



Explaining the Science of Everyday Life

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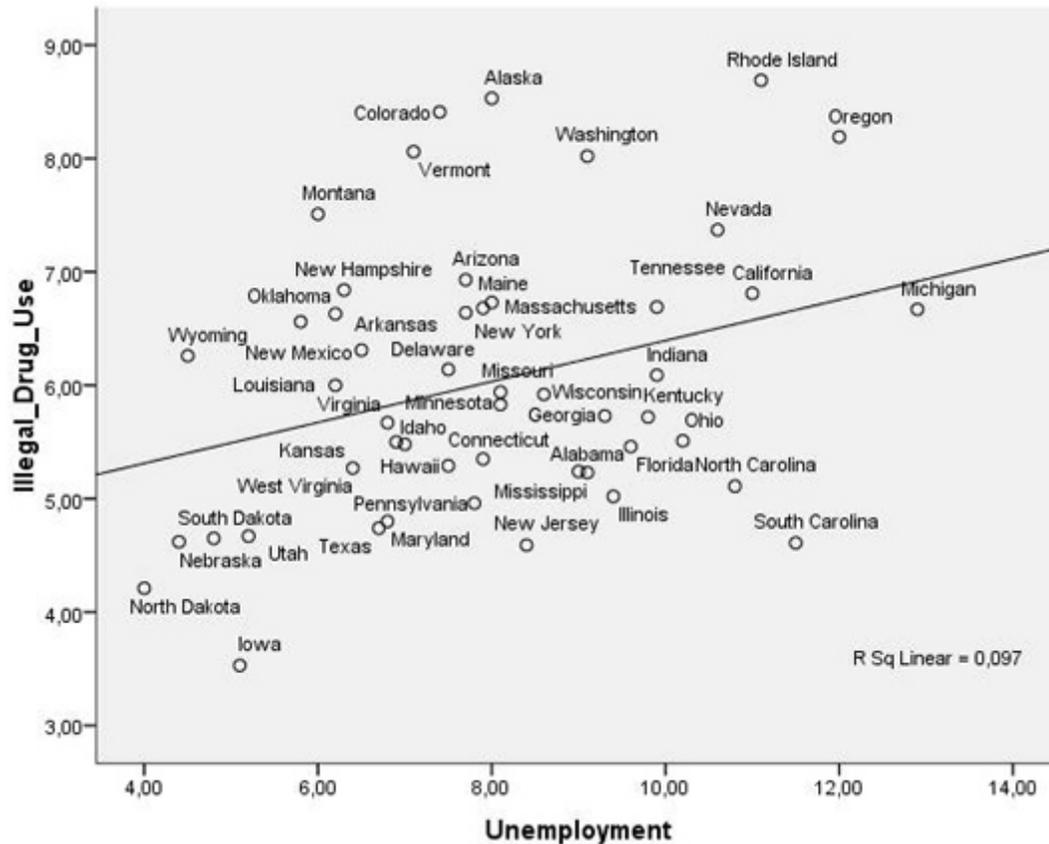
Does Higher Unemployment Lead to More Drug Use?

By [Catherine Rampell](#)

In response to our [interactive maps of drug use by state](#), some readers wrote in asking about the relationship between illicit substances and unemployment (as well as a number of other variables). Some of these queries were inspired by Rhode Island, which has both the highest drug prevalence rate and one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

Luckily, as it turns out, [Richard Florida](#) has already whipped up some fascinating charts looking at many of these relationships.

Mr. Florida is director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and professor of business and creativity at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto. He found that states with higher unemployment rates do tend to have higher rates of drug use:



Richard Florida

Given the overall pattern, Rhode Island seems to have a higher drug use rate than even its high jobless rate would predict.

In addition, Mr. Florida looked at [state output per capita](#) (which is more positively correlated with use of cocaine and marijuana), as well as a host of other measures.

He found that use of marijuana and cocaine were [significantly and positively correlated with states whose populaces voted for Barack Obama](#) in the 2008 presidential election, for example.

Use of these two drugs is also [positively and significantly related](#) to states with higher concentrations of the “creative class.”

Mr. Florida took a look at how health and happiness correlated with drug use. Before he did so, I told him I guessed healthier and happier states used fewer drugs; his hunch was the opposite. Turns out we were both wrong. When he ran the numbers using the [Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index](#) and its sub-components (which include measures of health), there were no significant relationships, he said.