



Marijuana Legalization Is Not Linked With Increased Crime Rates

“All those [marijuana] arrests do is make people hate us.”
— Cathy Lanier, former police chief for Washington, D.C.

“Our state’s efforts to regulate the sale of marijuana are succeeding. A few years ago, the illegal trafficking of marijuana lined the pockets of criminals everywhere. Now, in our state, illegal trafficking activity is being displaced by a closely regulated marijuana industry that pays hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes. This frees up significant law enforcement resources to protect our communities in other, more pressing ways.”

— Washington State Gov. Jay Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson

Government-published data, academic research, and the experiences of many law enforcement officials indicate that marijuana policy reform does not increase crime rates. Relying on statistics from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports, peer-reviewed studies have analyzed changes after passage of both adult-use legalization and medical marijuana laws. Contrary to assertions made by some opponents of legalization, there is no compelling basis for claims that legalizing marijuana and establishing regulated markets undermines public safety.

For medical marijuana, multiple analyses have concluded that these laws are not linked with increases in violent crime or property crime.^[1] In fact, researchers from RAND discovered a “negative and significant relationship between dispensary allowances and property crime rates.”^[2]

Similarly, available evidence suggests that legalizing marijuana for adults does not lead to increased crime of any variety either. In a 2018 study, scientists found “no statistically significant long-term effects of recreational cannabis laws or the initiation of retail sales on violent or property crime rates.”^[3] In a more recent paper using regression analysis, a University of Washington researcher wrote, “Results indicate that the legalization of marijuana, both recreational and medical, does not increase violent crime rates. In contrast, marijuana legalization could lead to a decline in violent crime such as homicide, robbery and aggravated assault.”^[4]

Other studies also point to marijuana policy reform as a public safety benefit. In a 2018 analysis, experts at Washington State University found that police solved significantly more violent and property crimes after passage of legalization laws in Colorado and Washington.^[5] Another peer-reviewed paper in *The Economic Journal* supports the argument that legalizing marijuana reduces crime by displacing illicit markets traditionally controlled by drug cartels and illicit distributors.^[6]

^[1] Shepard, E. M., et al. (2016). Medical Marijuana and Crime: Further Evidence From the Western States. *Journal of Drug Issues*. Accessed from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022042615623983>

Chu, Y. L., et al. (2019). Joint culpability: The effects of medical marijuana laws on crime. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*. Accessed from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.07.003>

[2] Hunt, P., et al. (2018). High on Crime? Exploring the Effects of Marijuana Dispensary Laws on Crime in California Counties. Institute of Labor Economics. Accessed from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp11567.pdf>

[3] Lu, R., et al. (2018). The Cannabis Effect on Crime: Time-Series Analysis of Crime in Colorado and Washington State. *Justice Quarterly*. Accessed from <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1666903>

[4] Rice, A. (2019). A blunt look at the impacts marijuana has on violent crime (manuscript). University of Washington. Accessed from <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/44495>

[5] Makin, D.A., et al. (2018). Marijuana Legalization and Crime Clearance Rates: Testing Proponent Assertions in Colorado and Washington State. *Police Quarterly*. Accessed from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611118786255>

[6] Gavrilova, E., et al. (2017). Is Legal Pot Crippling Mexican Drug Trafficking Organisations? The Effect of Medical Marijuana Laws on US Crime. *The Economic Journal*. Accessed from <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12521>