

The Poll of Polls

A Decade of Data Reveals Consistent Support for Cannabis in the United States

CBD Oracle analyzed 70 polls from over the past decade to offer a detailed look at how many Americans support legalizing recreational cannabis.



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Introduction

If you want to find out how many people in the US support legalizing cannabis nationwide, you'll find a seemingly endless stream of polls purporting to have the answer. But as most people know – especially with a presidential election on the horizon – any one poll doesn't necessarily give a reliable answer to a particular question. One poll will tell you 60% support legalizing weed, while the other will put it at closer to 50%. So how do you deal with this inherent uncertainty?

Simply put, you don't focus on *one* poll, but *all of the polls*. By combining the results from many specific polls into a single result, you effectively reduce the bias in any one result and come to a more reasonable conclusion about the overall issue.

So with that in mind, how many Americans support legalizing cannabis nationwide? Do things like age and political affiliation affect the answer? And what about states like Florida with a cannabis legalization ballot coming up – is it likely to pass?

We've analyzed the results from 70 individual polls to answer some of the key questions about the fight for cannabis legalization in the US. Here's what we found.

The National Picture: How Many Americans Think Cannabis Should Be Legalized?

The core question we investigated was: should cannabis be legalized in the US?

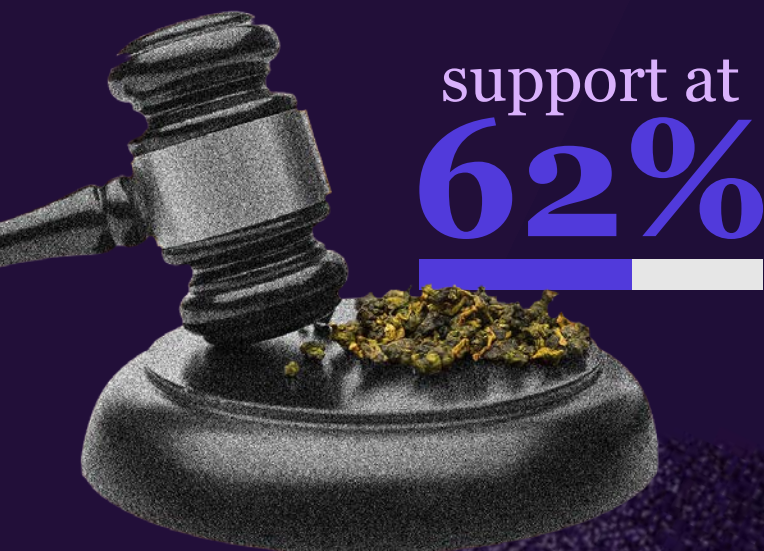
We looked at data spanning roughly a decade, from 2015 to June 2024, splitting each year into two for data analysis, with the exception of 2015, 2020, and 2023, which had fewer polls overall which were all analyzed annually.

Overall, the results show that aside from a notable spike in early 2022, support for cannabis legalization gradually increased over the past decade, with some signs it may settle down at somewhere between 60% and 65%. The most recent result, for all 2024 polls conducted to date, shows support at 62%.

There were a few outliers to this overall trend. In late 2018 and early 2019, support briefly declined to around 56%, after having risen for several years beforehand, while in late 2019 it reached 66%. The biggest outlier was in 2022, where the pooled result reached 71%, likely owing to a SICPA/Harris Poll of 2,069 US adults showing 78% support for national legalization. ^[1]

While the current 62% support for legalization is a positive thing overall, it may seem concerning that support has apparently declined since 2022. It could be that after the pandemic boon for the cannabis industry, we're settling back into the norm of around three-fifths of voters supporting legal cannabis nationwide.

But the overarching trend is still an increase, and there have been spikes and declines in the past (e.g. the spike in late 2019 followed by a two-year slump) but the overall trend has remained. Support will likely continue to increase in the future, but only time will tell for sure.



Democrats Are More Likely Than Republicans to Support Legalization

As you've probably noticed if you've been following this issue, there is a clear party-political divide when it comes to cannabis. We looked into this for 2024, and the result is pretty stark and in the direction you'd expect.



Democrats, on the whole, are more supportive of legalization. Based on four polls from 2024, **71.4%** support the legalization of cannabis at the national level.

Independents are more in line with the overall national viewpoint, with **63.5%** supporting legalization based on the 2024 polls.

Republicans are the least supportive of cannabis legalization, with **47.6%** supporting legalization.



It's notable that almost half of Republicans support legalization, given that it's typically seen as a Democrat policy. This is also a reminder of the importance of looking at more than just a single poll because a Data for Progress poll from April 2024 put overall Republican support at 54%.^[2] For advocates, it would be tempting to point to this number and say that there's bipartisan support for legalization, but looking at all of the results shows it's not quite so clear-cut.

Younger Americans Are More Likely to Support Legalization

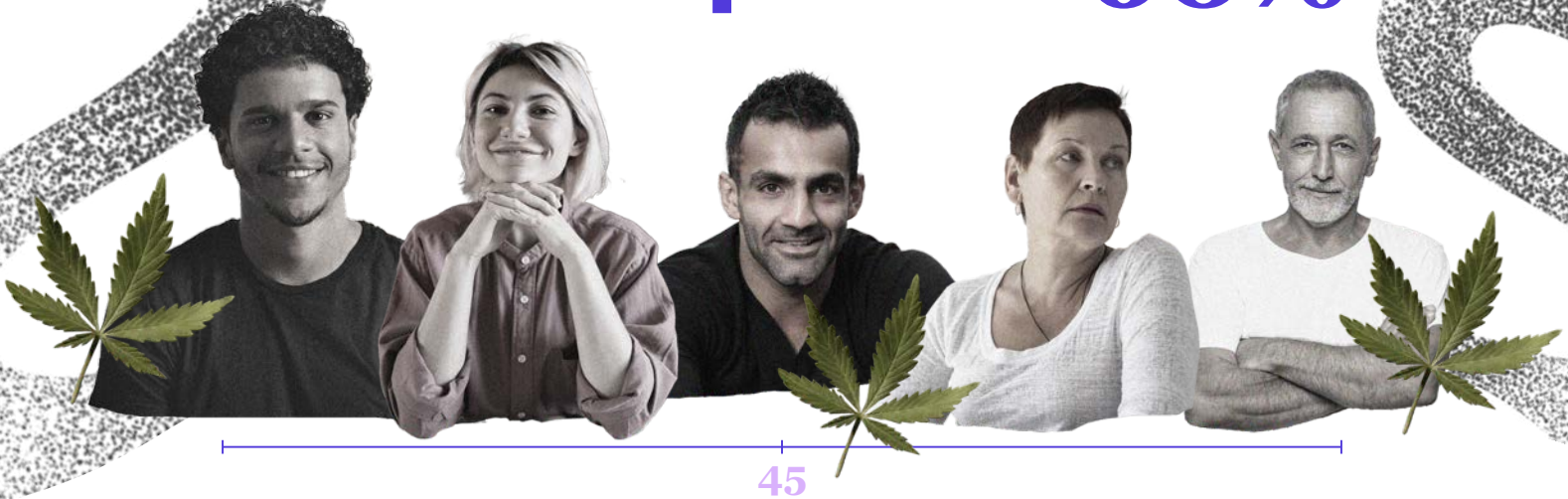
Likewise, there appears to be a generational divide when it comes to support for legalization, although this is not as big a difference as you may expect. Three polls from 2024 had enough information on the age breakdown of responses to allow us to investigate this question.

For those aged under 45, support for cannabis legalization sits at around

66.4%

For people aged over 45, support is slightly lower, at

60%

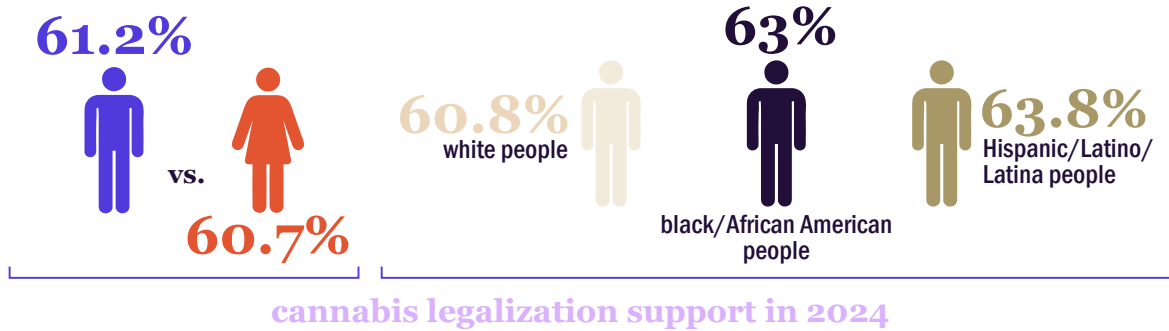


It's notable that even older Americans are supportive of legalization.

While this can't come from the polling alone, it's possible that widespread medical marijuana programs have had a substantial impact on older adults who otherwise wouldn't have tried cannabis. But in fairness, it's also hard to imagine the Woodstock generation having too negative a view of weed.

Other Demographics Showed No Differences

We also looked at the 2024 results broken down by race and gender, but none of these comparisons showed any significant differences. Based on the combined poll results, we found:



Statistically, looking at the original polls, there is no significant difference between groups in either of these cases. In fact, based on the limited original poll data the only significant differences were by political affiliation.



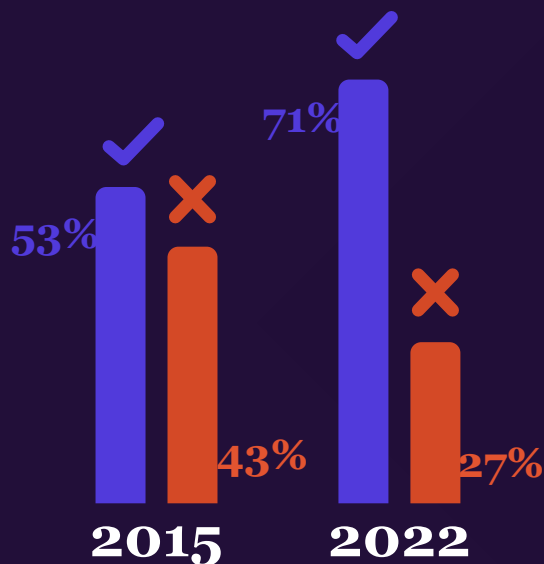
The National Picture: How Many Americans Oppose Legalization?

There's a very closely related question on the other side of the coin: how many Americans are actually *opposed* to legalization? Even when support seems to be lower, it could be that a lot of people are just unsure what to think about the issue.

Overall the data is pretty much as you'd expect, but there are some signs that opposition to legalization is declining more quickly than support is increasing. If you just look at the two trends, they run in the expected opposite directions, starting out in 2015 with 53% supporting legalization vs. 43% opposing, and then the gulf between

them widening until 2022's 71% supporting vs. 27% opposing. The most recent results from early 2024 show that while support declined to around 62%, opposition remained very low at just above 26%.

These recent results reveal more about the overall trend than just the pure numbers in support. While support only rose past 70% once (in early 2022), the opposition has remained under 30% since 2020, with the exception of the few polls taken in 2023. It might look like support has slumped in the past couple of years, but it's important to remember that this hasn't been accompanied by a rise in opposition to legalization.



Naturally, this contrast means that more people are unsure about the question, reaching a peak of 13.5% in the first half of 2019 and generally remaining high since then. In the first half of 2024, 12% of respondents said they were unsure about cannabis legalization.

This might not necessarily seem like good news for cannabis advocates, but it's a sign that people are seeing more nuance on this issue than they have in the past. Combined with the overall trend, it seems likely that overall support will go beyond 70% again in the near future.



States to Watch in 2024:

Florida

Several states are debating whether to join around half of the country in legalizing cannabis for recreational purposes, and the most prominent of these is Florida. There is a ballot initiative up for a public vote in November, and many pollsters have looked at voters' views in the state.

For 2024, there have been a total of five polls covering voters' views on Florida legalizing cannabis, and there were three others in 2023 that can give insight into how things have been developing.

Based on all of the polls conducted in 2024 to date, overall support for the legalization measure in Florida sits at 56.8%.^[3] This is not as positive as it may seem, because ballot measures in Florida require a 60% "yes" vote to pass.

In 2023, voters appeared more positive about the prospect. In fact, based on the three polls conducted in Florida that year, 65.6% of voters were supportive of legalizing cannabis in the state. From the above, it's clear that this is broadly in line with the national trend of declining support for legal cannabis relative to the high point of 2022.

However, when you dig deeper into the specific polls, there are promising signs. While the three polls conducted in April and May show support under the 60% threshold, the two conducted in June found 66% and 64% of voters in favor of the measure. Firstly, this is more in line with the 2023 results, and more importantly, it could represent the impact of the heating up of campaigns in the lead-up to the vote.

Overall, using the polls taken up until July 2024, it appears that cannabis legalization has a good chance of success in Florida this year.

Legalization Support



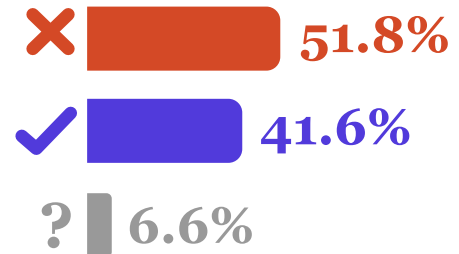
South Dakota

Voters in South Dakota have submitted signatures in support of a ballot initiative to legalize cannabis in the state.^[4] Provided that the signatures are validated by August, the measure will appear on the ballot in November.



Unfortunately, polling in South Dakota hasn't been as extensive as in Florida, and there is only one poll from 2024 so far.^[5] This is of just 500 registered voters, and the margin of error is +/- 4.5%, but it shows that only 41.6% of voters support the measure. However, with 6.6% undecided, a small sample, and a pretty substantial margin of error, this is far from conclusive.

There were two polls conducted in 2023, and combining these results as above puts support last year at 47%. These polls were also larger, with 782 and 747 participants. However, as we've discussed, support for legalizing cannabis seems to have declined slightly over the past year, so again this doesn't offer any clear answers.



North Dakota

After a campaign by New Economic Frontier, a ballot initiative has been submitted in North Dakota for the legalization of cannabis and it's likely to appear on the ballot in November.^{[6],[7]}



Unfortunately, there is only limited polling available for North Dakota, with just one poll so far in 2024. This is a small poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, with just 500 likely voters participating and a margin of error of 4.4%.^[8] However, it shows that only 43% support legalization while 57% oppose it.

If the measure is approved for the ballot, there will probably be more polling of North Dakota residents in the coming months.



Nebraska

Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana submitted signatures in early July in an attempt to get a medical marijuana legalization initiative on the ballot in November.^{[9],[10]}



However, there has only been one poll from 2024 to date, and this found that 70% of likely voters in Nebraska wanted to legalize medical marijuana in Nebraska.^[11] It was a pretty big poll, with 2,198 participants and a margin of error of 2.1%. According to Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana, their 2022 poll found that 80% of registered voters were in favor of the change.

Overall, based on the most recent poll, it's likely that this measure will pass if it makes it to the ballot in November.

Legalization Support





Conclusion

**Support for
Cannabis May
Be Declining,
But Remains
Strong**

Based on the polling we've analyzed for this research, it appears that support for cannabis legalization is declining slightly from a high point in 2022. However, this likely isn't a long-term trend that we should be getting worried about – if anything, the trend is towards increasing support. With cannabis legalization becoming a reality in many states in recent years, it makes sense that opinions would shift, ebbing and flowing year to year.

The most important point is that even with a decline over the past couple of years, a strong majority of Americans support the legalization of cannabis for recreational use. The longer-term trend remains one of increasing acceptance, and as in Florida, where initial signs were negative but recent polls show an upward trend when voters actually have a decision to make, things can change. The tired old prohibitionist arguments fall flat, while ordinary Americans arguing for freedom and shining the spotlight on the decades-long failures of the war on drugs have the power to change minds.

Methodology: How We Analyzed the Polls

Our analysis of national polls and those in Florida and South Dakota used Monte Carlo simulations to pool the results into larger datasets covering a year or half-year. If you're interested in the details of the analysis and how we produced our estimates, here's what we did.

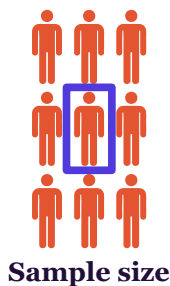
Choosing Appropriate Polls

The first step to conducting an analysis like this is collecting the raw data for the polls. Here, the goal was simple, to look for any representative poll of adults in the US (or specific states like Florida) that asked whether the participants wanted to legalize cannabis at the federal level.

We did consider a few specific factors in selecting a poll:



While these groups are technically different – not every adult is a likely or registered voter, for instance – for the overall issue of where Americans stand on legalizing cannabis, there is no meaningful difference between these groups. There's simply no reason to assume that likely voters differ from overall US adults when it comes to this issue.



For the national data, we ensured all polls had at least 800 participants. While smaller polls can produce valid results, we took this as more of a loose guideline for the minimum poll size we were looking for, in line with approaches used by poll compilers such as Politico.^[12] However, for state-specific polls, this would have reduced the analysis substantially, and smaller polls had to be included.



Demographics

All of the polls included in the analysis made necessary adjustments so that the results reflected the overall demographics of the target population. This usually means weighting responses in order to match up to Census data.



Legalize or not?

The question in each poll was whether participants thought that cannabis should be legalized at the federal level. Surveys in which participants were asked whether it should be federally legalized or left to states were excluded, because someone answering “left to the states” could either believe it should be legal or banned but just thinks it should be decided state-by-state.



Legalize “in your state” vs Nationwide?

In one case, owing to very few national polls conducted in 2023, we included a survey where people were asked whether cannabis should be legal “in their state.” The reasoning here is that the answers are unlikely to differ in terms of preferences in their home state and nationwide. Unlike the examples discussed above, the question was essentially “should cannabis be legal?” and not “should it be a federal or state issue?”

Analyzing the Polls

We conducted a Monte Carlo analysis based on the result and reported a margin of error in each poll. This is inspired by methods used to analyze political polling.^[13]

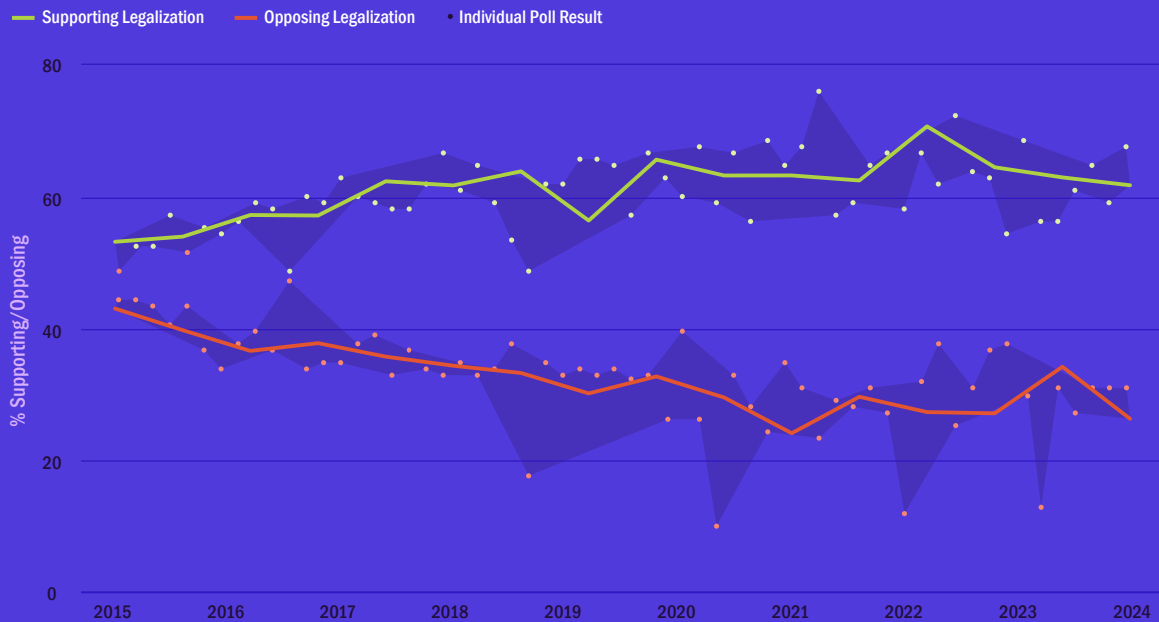
In short, a Monte Carlo analysis uses polling data to simulate results in line with the mean and margin of error (i.e. a statistical measure of the range of deviation from the mean – closely related to the standard deviation). This essentially replicates what would have happened if each pollster had conducted hundreds, or even thousands, of polls of the same population. While the results would all likely converge around the mean value, each poll would be slightly different, but 95% of results would fall within the margin of error.

Going through this process for each of the polls generates a huge amount of data that reflects both the variation expected within a single poll and the variation in results between different polls. In essence, we generated a huge amount of data and then pooled those results together to generate the final estimate. Specifically, we generated a thousand results from each specific poll as part of the analysis, assuming a normal distribution and using the standard error of the mean, derived from the reported margin of error.

Finally, we needed an estimate of how quickly opinion on this topic changes to determine which polls to pool together and which to separate. Based on statistical tests for a difference (t-tests), we determined that there tended to be significant differences from one quarter to the next on some occasions, but that grouping six months of data together struck the best balance, considering a relatively low number of polls (or even the lack of polls) in some quarters. Unfortunately, there were very few national polls in 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2023, so for these we analyzed them annually as opposed to in six-month blocks.

Support for Cannabis Legalization over the last 10 Years

Individual polls compared to average trendline for all the polls conducted in a given year



Limitations of the Approach

As with any research, there are some limitations to the approach we used to analyze the polls.



Outliers

We didn't identify and disregard any "outliers" as part of our analysis. In particular, a poll from early 2022 may have shifted the final result far beyond that in other time periods. However, making the determination that some polls are outliers and disregarding them may introduce bias in itself.



Uneven time periods

Some years simply did not have as many polls to work with as others. As a result, in 2015, 2020, and 2023, all of the years' polls were combined into one result, despite the others being combined on a half-year basis. These results are therefore slightly less reliable than the others, and may not capture changes in viewpoints that took place within the year.



Limited demographic data

The demographic breakdowns from different pollsters don't always match up. For example, YouGov's polling uses four categories for race (those included plus "Other"), while other polls and consequently our analysis keep it to three: black/African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, and white.

However, despite these limitations, the analysis offers results that are more robust than individual data points and gives a much clearer picture of overall support.

Data Availability

The full dataset from the analysis is available in [this spreadsheet](#).

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About the Authors



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Lee Johnson is the senior editor at CBD Oracle and has been covering science, vaping, and cannabis for over 10 years. He has a Master of Science in Theoretical Physics from Uppsala University. At CBD Oracle, he focuses on research-driven deep dives into topics ranging from medical uses for cannabis to industry and user statistics, as well as general guides and explainers for consumers.



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