

Increasing Percentages of Americans are Ready for Legal Marijuana

NEW YORK , N.Y. – May 7 , 2015 – Last month, Georgia decriminalized marijuana, making it the twenty-sixth jurisdiction (Washington, D.C. included) to legalize marijuana for medical purposes. A new Harris Poll finds that the growing acceptability of marijuana among state lawmakers reflects attitudinal shifts amongst the general American public since 2011. Support for the legalization of marijuana for both medical treatment and recreational use has increased by seven percentage points over the past four years.

Currently, four in five adults (81%) favor legalizing marijuana for medical use, up from 2011 when three quarters of Americans (74%) indicated the same. Meanwhile, half of Americans are supportive of legalizing marijuana for recreational use (49%), up from the two fifths (42%) who felt that way in 2011.

- Nearly nine in ten Democrats and Independents are in favor of legalizing marijuana for medical treatment (87% & 86%, respectively) and over half support recreational use (58% & 55%, respectively)
- While a majority - albeit a slimmer one - of Republicans also support the legalization medical marijuana (69% support, 23% oppose), a similar majority opposes legalizing marijuana for recreational use (27% support, 65% oppose).

These are some of the results of **The Harris Poll®** of 2,221 U.S. adults surveyed online between February 11 and 17, 2015.

Federal law or each state for itself?

As for who should be making the big legalization decision, 44% favor each state resolving the issue for itself, while 35% favor a single law handed down by the federal government.

- In keeping with their party's state's-rights principles, 51% of Republicans believe the decision should be made at the state level, while three in ten (30%) support a nationwide federal ruling.
- Independents share similar sentiments, though by a smaller margin (47% state vs. 35% federal).
- Meanwhile, Democrats are the most divided of the bunch. A two-fifths plurality (42%) believe it should be a federal decision that applies to all states, while 37% would prefer state-by-state decision-making.

Potential consequences

When asked about the effects legalizing marijuana might have, expectations have not changed much since 2011. Then and now, three quarters of adults (75%) expect tax revenues will increase post legalization.

Seven in ten Americans believe the amount of marijuana used will increase (68% then, 70% now) along with the number of people who use marijuana (68% then, 69% now). A majority of Americans also anticipate an increase in the consistency and standardization of the marijuana used (59% in 2011 and 2015).

Meanwhile, expectations are split when it comes to the effect the legalization of marijuana will have on the amount of money spent on prisons/prisoners and the crime rate. Thirty-six percent of adults anticipate a decrease in prison spending, while two in ten each believe decriminalized marijuana will cause an increase in prison spending (20%) or no change at all (22%).

In addition, a third of Americans (34%) believe the crime rate will decrease, while 28% feel crime will increase, and 22% anticipate no change at all.

Marijuana vs. Alcohol

Aside from a thirteen-year blip known as Prohibition, citizens of the United States have legally sold and consumed alcohol since the country's founding. In contrast, for the larger part of our nation's history, selling and using marijuana had been illegal.

When asked whether alcohol or marijuana is more problematic, majorities feel neither is more or less hazardous; however, when focusing on those who pointed out one or the other specifically, marijuana is consistently seen as less dangerous or harmful than alcohol.

- Impairs one's ability to drive a vehicle: 68% both equally, 22% alcohol, & 3% marijuana
- Excessive use can be detrimental to overall mental health: 62%, 21%, & 7%
- Excessive use can be detrimental to overall physical health: 61%, 25%, & 4%
- Regular use over a long period can be detrimental to overall physical health: 56%, 27%, & 5%
- Addictive: 56%, 25%, & 9%
- Regular use over a long period can be detrimental to overall mental health: 56%, 20%, & 10%

On the matter of being a gateway to other drugs, while a plurality (36%) still feels this describes both equally, after that, there is equal support for it being either a better description of marijuana (22%) or not an accurate description of either substance (21%).

Americans are more divided when it comes to which is most dangerous to use even in moderation: 32% say both are equally dangerous in moderation, while 31% say neither is.

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TABLE 1a

LEGALIZING MARIJUANA FOR VARIOUS PURPOSES – SUMMARY GRID AND TREND

"Certain states are discussing the idea of legalizing marijuana. Would you support or oppose the legalization of marijuana for the following purposes in your state?"

Base: All adults

	Support (NET)	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Oppose (NET)	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Not at all sure	Decline to answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Medical treatment (2011)	74	48	26	18	7	10	7	1
Medical treatment (2015)	81	57	25	13	4	8	5	1
Recreational use (2011)	42	23	19	49	12	37	7	2
Recreational use (2015)	49	27	22	44	11	32	6	2

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 1b

LEGALIZING MARIJUANA FOR VARIOUS REASONS – SUMMARY OF SUPPORT

Summary of those saying, "strongly oppose" or "somewhat oppose,"

by Trend, Party Identification, and Marijuana's Legal Status in Respondent's State at Time of Interview

"Certain states are discussing the idea of legalizing marijuana. Would you support or oppose the legalization of marijuana for the following purposes in your state?"

Base: All adults

	Total 2011	Total 2015	Party Identification			Marijuana's Legal Status for Respondent			
			Rep	Dem	Ind	Illegal	Legal/ Impending (NET)	Legal/ Impending (medical only)	Legal/ Impending (medical & recreational)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Medical treatment	74	81	69	87	86	79	83	82	92
Recreational use	42	49	27	58	55	44	54	52	64

TABLE 1c

LEGALIZING MARIJUANA FOR VARIOUS REASONS – SUMMARY OF OPPOSE

Summary of those saying, "strongly oppose" or "somewhat oppose,"

by Trend, Party Identification, and Marijuana's Legal Status in Respondent's State at Time of Interview

"Certain states are discussing the idea of legalizing marijuana. Would you support or oppose the legalization of marijuana for the following purposes in your state?"

Base: All adults

	Total 2011	Total 2015	Party Identification			Marijuana's Legal Status for Respondent			
			Rep	Dem	Ind	Illegal	Legal/ Impending (NET)	Legal/ Impending (medical only)	Legal/ Impending (medical & recreational)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Medical treatment	18	13	23	8	9	15	11	11	7
Recreational use	49	44	65	34	38	48	38	39	34

TABLE 2
SHOULD LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA BE A FEDERAL OR STATE DECISION

By Trend and Party Identification

"Regardless if you think marijuana generally should be legalized or not, do you think that the decision should be at the state level, or do you think it should be a federal decision which applies to all states?"

Base: All adults

	Total	Total 2015	Party Identification		
	2011		Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%	%
Should be a state decision	44	44	51	37	47
Should be a federal decision	40	35	30	42	35
Not at all sure	14	19	17	20	16
Decline to answer	2	2	2	1	1

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3a
LEGALIZING MARIJUANA WOULD CAUSE THE FOLLOWING – SUMMARY GRID

"If marijuana was legalized generally, do you think it would cause an increase or a decrease in the following?"

Base: All adults

	Increase	Increase	Large increase	Small increase	No change	Decrease	Decrease	Small decrease	Large decrease	Not at all sure	Decline to answer
	2011	2015				2011	2015				
	(NET)	(NET)	(NET)	(NET)							
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Tax revenue	75	75	52	23	9	5	3	2	1	11	2
The amount of marijuana used	68	70	43	27	19	5	3	2	1	7	2
The number of people	68	69	37	32	21	5	3	1	1	7	2

who use marijuana											
Consistency and standardization of the marijuana used	59	59	34	25	19	6	4	2	2	17	2
The crime rate	28	28	16	12	25	41	34	14	20	11	1
The amount of money spent on prisons/prisoners	20	20	13	8	26	44	36	20	16	16	2

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3b

LEGALIZING MARIJUANA WOULD CAUSE THE FOLLOWING – SUMMARY OF INCREASE

Summary of those saying, "large increase" or "small increase,"

by Trend, Party Identification, and Marijuana Legislation

"If marijuana was legalized generally, do you think it would cause an increase or a decrease in the following?"

Base: All adults

	Total	Total	Party Identification			Medical Treatment Usage		Recreational Usage	
	2011		2015	Rep	Dem	Ind	Supports	Opposes	Supports
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Tax revenue	75	75	72	76	76	80	59	83	69
The amount of marijuana used	68	70	78	67	69	71	76	63	82
The number of people	68	69	77	66	67	69	77	62	80

who use marijuana									
Consistency and standardization of the marijuana used	59	59	49	63	63	65	42	69	51
The crime rate	28	28	40	22	27	23	63	10	51
The amount of money spent on prisons/prisoners	20	20	25	19	18	17	40	10	32

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4

MARIJUANA, ALCOHOL, BOTH, OR NIETHER – SUMMARY GRID

"Thinking about marijuana and alcohol/alcohol and marijuana, please choose which of these, if either, you believe best fits with each description below."

Base: All adults

	Describes both equally	Describes alcohol more than marijuana	Describes marijuana more than alcohol	Does not describe either	Not at all sure
	%	%	%	%	%
Impairs one's ability to drive a vehicle	68	22	3	1	6
Excessive use can be detrimental to overall mental health	62	21	7	2	8
Excessive use can be detrimental to overall physical health	61	25	4	3	7
Regular use over a long period can be detrimental to overall physical health	56	27	5	5	8

Addictive	56	25	9	3	7
Regular use over a long period can be detrimental to overall mental health	56	20	10	6	9
A gateway to other drugs	36	10	22	21	12
Dangerous to use even in moderation	32	16	11	31	10

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online, in English, within the United States between February 11 and 17, 2015 among 2,221 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Poll surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in our panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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