

Changing Trends in Adult Attitudes Toward Marijuana Legalization

Research Questions

- How have American attitudes towards legalization of marijuana changed since the mid 90s?
- How does the change vary by age, race, and gender?

Significance

- Marijuana for medicinal use was first legalized in the state of California in 1996.
- More and more states are beginning to engage in the discussion surrounding legalization of marijuana (Williams, 2018).

Background

- Support for legalizing marijuana has surged nearly 20 points in less than a decade (Galston et al., 2013).
- Major reasons for support include self-interest (past and current users) and peer use (Cruz 2016, Williams et al., 2011).
- A major reason against legalization is the possibility of abuse and addiction (Pew Research Center, 2015).
- Younger generations have favored legalization more intensely than older generations (Galston et al., 2013).
- Support for marijuana legalization is greater among Whites and Blacks than other race/ethnicity (Pew Research Center, 2015).
- More men support than women (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Hypotheses

- The increase in support for legalization of marijuana will be:
 - Higher among those 65+ due to better understanding of the medical benefits
 - Higher for minorities than whites due to adversarial nature of our criminal justice system toward minorities
 - Higher for women than men

Data and Measures

- Data
 - General Social Survey (GSS)
 - 11 surveys collected biannually from 1996-2016. N= 16,030
 - U.S. adults aged 18-89
- Dependent measure
 - Attitudes towards legalization of marijuana. "Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal" (1 = Should ; 2 = Should not)
- Independent measure
 - Year of the survey
- Control measures
 - Age
 - 18-34 28%
 - 35-64 54%
 - 65+ 18%
 - Race
 - White 77%
 - Black 15%
 - Other 8%
 - Sex
 - Male 44%
 - Female 56%

Analysis

- Cross tabulation and Chi-squared tests using SPSS

Figure 1. Trend in % Support for Legalization of Marijuana by Age

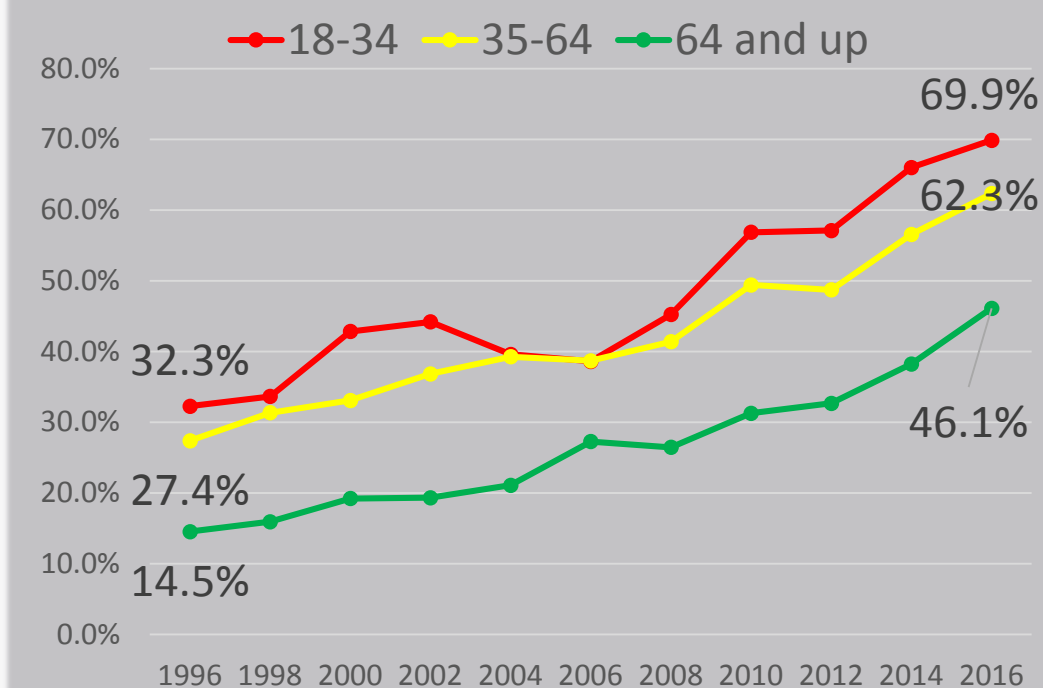


Figure 2. Trend in % Support for Legalization of Marijuana by Race

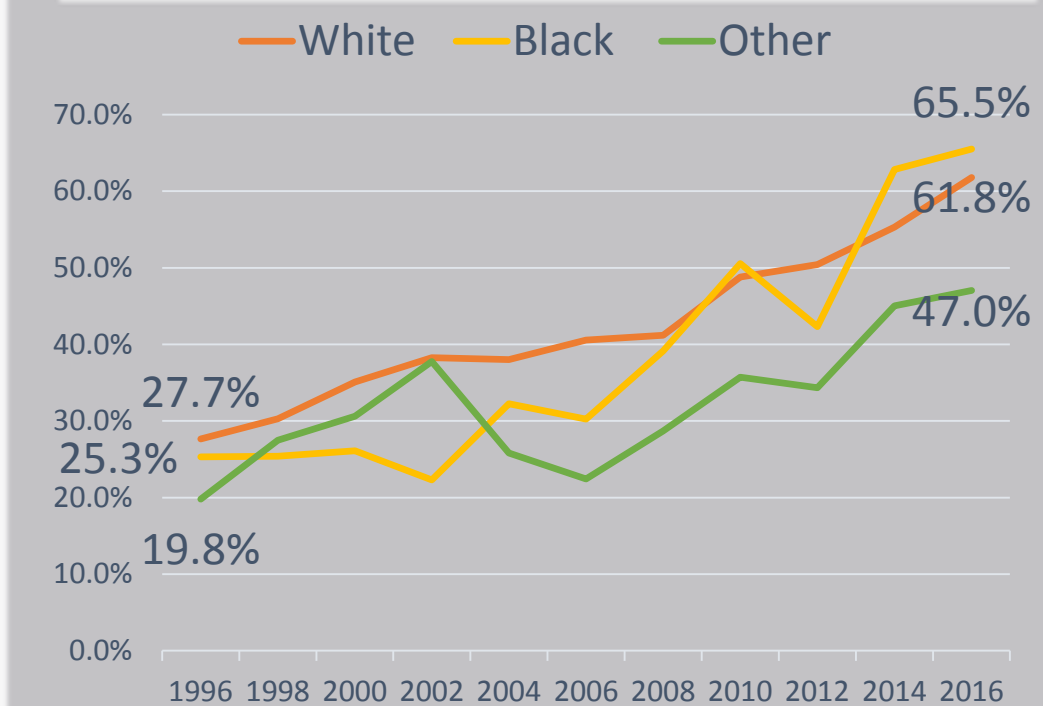
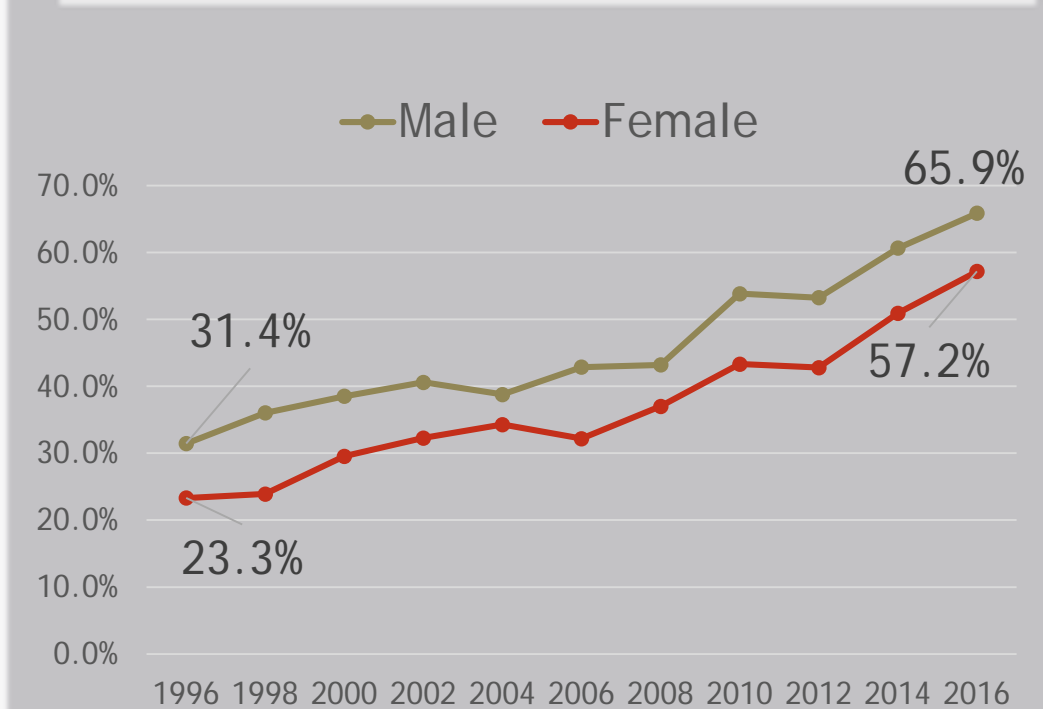


Figure 3. Trend in % Support for Legalization of Marijuana by Gender



Summary of results

- Overall, support for legalization increased steadily from 27% to 61% over the last 20 years.
- Most notably, support for legalization by those over 65 has tripled from around 14% to 45%.
- By race, we see a steady increase in support for legalization by Whites. While support among Blacks and other races increased, we see that it was not as linear as the increase for Whites. This may be indicative of the discrepancy by race in the prison population regarding drug related offenses.
- By gender, we see a constant steady increase in support by both men and women.

Future research

- From this point it is clear that we need much more research done with the drug itself.
- With support growing steadily over the past 20 years, now more the ever, we need to encourage and support as many marijuana studies as we can to allow a full picture.

References

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