

Topic: Legalizing marijuana

Background

Under federal law, using or possessing marijuana is illegal in the United States. Even so, most states allow the use of marijuana for medical or recreational purposes, or both.

Public support for legalizing marijuana has increased over the last two decades. But the level of support differs depending on whether the public is thinking about *medical* use of marijuana or *recreational* use.

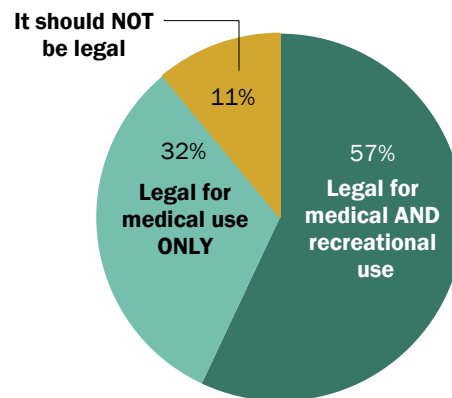
Public opinion polling says ...

Pew Research Center conducted a survey of U.S. adults in January 2024 to find out what Americans think about this issue. Here's what we found.

- **57%** say marijuana should be legal for both medical and recreational use.
- **32%** say it should be legal only for medical use.
- **11%** say it should *not* be legal at all.

Public views on legalizing marijuana

% saying marijuana use should be ...



Note: Fewer than 1% of respondents did not answer the question.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 16-21, 2024.

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How views differ by age

Across age groups, young adults are the most likely to say marijuana should be legal for both medical and recreational use. Among those ages 18 to 29, 71% say this.

But even among adults 65 and older, a very small share (14%) say marijuana should not be legal at all. Older age groups are more likely than younger groups to say it should be legal only for medical use.

Public views on the impact of legalizing marijuana

We also asked Americans how legalizing recreational marijuana affects different parts of society. The public has mixed views about this.

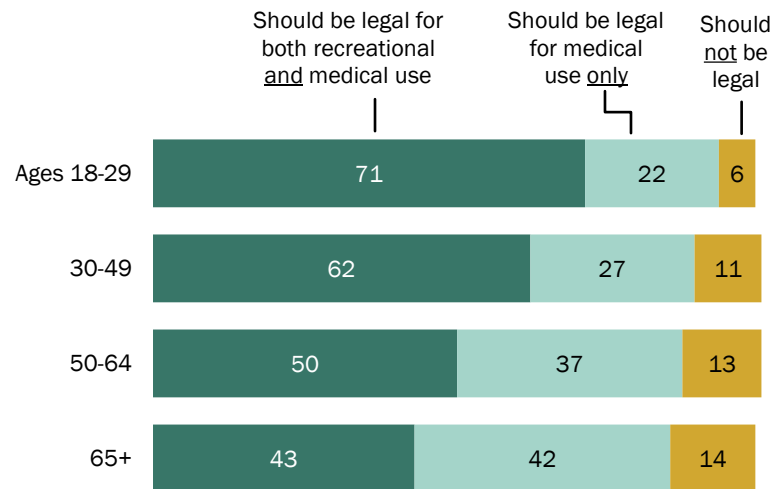
- **Local economies:** 52% say that when marijuana is legal for recreational use, it's *good* for local economies. Another 17% say this is *bad* for local economies, and 29% say it has no impact.
- **Criminal justice:** 42% say making marijuana legal makes the criminal justice system *more* fair, 18% say it makes it *less* fair and 38% say it has no impact.
- **Community safety:** 34% say making marijuana legal makes communities *less* safe, 21% say it makes communities *more* safe and 44% say it has no impact.
- **Use of other drugs:** 29% say making marijuana legal *increases* the use of other drugs like heroin, fentanyl and cocaine. Another 27% say it *decreases* the use of these drugs, and 42% say it has no impact.

What does polling say about related topics?

Other illegal drugs: When we asked the public in 2024 [what issues should be top priorities](#) for the president and Congress, 55% pointed to reducing the availability of illegal drugs like heroin,

Views on legalizing marijuana by age

% saying marijuana ...



Note: Shares of respondents who didn't offer an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 16-21, 2024.

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fentanyl and cocaine. By comparison, 73% said strengthening the economy should be a top priority.

Reducing the availability of illegal drugs ranked near dealing with immigration (57% said this should be a top priority) and reducing the budget deficit (54% called this a top priority).

Drug addiction: A [2021 Pew Research Center survey](#) found that public concern about drug addiction had fallen in recent years. In October 2021, 35% of Americans said drug addiction was a major problem in their local community. This was down from 42% in 2018.

Discussion questions

- Did anything about this data surprise you?
- Why do you think we see differences in opinion across age groups?
- How do you think lawmakers could use this data to improve policies?

Additional resources

Use this QR code to view a web version of this brief and to visit the publications below:



[Summary of key facts about Americans and marijuana](#)

A more detailed analysis of [Pew Research Center's 2024 survey on views of marijuana legalization](#)

More information on [state-by-state laws on marijuana](#)