



Comparative Approaches to Legalization of Marijuana and Factors That Affect Public Opinion



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Part 1: Varying Approaches

Public opinion on marijuana has changed drastically over the past 30 years. In 1988, only 24 percent of Americans supported the legalization of marijuana, while in 2018 public support had risen to about 66 percent. Along with the shift in public attitude has come a wave of new legislation regarding the drug.

Study #1: As Brian A. Ford discusses in the article, "From Mountains to Molehills: A Comparative Analysis of Drug Policy," globally, the predominant, historic approach to public policy regarding drug law has been modeled by the prohibitionist system. This type of system fails to address the root of the issue and does nothing to prevent further abuse of illegal substances. An approach based on harms reduction, a policy involving treatment and tolerance, rather than criminal bans on cultivation, distribution, and use. Ford compared the two systems' effectiveness by juxtaposing their respective incarceration and rehabilitation statistics. Eliminating criminal bans through the harms reduction model is far more effective in solving drug abuse according to the results of his studies.

Study #2: The United Kingdom and countries of similar size and power have historically used policies such as The Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) and the Psychoactive Substances Act (2016) to reinforce the criminalization of drug use, cultivation, and distribution. However, research shows that this method has become outdated and proven to be less effective than alternative options such as The Psychoactive Substances Act. In the study, they conducted interviews with four United Kingdom substance use service providers. The results from these interviews showed that the UK desperately needs drug policy reform. An approach like Portugal's integrated system of liberalization policy would benefit the United Kingdom in terms of preventing drug abuse and promoting proper treatment.

Study #3: An article called "Comparative Cannabis: Approaches to Marijuana Agriculture Regulation in the United States and Canada." by Ryan B. Stoa compares the legalization efforts of the U.S. to Canada. Both countries started out staunchly opposed to marijuana yet both countries have since seen a steady trend towards the legalization of recreational use. In Canada, the legislation has been driven by the courts. This forced the government to create a nationwide, medical marijuana program. In the United States, the federal government has not legalized marijuana, so individual states have decided to take it upon themselves through local legislation.

Conclusion drawn from the studies:

Based on my research of the previously listed approaches towards the legalization of marijuana, the prohibitions method, which is the current, long-running, national system in the United States, is beneficial because of the strict punishments deterring the abuse of drugs. However, the harms reduction policies in Canada and Portugal offer a new look that seeks to solve the problem of drug abuse by regulating the drug instead of outlawing it. They, along with the states that have legalized it, have seen a great amount of short-term success. Meanwhile, the prohibitionist method continues to encounter the same issues that it has for years.

Abstract

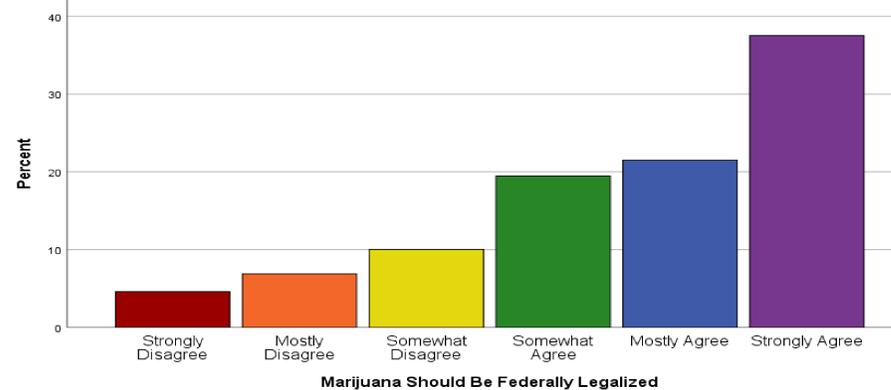
Public opinion on marijuana legalization in the United States has shifted dramatically in recent years. The purpose of this research is twofold. First, to look into the different approaches to the legalization of marijuana being implemented not just in the United States but all over the world; Second, to use survey research to examine what factors influence people's opinion on legalization and their likelihood to support one type of approach over another. The first part of the paper compares different approaches to marijuana in the United States, Portugal, The United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada, evaluates the effectiveness of the approaches, and considers the impact of the various policies. The second part of the paper analyzes data collected from a survey given out to Mercer University undergraduate students.

My research shows that the "new harms reduction" approach to legalization is seeing increasing success and implementation in comparison to the "traditional prohibitionist" method. Factors such as race, gender, parental income, Greek life affiliation, and religiosity do not have a significant impact on the opinion of Mercer undergraduates on the legalization of marijuana and a majority of those surveyed would be in favor of a "harms reduction" approach.

Method and Analysis for the Survey:

A hard copy of a survey about the legalization of marijuana was handed out to 350 Mercer University undergraduate students. It was given in an assortment of different classes and areas on campus to ensure a randomized representative sample. The survey asked the respondent to mark their level of agreement with the statement, "The United States should federally legalize the recreational use of marijuana." This is the dependent variable in this study. Using a Likert scale, the response categories are recorded through the following six choices: strongly disagree, mostly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, mostly agree, or strongly agree. Next on the survey are several demographic questions to obtain information about five factors that might influence a Mercer University student's opinion on the legalization of marijuana. The five factors tested, which are the independent variables in this study, are race, gender, parental income, Greek life affiliation, and religiosity. The data for each independent variable is compared to the dependent variable using a cross-tabulation to show their association and determine if those variables were factors that affected people's opinion on legalization.

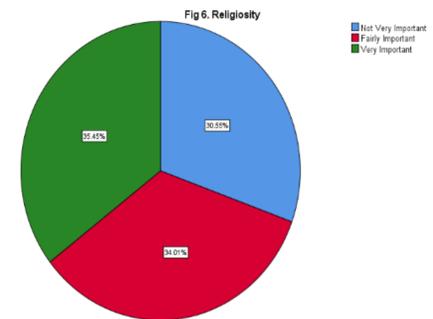
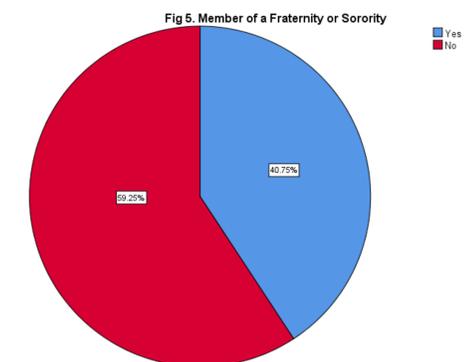
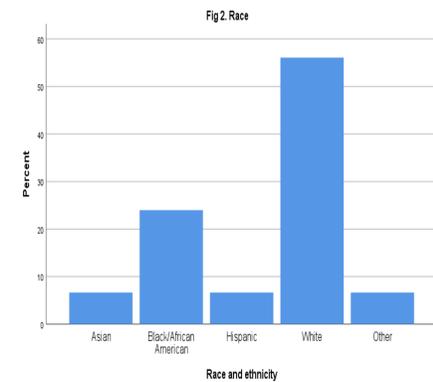
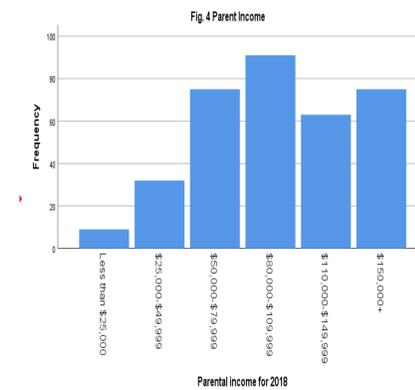
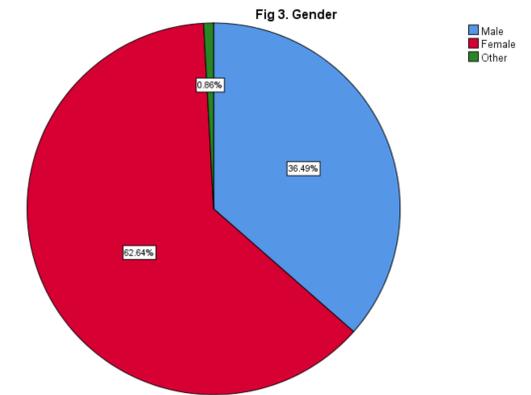
Fig 1. Marijuana Should Be Federally Legalized



		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	4.6	4.6	4.6
	Mostly Disagree	24	6.9	6.9	11.5
	Somewhat Disagree	35	10.0	10.0	21.5
	Somewhat Agree	68	19.4	19.5	41.0
	Mostly Agree	75	21.4	21.5	62.5
	Strongly Agree	131	37.4	37.5	100.0
Total		349	99.7	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	1	.3		
Total		350	100.0		

Figure 1: A bar chart and cross tabulation table showing the general support for legalization

Charted Results:



Conclusions from survey:

- None of the five variables had quite the association that I predicted. Greek life affiliation ended up having no correlation to support for legalizing marijuana. Another surprising result is the fact that women are actually more likely to support the legalization of marijuana than men. Though there is only a very weak association between gender and support for legalization, the association was for the opposite gender than I predicted.
- Race, family income, and religiosity all had weak associations, but they all had at least a 10 percent association in agreement with the hypothesis. It is most likely that the weak associations can be explained by the overall shift in public opinion towards legalization.
- With an overall 78.5 percent of the sample group showing some level of support for the legalization of marijuana, the independent variables do not have a large impact because almost everyone is supporting legalization regardless of their race, gender, income, greek life affiliation, or religiosity.

References:

Ford, Brian A. "From Mountains to Molehills: A Comparative Analysis of Drug Policy." Samantha Lusher, Joanne Guedelha, and Francisco, "Portugal's 2001 Drugs Liberalisation Policy: A UK Service Provider's Perspective on the Psychoactive Substances Act (2016)."
Stoa, Ryan B. 2017. "Comparative Cannabis: Approaches to Marijuana Agriculture Regulation in the United States and Canada."