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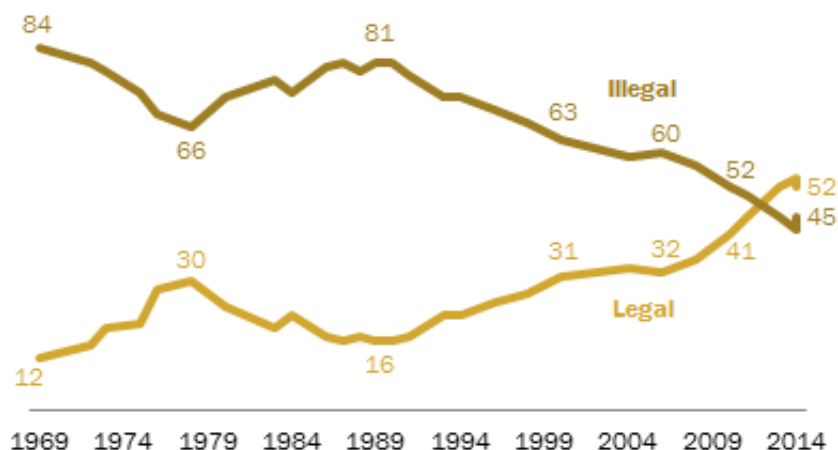
6 facts about marijuana

BY SETH MOTEL ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/AUTHOR/SMOTEL/](http://www.pewresearch.org/author/smotel/))

Attitudes about marijuana have undergone a rapid shift in public opinion, paralleled by few other trends in the U.S. Our recent data, along with historical figures from Gallup and the General Social Survey, reveal how views have shifted about the drug over time. Earlier this year, our survey found that many more Americans now favor shifting the focus of the nation's overall drug policy. Here are six key facts about public opinion and marijuana:

Slim Majority Supports Marijuana Legalization

% saying the use of marijuana should be ...



Survey conducted Oct. 15-20, 2014.

1973-2008 data from General Social Survey, 1969 and 1972 data from Gallup

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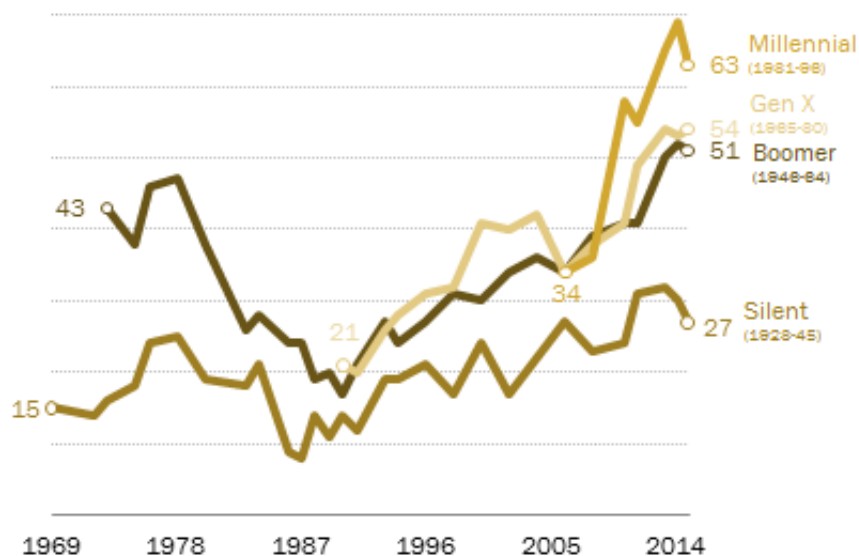
(http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_10-24-14_marijuana-01/) **1** Support for marijuana legalization is rapidly outpacing opposition. A slim majority (52%) of Americans (<http://www.people-press.org/2014/10/23/as-midterms-near-gop-leads-on-key-issues-democrats-have-a-more-positive-image/#other-issues-immigration-health-care-and-marijuana>) say the drug should be made legal, compared with 45% who want it to be illegal. Opinions have changed drastically since 1969, when Gallup first asked the question and found that just 12% favored legalizing marijuana use. Much of the change in opinion has occurred over the past few years — support rose 11 points between 2010 (<http://www.people-press.org/2010/04/01/public-support-for-legalizing-medical->

marijuana/#legal-marijuana) and 2013 (although it has remained unchanged in the past year).

Separately, 76% in our February survey said people convicted of minor possession should not serve time in jail.

Support for Legalization of Marijuana by Generation

% saying the use of marijuana should be made legal



Survey conducted Oct. 15-20, 2014. Generational lines shown when significant sample is available. 1973-2008 data from General Social Survey; 1969 and 1972 data from Gallup

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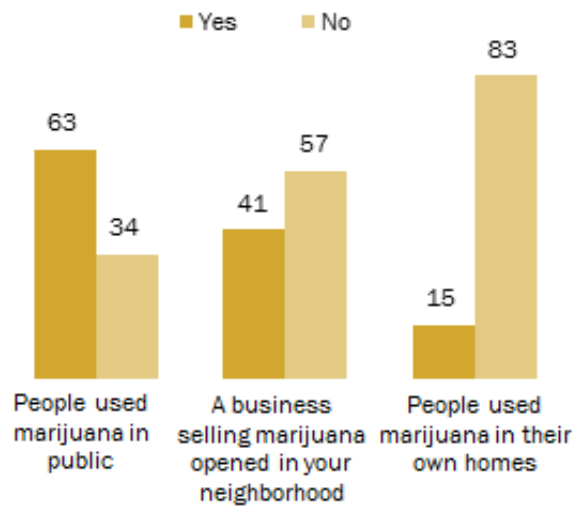
([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_10-24-14_marijuana-](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_10-24-14_marijuana-02/)

2 02/) **Not all groups support legalization.** Only about three-in-ten Republicans (31%) do. While most non-Hispanic whites and blacks say marijuana should be made legal, only 39% of Hispanics share that view. Among generations, 63% of Millennials say marijuana should be legal while only 27% of the Silent Generation (those 69 to 86) share that view. Baby Boomers, who were the most supportive generation in the 1970s before becoming opponents during the “Just Say No” 1980s, are now about as likely to favor (51%) as oppose (46%) legalization.

3 **About seven-in-ten (69%) Americans believe alcohol is more harmful to a person’s health than marijuana** while 15% pick marijuana as worse (14% say both or neither). If marijuana became as widely available as alcohol, 63% still believe alcohol would be more harmful to society.

Most Would Be Bothered by Public, Not Private, Marijuana Use

If marijuana were legal, would it bother you if ...



Survey conducted Feb. 14-23, 2014.

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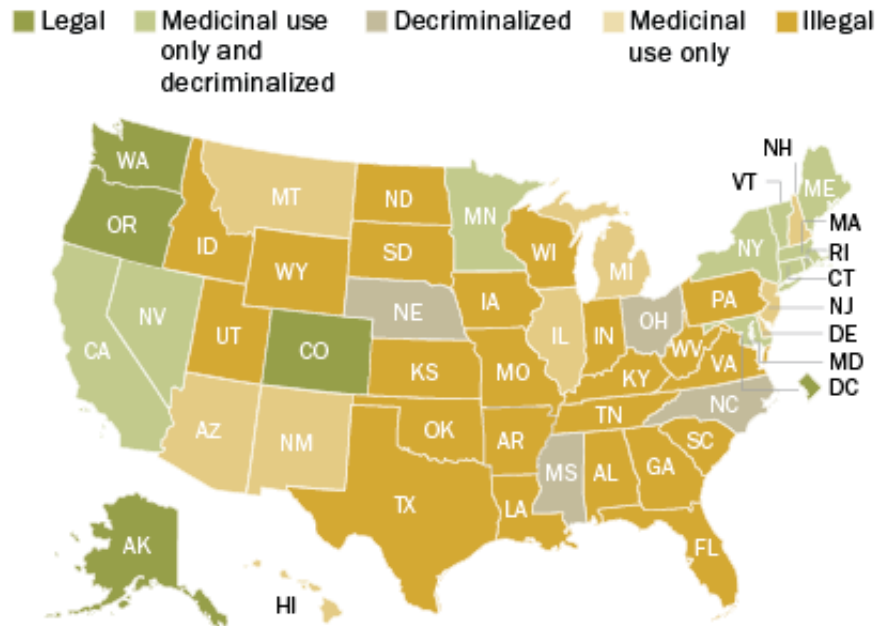
(http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_marijuana_bothered/)

4 While support for legalizing marijuana is growing, **63% of Americans would be bothered if people did their smoking in public.** More than half (54%) think that legalizing marijuana would lead to more underage people trying it. On the other hand, about six-in-ten (57%) said they would not be bothered if a store or business selling marijuana legally opened up in their neighborhood.

5 Nearly half (47%) of Americans say they have tried marijuana (<http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-questionnaires/Drugs%20Topline%20for%20release.pdf>), and 11% in the past year, which the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>) says is the most commonly-used illicit drug in the U.S. The government survey showed that 18.9 million Americans 12 or older (7.3%) had used marijuana in the prior month.

Marijuana Laws in 50 States

Marijuana is now legal in some form or decriminalized in 27 states and the District of Columbia



Note: Federal law prohibits the possession, selling or harvesting of marijuana. Decriminalization laws reduce the penalties associated with the use or possession of small amounts of marijuana. Sources: National Conference of State Legislatures; National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws

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([http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_14-10-](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_14-10-24_marijuanamap/)

6 [24_marijuanamap/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/07/6-facts-about-marijuana/ft_14-10-24_marijuanamap/)) **Four states – Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska – and the District of Columbia have passed measures to legalize marijuana use**, while an additional 14 states have decriminalized (<http://norml.org/aboutmarijuana/item/states-that-have-decriminalized>) certain amounts of marijuana possession. Including those five locations, nearly half of U.S. states (23 plus D.C.) allow medical marijuana (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-medical-marijuana-laws.aspx>).

Note: *This post has been updated with October 2014 survey data and November 2014 election results.*

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