



JANUARY 4, 2012

Support for Legal Marijuana Softens as Initiative Heads to Legislature

Washington voters are basically divided over the question of legalizing marijuana. In the most recent *Elway Poll*, 48% of respondents were in favor of legalization, including 26% “definitely” and 22% “probably” in favor, while 45% were opposed (30% “definitely” opposed).

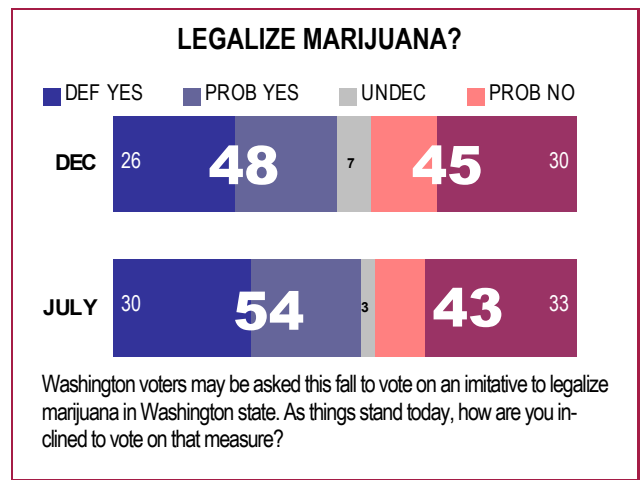
Initiative 502, an initiative to the legislature, would decriminalize production, possession, delivery, distribution and sale of marijuana. Backers have submitted many more than the required number of signatures, which means the legislature will have to take it up in the 2012 session. The legislature has three options: Pass it into law; ignore or reject it, which automatically sends it to the fall 2012 statewide ballot; or send it to the ballot along with a legislative alternative.

Support for legalization has dropped somewhat since we asked the question last July. In that survey 54% were in favor with 43% opposed. The question this time asked how respondents were inclined to vote. The July question asked whether they were inclined to support or oppose legalization. The difference is not statistically significant, but the 50% mark is symbolically important.

The demographic splits indicate some potentially important differences of opinion:

- As expected, Republicans were most strongly against the measure, with 74% opposed (61% “definitely”).
- Democrats (56%) and Independents (53%) were mostly in favor.
- Men (52%) were more likely to favor than women (43%).
- As expected, support for legalization went down with age, from 69% among those under 35 to 41% among those over 65. (even the baby boomers were opposed 50-45%).
- Support went up with education, from 42% among those with a high school education to 52% among those with post graduate degrees.
- Legalization was slightly more popular among least likely voters than among regular voters. 51% of those who had voted half the time or less would vote yes, compared to 43% of “perfect voters” (voted in all of the last 4 elections).

The support patterns related to vote history and age could have particular political significance if the measure goes to the ballot (and who is betting the legislature will pass it without putting it on the ballot?). Younger voters and infrequent voters are most likely to favor legalization. The question is whether having the marijuana legalization measure on the fall ballot pull more such voters to the polls, and with what effect. In a presidential year, the impact could go the other way: more young and infrequent voters at the polls may impact the outcome of the marijuana initiative. This calculus may enter into the Legislature’s deliberation in the coming weeks.



Live telephone interviews were conducted between Dec 27-29, 2011 with 411 voters selected at random from the list of registered voters in Washington state. The margin of sampling error is $\pm 5\%$ at the 95% level of confidence. This means, in theory, had this same survey been conducted 100 times, the results would be within $\pm 5\%$ of the results reported here at least 95 times. A full demographic profile of the sample was published in yesterday's edition.