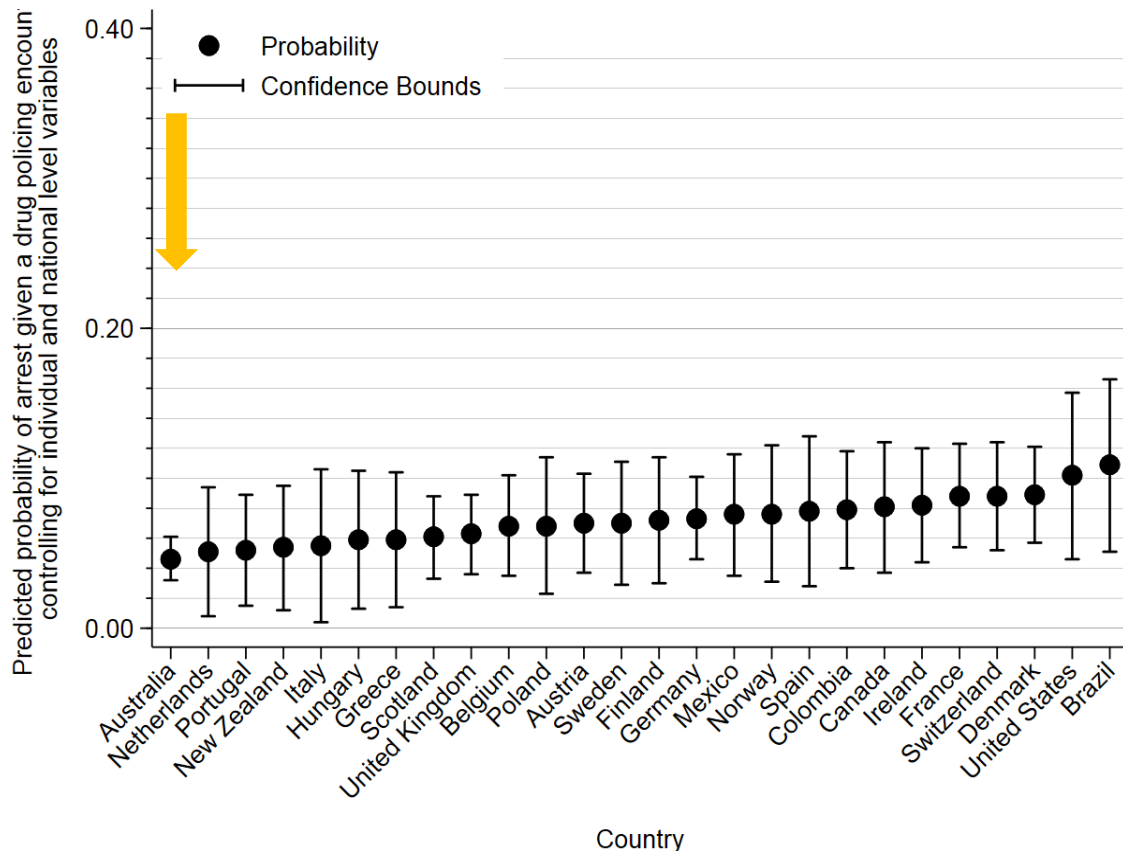
Predicted probability of a drug dog encounter, controlling for individual and country level effects



Predicted probability of stop and search, controlling for individual and country level effects



Predicted probability of a drug encounter leading to an arrest, controlling for individual and country level effects



Conclusion

- Limitations: Self-selected and non-injecting sample. Excludes some countries known for high drug-related policing e.g. Russia.
- But, affords first evidence of significant cross-national variation in drug-related policing of people who use drugs
- Highlights key areas of difference:
 - **Intensity** of drug policing
 - **Nature** of drug policing e.g. stop and search (Sweden, Poland) vs drug dogs (Australia, UK)
- Differences do not appear attributable to national differences in drug use prevalence or number of police personnel
- How does Australia compare....
 - higher than average likelihood of police encounters
 - fourth highest likelihood of drug detection dog encounters

Implications

1. Variation in drug policing is important to unmask as different approaches carry different risks for people who use drugs
 - e.g. Drug detection dogs can increase consumption of drugs on site of dogs – a clear risk for overdose
2. Reminds that countries do have choices in *how* they choose to police people who use drugs
3. Suggests real opportunity for countries to better inform drug policing approaches
 - What approaches are most cost-effective?
 - What approaches most *reduce* harm?
 - What approaches offer the best mix from a public health and public safety perspective?

Next steps: replicate survey (Nov-Dec 2018)

Thank You!

We thank all the people who took part in the Global Drug Survey and the media partners (www.globaldrugsurvey.com) who helped promote the survey.

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