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Hawkeye Poll: Majority of Iowans support legalization of marijuana for medical, recreational use

According to a recent Hawkeye Poll, conducted by University of Iowa faculty and students between March 31 and April 13, a majority of Iowans support medical and recreational marijuana. Specifically, 71.1% of survey respondents indicated that they think marijuana should be legal for medical use while 52.5% indicated that marijuana should be legal for recreational use.

Support for legalization for medical use was high across all age groups. The largest support (74.0%) was among respondents aged 35 to 54 and the smallest (62.8%) among those aged 70 and older. Legalization for medical use also attained majority support across party identification. More than 80% of Democrats (81.4%) said they support legalization, along with 75.2% of Independents and 55.6% of Republicans.

However, when it comes to marijuana legalization for recreational use, notable differences in support emerged based on respondents' age and party identification. Support decreases as age increases. Of the 18 to 34 category, 66.2% supported legalization while 27.1% said marijuana should be illegal. Among respondents aged 70 and older, only 23.8% supported legalization, compared to 59.9% who said it should be illegal.

A majority of Democrats (64.3%) supported marijuana legalization for recreational use compared to 35.1% of Republicans and 53.2% of Independents. Republicans were more likely to support marijuana being illegal and not being decriminalized. Specially, 38.6% of Republicans said that marijuana should be illegal and not be decriminalized for recreational use, compared to 11.8% of Democrats and 20.5% of Independents.

Regardless of their stance on marijuana legalization, respondents were offered a list of reasons to support and oppose legalization and were then asked to indicate which, if any, they agreed with. Of reasons to support legalization, a majority of respondents agreed that legalization has medicinal benefits (71.1%); frees up law enforcement (51.0%); and provides a good source of tax revenue (52.5%). Respondents were split equally on reasons that legalization could lower incarceration rate (48.5% agreeing to 47.3% disagreeing) and could make regulation easier (47.2% agreeing to 48.6% disagreeing). A slight majority of respondents disagreed that legalization could create more jobs, 54.3% to 41.5%.

In terms of reasons to oppose legalization, the most common reason among respondents was that marijuana negatively impacts children's intellectual and mental health, cited by 39.3% of respondents. Other reasons offered included possible negative side effects on the brain (31.2%), increasing drug usage (29.1%), and marijuana addiction (25.8%).

Respondents also were asked whether they agree or disagree with a company's decision to rescind an offer if a job candidate had a marijuana-related criminal conviction. Opinions differed based on the possible reason for the conviction. A majority of respondents, 51.8%, disagree with the company's decision when the candidate's conviction was for possession of marijuana, compared to 24.9% agreeing. If the candidate was convicted of distribution of marijuana, 50.1% agreed with and 27.8% disagreed with the company's decision. Changes were slight when the conviction was for manufacture of marijuana, for which 52.5% agreed with and 25.4% disagreed with the company's decision.

The UI Department of Political Science has conducted the Hawkeye Poll since 2007. A series of national and state public opinion polls, this experience serves as an important learning opportunity for students. More than 1,000 students have had the opportunity to directly participate in the research and survey process and acquire valuable career-related knowledge about survey research and public polling. This year, 28 students collaborated to design and implement a poll of Iowans. Learn more about the course at <https://now.uiowa.edu/2019/11/taking-iowas-pulse-hawkeye-poll>.

Respondent identification: The Iowa Social Science Research Center (ISRC) assisted with data collection. Responses were gathered by phone (116) and online (947). For the phone portion, the ISRC obtained a random sample of Iowans consisting of 40% household landline numbers and 60% mobile phone numbers. All respondents who stated they were older than 18 and willing to participate in the survey were included. After training, students in the class used the ISRC's computer-assisted interviewing resources to complete the calling and interviews. No quotas were set for the phone component. For the online portion, the ISRC contracted with a respected web panel vendor to field the survey to a demographically representative sample of 947 online respondents. Respondents invited to complete the online survey were Iowa adults, aged 18 to 120 years, recruited for participation via online panel. To obtain a census-representative sample, quotas were set on the following demographics: sex, age, and urbanicity.

Sample: 1,063 voting-age residents in Iowa (online and by phone), margin of error +/-3.1%. Among these, 947 respondents took the online version of the survey, with a margin of error of 3.2%.

Results for this release use only responses to the web survey since the questions about marijuana reforms were not asked on the phone version to reduce interview length.

Weighting: Reported results are weighted by age, sex, and party identification.

About the Hawkeye Poll

The poll was conducted by the Hawkeye Poll Cooperative, comprised of UI faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in the Department of Political Science. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project that uses the facilities of the Iowa Social Science Research Center directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science and faculty advisor for the poll. The Department of Political Science in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the UI Public Policy Center support the poll; financial support was provided through a Student Technology Fee award (#1290-91).

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