

Legalization of Recreational Marijuana

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## Abstract

In 2012 Colorado and Washington were the first two states to legalize recreational marijuana. Other states have followed and have begun doing the same thing. Public opinion on legal marijuana has drastically changed over the past couple decades. This research paper looks at the history of marijuana laws and how the public's opinion on it has changed overtime. Throughout the paper, there are graphs and charts that break down how America feels about legalizing marijuana. We also explore how different demographics feel and compare to other subgroups. With data and research, I conclude how the public feels towards marijuana laws and where it could potentially lead to in the future.

Chris Boains

Public Opinion

### Legalization of Recreational Marijuana

Legalization of recreational marijuana over the past few decades has been a highly debated topic. There are many mixed opinions on this issue and both sides can make strong cases for feeling the way they do. Many people still view marijuana as a drug that inflicts damage on people and society overtime, while others believe it has many health benefits and is no more dangerous than alcohol and cigarettes. While these are the most common and obvious statements about marijuana, there are many other factors that must be considered when making a decision like this. Other factors that people look at is economy or tax revenues, minor use, driving impacts, regulated use, crime, and race. Race is an interesting factor to look at especially since race essentially made marijuana a controversial topic in the first place.

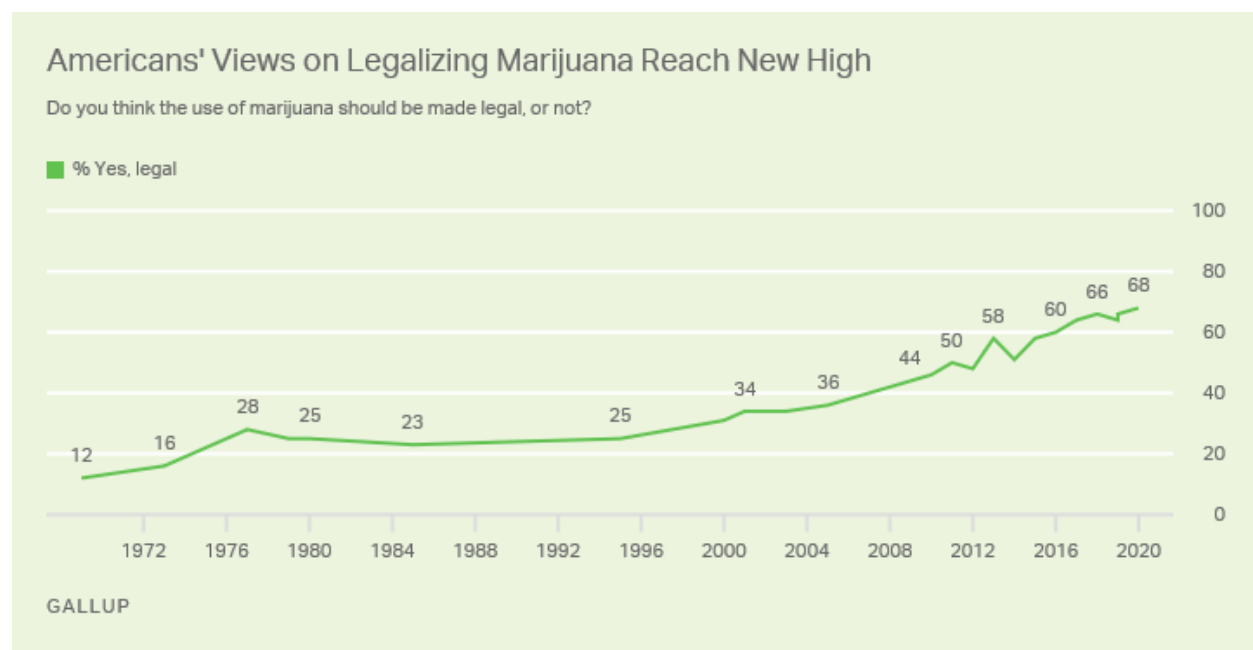
Cannabis used to be a little used drug among Americans. Europeans knew of its medical benefits since the 1830's and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans could purchase cannabis extracts to help with stomach pains, migraines, and other ailments. Then the Mexican Revolution happened in 1910 and many Mexicans began moving to the United States. The Mexican immigrants had a tradition of smoking cannabis. America had fear stemmed from racism about these Mexican immigrants coming into the country. They did not want them so they began making absurd allegations about cannabis to make the Mexicans seem scary and dangerous so more people would be opposed to them entering the country. The public was being told that marijuana causes violent crimes and gives its users a lust for blood and grants superhuman strength. More rumors came from this and eventually people were being told that

Mexicans were distributing killer weed to unsuspecting American schoolchildren. They even replaced the term cannabis with marijuana to promote foreignness of the drug. Many states began outlawing marijuana around this time and eventually it was made illegal across the entire United States with the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act in 1937. Marijuana was clearly made illegal just for racist reasons and not to protect people or benefit society. Obviously, this is now a controversial topic and it had to be revisited considering the law was passed so long ago and was inspired by racism. Now that we have progressed more as a society, have more information, and less racial ignorance it makes sense to revise marijuana laws.

This topic is interesting to me because I feel very strongly about these laws and that many people still view marijuana as a dangerous frowned upon drug. It is 2020 now and facts and evidence are out there that marijuana is no worse than cigarettes or alcohol and has several different healing remedies and health benefits. Having a glass of wine after work was never frowned upon and I believe that marijuana should be viewed that way as well. I used to use marijuana recreationally just to relax I always preferred it over alcohol. Then a few years ago, I got stomach issues and got nausea in the mornings and almost every time I tried to eat. I went to the Dr. and they told me I had stomach inflammation. They tried prescribing me prescription pills, but my insurance would not cover it, so I never got the pills. My stomach never felt uncomfortable when using marijuana, so I looked it up and marijuana does help reduce stomach inflammation. Marijuana significantly helps my stomach problems, and I do not have to take prescription pills that would have done more damage to my body than marijuana. I know several other people who greatly benefit from the healing remedies of marijuana and I fully support its use and legalization. I was always looked at as a “bad kid” because I used marijuana and I want that sort of stigma with marijuana to be gone. Marijuana can be extremely beneficial to so many

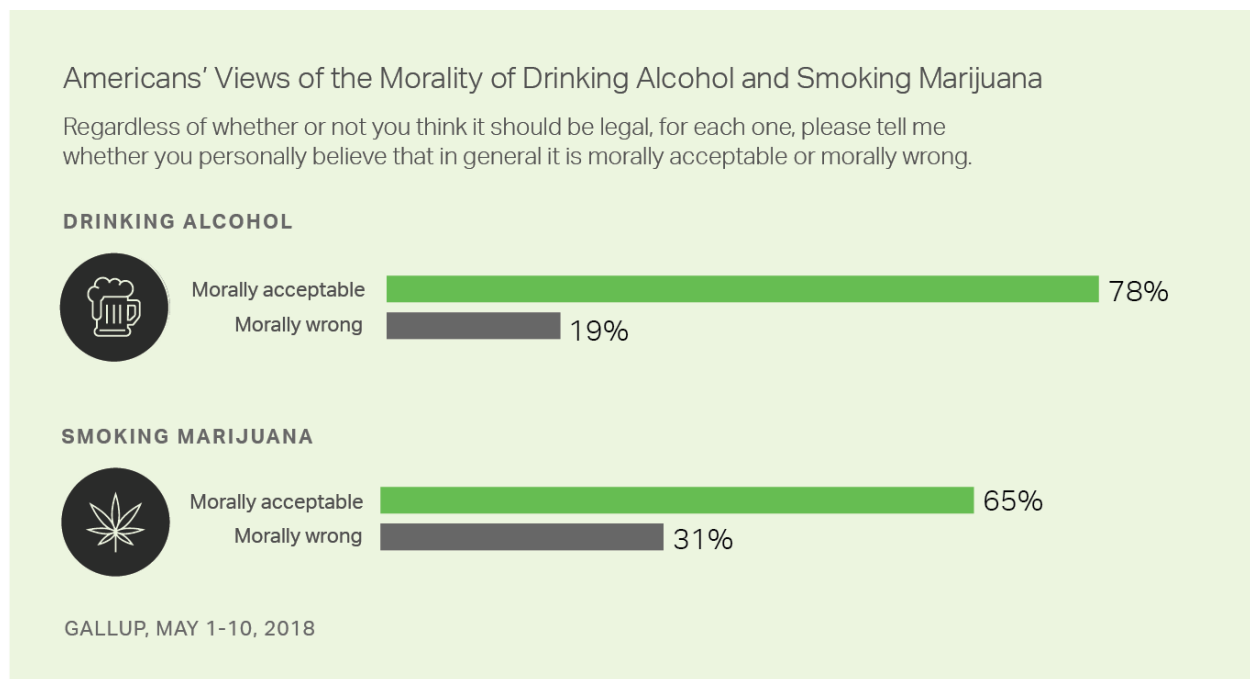
people and everyone has their own reason for using it. This is why I feel so strongly about this topic and am very interested in it. Everyone has their opinion, and I am going to put mine aside and look at the public's opinion. I want to present what the country collectively thinks about the subject of marijuana laws.

The public opinion on legalizing marijuana has changed little in the past few years but over the past few decades it has changed drastically. In 1969 only 12% of Americans supported marijuana legalization. In 2006, 32% of Americans supported marijuana legalization while nearly 60% opposed. Now 14 years later, 68% of U.S. adults support the legalization of marijuana. Support for legal marijuana has more than doubled since 2006. To summarize those numbers, Americans are more likely now than at any point in the past five decades to support the legalization of marijuana in the U.S.



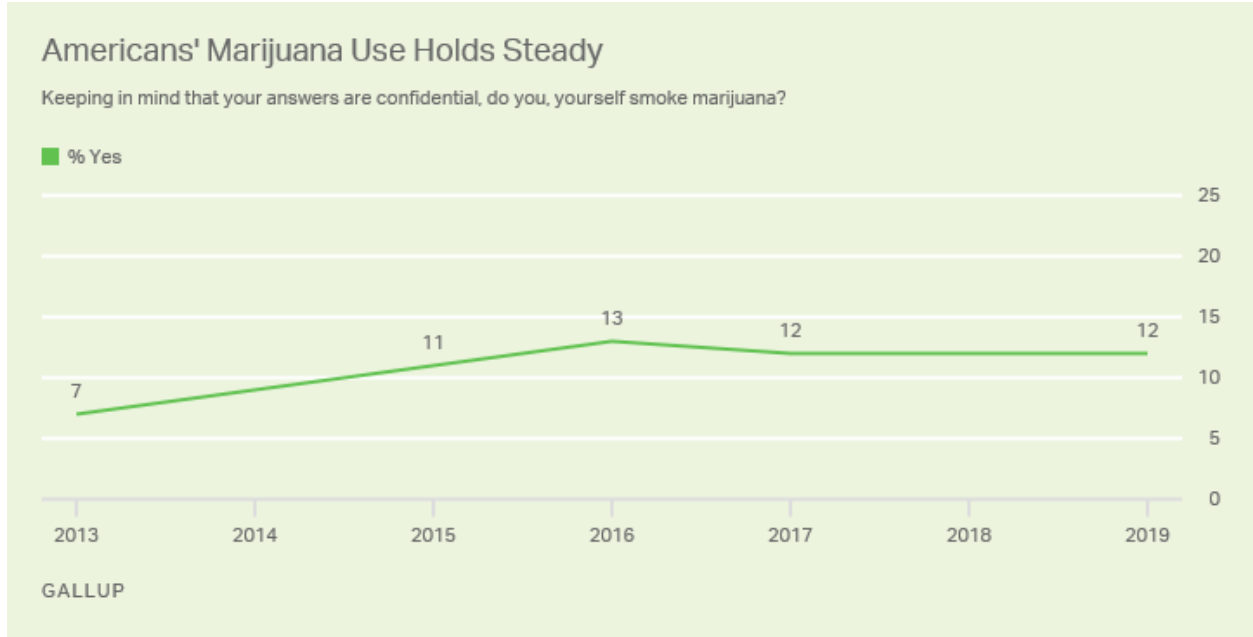
As you can see by the graph, the public opinion on legalizing marijuana has dramatically changed over the past few decades and is still slightly changing year by year. This shows that public opinion is flexible and ever changing. Going from 34% yes to 68% yes in ten years is a

huge shift in the public's opinion. With these numbers changing we are seeing action taken as well. In this most recent election, Arizona, Montana, New Jersey, and South Dakota authorized the legal use of recreational marijuana. They joined 11 other states and D.C. in doing so. We know that 68% of America is in favor of legalizing marijuana now I am going to look at how the public feels about people actually using marijuana. A survey conducted in May of 2018 asked Americans if they believe smoking marijuana is morally acceptable. The survey found out that 65% of Americans find smoking marijuana to be morally acceptable while 31% said it was not morally acceptable. They asked the same question about alcohol to compare, and 78% said that drinking is morally acceptable while 19% said it is not.



This survey was taken in 2018, and in 2018 64% of Americans said that marijuana should be legalized. This number nearly matches the 65% who said smoking is morally acceptable. This most likely means that the 64% of people who support legal marijuana also find it morally acceptable for people to use. Now it is time to look at how much of America regularly uses marijuana. A poll taken in 2019 found that 12% of Americans use marijuana. This number has

essentially been the same since 2015 when it was at 11%.



These graphs show the public opinion on legalizing marijuana, people's feelings towards marijuana, and how many people use it. These graphs contain general information about who supports marijuana and who does not but when you break down the demographics of these survey participants is when it gets interesting.

When you break this down by demographics, majorities of most key subgroups now favor making marijuana legal. Some demographics have more significant discrepancies than others, but first we will look at how people's opinions are divided by age.

	Favor	Oppose
	%	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-29 years	81	18
30-49 years	71	29
50-64 years	62	36
65+ years	49	49

This graph shows that younger adults are much more likely to favor legalizing marijuana than older adults. Less than half of senior citizens are in favor of legalizing marijuana at 49%. This tells us that the younger generations are more likely to be in favor of marijuana than the older generations. Next, we look at race.

	Favor	Oppose
	%	%
Black	74	25
White	66	32
Hispanic	57	42

Majorities of these ethnic subgroups support legal marijuana, but blacks are more likely to be in favor than whites, and Hispanics show even less support than whites. Political ideology is where there is a noticeable difference in support

Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal, or not?

	Yes, legal	No, not legal
	%	%
<b>Party identification</b>		
Republican	48	52
Independents	72	27
Democratic	83	16
<b>Political ideology</b>		
Conservative	49	50
Moderate	74	26
Liberal	87	13

This graph shows us that party identification and political ideology have a lot to do with an individual's stance on marijuana laws. Left leaning and middle of the road Americans are more



likely to favor legal marijuana than right leaning. Democrats and liberals are in the 80's while republicans and conservatives are less than half. Conservatives are one of the few major subgroups expressing less than majority support for legal marijuana. These graphs show us which subgroups are most likely to favor legal marijuana. For age the most likely subgroup to favor it is 18-29 year olds, for race African Americans are most likely to favor, and lastly democrats and liberals are most likely to favor it. This shows us a little more about the people who favor legal marijuana. This next graph will show us which subgroups mostly use marijuana.

Keeping in mind that your answers are confidential, do you, yourself smoke marijuana?

	Yes %
U.S. Adults	12
<b>Gender</b>	
Men	15
Women	9
<b>Age</b>	
18 to 29	22
30-49	11
50-64	12
65+	3
<b>Race</b>	
White	14
Non-white	9
<b>Ideology</b>	
Conservative	4
Moderate	12
Liberal	24

This survey shows that the likelihood of smoking marijuana varies significantly by age, gender, and political ideology. Men are more likely to smoke marijuana than women, 15% of men use it while 9% of women use it. 18 to 29-year olds are the most likely age group to smoke marijuana and are twice as likely to use it than 30 to 49 year olds. Liberals are six times more likely to smoke marijuana than conservatives. Based on this graph the most likely profile of someone who uses marijuana is a liberal white male between the ages 18 to 29. These graphs help us better distribute the public opinion on legal marijuana.

Based on the research I have done of this data I believe that eventually every state will legalize marijuana. Fifteen states have made it legal so far and others will soon follow. The public has been consistently expressing opposition to marijuana laws and majority of the country is in favor of legalizing it. Since 2000, the percentage of Americans advocating for legal marijuana use has more than doubled and support among major subgroups has been increasing significantly. The country is becoming more accepting of it and now nearly 70% of America views smoking marijuana as morally acceptable. Americans still view alcohol as more morally acceptable than marijuana, but this may be because alcohol is legal in all states while marijuana is not. As more states legalize marijuana it may help remove some of the stigma behind it and the results of that survey may change overtime. Also based on data, the younger generations are more in favor of marijuana which means future generations will be more accustomed to accepting it and more likely be in favor of it being legal. Since 2012 when Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize it, Americans support to legalize it jumped 20 points to a record high 68%. If that number jumped by 20 in eight years, then support will more than likely continue to grow. Considering the high level of public support, we should continue to see states legalize marijuana and there could maybe even be a change in federal policy.

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