

ABSTRACT

The Politics of Pot: Marijuana Use and the Potential for Collective Action

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Marijuana and its legal status occupy a lengthy and controversial place in United States history. Penalties for marijuana use and distribution have increased in severity alongside the number of individuals who annually consume the drug. This has spurred skepticism regarding the effectiveness of prohibitive drug policy, especially when considering the harsh consequences that penalties place on individuals. To the dismay of the federal government, skepticism has manifested into political action by American state governments that have begun legalizing marijuana use for medicinal and recreational purposes. Using nationally representative data from the Baylor Religion Survey, I find marijuana users are more likely to publicly protest as well as attend political rallies than those who abstain from using. These findings hold true for public protest when separating the sample by political party identification. However, political rally attendance only shows significant relationships for marijuana users who describe themselves as politically independent.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since the early 1900's, the prohibition of marijuana has effectively criminalized American citizens who possess, distribute and consume the drug for recreational and medicinal use. However, within this 100-year span, a significant amount of societal change has produced a world that would be unimaginable to those who established the initial laws prohibiting American citizens from using marijuana. This change has led to an environment where identifying as a marijuana user has become much less stigmatized than in previous decades. A number of reasons, such as the overall increase in societal use, media normalization of this increased use and the emerging medical benefits of the drug are contributing to this change in attitude regarding marijuana in America. These components, as well as others, portray marijuana in a different light than the United States federal laws that view marijuana as one of the most dangerous illicit drugs with a high potential for abuse and no accepted medicinal use.

Because of the divergent views between public opinion and the federal government, legislative reform has begun at the state level. Medicinal use was first legalized in 1996 by California while Colorado was first to legalize recreational use in 2012. With 32 states now having legalized either medicinal, recreational (or both) use of marijuana, it is safe to say that a movement is underway in the United States regarding the way citizens believe marijuana should be treated by government. Research on social movements shows individuals who are attached to groups with outstanding societal grievances are most likely to participate in collective political action on behalf of those

groups – be it in the form of public protest, political rally attendance, or voting for reform that supports a movement. The findings in this study help support past research by showing that marijuana users are more likely than those who abstain to attend public protests and political rallies. These results are maintained even when dividing the sample by political party allegiance, showing that Republican, Democratic and Independent voters who use marijuana feel similarly about participating in public protests. Independent marijuana users, however, are the only sub-group who are more likely to attend political rallies.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review, Theory, and Hypotheses

Predictors of Collective Political Action

Why individuals and groups are motivated to protest certain social phenomena (to the extreme end of sacrificing life) has been a question driving social science research for the past half century. Tilly (1978) and others (Jenkins & Perrow 1977; Oberschall 1978a) argue that grievances which propel groups to collective action remain relatively constant and develop out of structural conflicts of interest built into social institutions. Movements form in response to these conditions due to gradual, long-term changes in group resources, organization, and opportunity for collective action. A related set of political explanations shifts focus to democratization and state capacity. Researchers argue that democracy and less centralized states should open opportunities for protest (Gurr 1989a; Tilly 1978, 2004). Others claim that strong, centralized states also have the ability to encourage protest by providing a concentrated oppositional target while also promoting the perception that they can adequately respond to the demands of protesters (Tarrow 1998; Tilly & Tarrow 2007). To some (e.g. Porta and Mattoni 1999; Kriesi 1995; Wilson 1990), a critical factor is the prevailing control strategy of elites. Where elites adopt an exclusionary strategy toward civil groups, protest is likely to be greater in these groups who are actively excluded (Kriesi 1995). Such circumstances are not to be considered mutually exclusive – structural characteristics commonly intersect to create environments ripe for protest.

Underlying this research is the theory of self-identity that assumes individuals in society strive for a positive self-evaluation from others around them (Turner & Onorato 1999). This self-evaluation concerns two components: personal and social identities. Personal identity refers to self-definition in terms of personal attributes, whereas social identity refers to self-definition in terms of social group memberships. As with personal identity, individuals also strive for and benefit from positive social identities associated with the groups they belong to (Van Steklenburg & Klandermans 2013). Microanalyses of the individuals, the groups to which they belong and the political attitudes that contribute to protest have dominated much of contemporary social movement research (Barnes & Kaase 1979; Crozat 1998; Klandermans 2002; Offe 1985; Martinez 2005; McAdam & Paulsen 1993; Nepstad 2006; Norris 1999). The standard view is that individuals driven to protest are those that benefit the least from existing social structures and seek to improve their status. However, an extensive amount of research on social movements and protest has been unable to concretely establish a correlation between individual levels of grievance and the propensity to protest (Gurney & Tierney, 1982; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; Useem, 1980).

Throughout this research, collective identity and political participation are correlated – showing that attachment to a group is a powerful reason to protest on behalf of it, be it with women or workers (Kelly & Breinlinger 1995; Kelly and Kelly 1994), the elderly or gay (Stürmer & Simon 2004a, 2004b; Stürmer et al. 2003), farmers (Weerd & Klandermans 1999; Klandermans, Sabucedo, & Rodriguez 2004) former East Germans (Mummendey et al. 1999) or feminists (Liss, Crawford, & Popp 2004). It is through these microsocial processes that individuals and the groups they belong to develop their self-

identity while existing in the macrosocial world where structural conflicts create a demand for group action (Tajfel 1978).

These groups are driven to collective action due to the power struggles produced within the aforementioned political contexts that act in combination with economic and cultural macrosocial factors as well (Jenkins, Wallace & Fullerton 2008). Inequality experienced by group members within these struggles produces a collective feeling of deprivation when comparing their group's position to others (Folger 1986). This perceived deprivation evokes a shared grievance amongst group members which propels collective action in order to be seen in a positive light by the larger society. Furthermore, political solidarity with members from a high-status group may prove to have the strongest effects on actionable protest by groups (Subasic et al. 2008). This solidarity is achieved once members of high-status groups recognize the efficacy of the culture that lower status group members promote as being who they are and how they should be related to. Additionally, high status group members may perceive their group identity as being threatened as wider acceptance of these values, beliefs and norms grows and begins to give the lower status group a new-found sense of power (Van Steklenburg et al. 2010). This solidifies support from high status members which in turn gives the lower group a sense of confidence in their ideas and organization as a social force.

The Marijuana Movement

Federal legislative action regarding marijuana began in the 1930's due to overt racial exclusionism and historical white ethno-centrism that created the initial, state-level laws prohibiting marijuana use in the American south and southwest (Gerber 2004). Backed by propaganda efforts such as the 'Reefer Madness' movement, marijuana

quickly became stigmatized - albeit inconsistently - as some state governments warned of its potential to drive individuals to violent fits of rage while others warned of its ability to turn hardworking citizens into lazy no-good doers (Kinder 1981). Regardless, the public was persuaded and a culture of demonization surrounding the drug spread just as quickly as the laws that prohibited it. Furthermore, corporate lobbying played a large, lesser known role in criminalizing marijuana due to the hemp plant's utility in creating products that rivaled traditionally profitable goods (Gerber 2004). Companies from a variety of industries contributed to political campaigns which helped buy legislative votes as well as the creation of government programs that actively warned against the dangers of marijuana use and drug use, more generally.

Throughout the mid-20th century, strict uniform penalties such as mandatory minimum sentencing policies were implemented over time at both the federal and state levels (Bonnie & Whitebread, 1974). Despite these harsher sanctions, recreational marijuana use not only continued but increased throughout the 1960's (Choi & DiNitto 2011). In 1970, the Controlled Substances Act classified marijuana as a Schedule 1 drug, meaning that it was considered to have a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical utility (Wadsworth, Moss, Simpson, & Smith 2004). Efforts to relax this "War on Drugs," such as rescheduling marijuana for medical research, have proven unsuccessful over time. Failure to alleviate these penalties has created an environment where mass incarceration has become a significant social problem for the United States of America. During the past three decades, the American prison population has exploded from around 300,000 inmates to well over 2 million (Tonry 1995). Even more astounding than this rate of growth is the way these policies have disproportionately affected

African-American communities (Mauer & King 2004). These incarceration trends are not due to any changes within the nature of crime in America, signifying that this shift in drug policy has been a resounding driver of the increase in prison population (Mauer 2001). Furthermore, the rate of imprisonment for all racial categories has spiked since the early 1980's when some of the most stringent punishment for drug related crimes were introduced – meanwhile, the national crime rate has steadily declined over this time (Alexander 2011).

A growing acceptance of marijuana usage (even by those who abstain from its use) has been steady since the early 1990's with 32 states having legalized it for medicinal or recreational purposes (Pew Research 2018a). Furthermore, it is estimated that nearly 18.1 million Americans use marijuana on an annual basis which the National Institute on Drug Abuse attributes to ease of access and the less detrimental effects users experience in comparison to other drugs (Patton et al. 2007). And while this figure represents roughly 1/6 of the American adult population, it has been difficult for researchers to pinpoint the exact demographic cross-sections of America that are using the drug due to the harsh criminal penalties connected to its usage and the resulting cultural stigma of being labeled a criminal user (Ferrell & Hamm 1998).

The popularity of marijuana legalization is at an all-time high (Pew Research 2018a). However, harsh marijuana laws are upheld by modern day lobbying efforts from private prison corporations, unions representing law enforcement agencies and other industries that benefit from the construction and maintenance of prison systems (Volokh 2007). Even though wider acceptance of its use has grown substantially, these efforts to keep marijuana illegal helps maintain a cyclical stigma of criminality towards its users

(Hathaway, Comeau, Erickson 2011). In his groundbreaking study of “outsiders” or social deviants, Becker (1963) presented the concept of “secret deviance”. Through the realization that they can keep their marijuana use a secret to a broader society that does not accept their habit, most marijuana users succeed in avoiding the pervasive stigma associated with it (Becker 1963). Becker points out that most users could be ‘others’ that individuals unknowingly encounter on a day to day basis. More recent ethnographic research on the daily lives of marijuana users confirms how crucial keeping one’s marijuana-using identity secret is due to the stigma that has historically been attached with being a user that could have repercussions in multiple arenas of a person’s social life (Boylstein 2010).

The extensive structural prohibition of marijuana and the accompanying stigmatization of its use has made studying the societal effects of marijuana use difficult (Oegema & Klandermans 1994; Klandermans 2004). Users are less likely to admit to using because of the consequences it will have on the way their other identities are perceived by others. However, a handful of studies exist that draw correlations between marijuana use, radical political leanings of users and an overall rejection of the current social system (Knight, Sheposh & Bryson 1974). This signifies marijuana usage as a socio-political issue that occupies a polarizing place in society. Over time, a gradual shift in culture has resulted in an organization of resources that has allowed the legal status of marijuana to enter the realm of thorny issues within mainstream American politics, growing in salience with each passing election cycle the country participates in. This shift in time has also had resounding effects on the ways American citizens view marijuana, even those who do not use the drug (Schwadel & Ellison 2017).

In the 1960's, a normalization process surrounding marijuana began due to the increase in overall societal usage as well as the way media representations have helped engrain this use into everyday American culture (Hathaway & Erickson 2004). Wildly popular magazines, television shows and movies portray marijuana in a positive light while casting doubt on the authority figures that abhor its use. Furthermore, since the mid-1990s, the Internet has offered marijuana users virtual communities to gather anonymously and discuss their lifestyles. While no specific research has been conducted on the marijuana movement and the Internet, the potential for its utility can be seen in other areas of political life where research has shown that the Internet can be a valuable resource in organizing individuals who have no other means of contacting one another for collective action towards social justice (Davis, Elin & Reeher 2002). A quote from this research details the power of the Internet in supplementing those who have no voice: "The Internet is the tool of the non-establishment that will change the political power structure. The Internet is a medium of a conspiracy, a medium of people not heard. It is profoundly disruptive. It asks you to talk back." In other words, the Internet gives individuals the ability to take a stand where no stand of the kind was available in past eras.

As state governments continue to pass legislation that ease penalties for marijuana possession and consumption, more research is needed to inform federal policy where marijuana is still classified as one of the most dangerous narcotics (Ferraiolo 2009). Otherwise, as noted by the sustained growth in public support for marijuana, the structural grievance described in previous paragraphs will only continue to grow. With support for marijuana legalization at an all-time high, a burgeoning assistance from

powerful elites in politics, business and culture is helping lay the structural foundation for marijuana's legal entrance into the American economy (Kaplan 2017). However, achieving full normalization within the American marketplace and political life has not yet materialized.

Hypotheses

The cultural conditions presented here show why the time is ripe for collective political action by marijuana users. An opportunity for dissemination, discussion and demonstration of information regarding marijuana and its use has never been more welcome or supported by American society. From this reasoning, I hypothesize:

H₁: Marijuana users will be more likely to publicly protest or demonstrate than those who abstain from its use.

H₂: Marijuana users will be more likely to attend political rallies or meetings than those who abstain from its use.

CHAPTER THREE

Data and Methods

In order to evaluate my hypotheses, I utilize data from Wave 4 of the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS IV). This address based survey sampled households in the 48 contiguous states and was conducted in January 2014 by the Gallup Organization on behalf of Baylor University. The final sample totaled 1,572 respondents. To assess how well the BRS IV compares to the general population, Froese and Mencken (2017) compare the BRS IV to the 2014 General Social Survey on comparable measures. Demographically, the two surveys are very similar. The mean ages in the 2014 GSS and BRS IV are 46 and 45 respectively; females comprise 53% of the BRS IV and 53.8% of the GSS 2014 respectively; 18% of the GSS 2014 hold a BA degree, compared to 18.1% of the BRS IV; 45.7% of the respondents in the GSS 2014 are currently married, 26.6% are single/never married, compared to 47.1% currently married and 24.5% single/never married in the BRS IV. The BRS and GSS compare favorably among very conservative respondents and liberal respondents. The BRS has a higher proportion of ‘conservative’ respondents (21.6% vs 14.6%) and slightly fewer self-identified moderates (34.3% vs. 40.4%).

Dependent Variables

In order to gauge the willingness of marijuana users to participate in collective political action, I utilize the two questions the BRS provides to respondents asking about political rally attendance and public protest attendance in the year prior to the 2012

election cycle. The questions are both provided as binary options that read as follows: *In the year leading up to the 2012 presidential election, did you A) attend a political rally or meeting? B) participate in a public protest or demonstration?* Respondents are given the options of answering (1)=yes and (2)= no. In order to analyze these variables in a more intuitive manner using logistic regression, I recoded (0)= no while the choice for yes remained coded as (1).

Independent Variables

The most pertinent independent variable within this analysis is the frequency of marijuana use by respondents which is named *marijuanause*. The question regarding marijuana use was developed as a 7-item scale that asks: *On how many occasions (if any) have you used marijuana (weed, pot) or hashish (hash, hash oil) during the last 40 days?* The respondents were given the following options as valid responses: (0) = none, (1)= 1-2 times, (2)= 3-5 (3)= 6-9 (4)= 10-19, (5)= 20-39 (6)= 40 or more.

Additionally, I created a dummy variable from this question that gauges the amount of times respondents used marijuana in the 40 days prior to the survey. The dummy variable I created was named *Marijuanauser* and takes all the people who answered yes to using marijuana, regardless of frequency, and collapsed their answers together into the category coded (1) for my dummy variable. Those respondents who marked as abstaining from the use of marijuana in the previous 40 days were relegated to the (0) category.

Control Variables

My analyses control for standard demographic categories as well as variables that take into account the political ideology of the respondents. Standard control variables included in the analysis are: age (in years); sex (female=1), race/ethnicity (white=1), education (range 1–7 with 1=8th grade or less and 7=postgraduate work/degree), and income (range 1–7 with 1=\$10,000 or less and 7=\$150,001 or more).

The controls that consider political ideology come from the question that asked respondents: *How would you describe yourself politically?* This question was presented as a 7-item scale where the options provided read: (1) = Extremely conservative, (2) = Conservative, (3) = Leaning conservative, (4)= Moderate, (5)= Leaning liberal, (6)= Liberal, (7)= Extremely liberal. In order to analyze collective action by political party affiliation, I created dummy variables from the question that asks *Do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?*

Furthermore, general attitudes towards government were taken into account. The BRS includes questions that measure respondent attitudes towards government that were included as a set of controls. The first question reads: *Do you think it is ever justified for citizens to take violent action against the government, or is it never justified?* The respondents are provided with two answer choices - (1)=Justified and (2)= Never justified. For the purposes of these analyses, the variable was recoded and answers are now represented as (0)= Never justified and (1)= Justified. The second question reads: *Do you think that you can trust the federal government in Washington, DC to do what is right?* Respondents are prompted with the following choices: (1)=Just about always (2)=Most of the time (3)=Only some of the time (4)=Never. The final question reads:

Some people think that the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses. Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country's problems. Still, others have opinions somewhere in between. Which one of the following statements best applies to you? Respondents have the option of selecting either: (1)=Government should do more (2)=Government does too much.

Geography was controlled for by clustering states into a dummy variable that accounted for whether the respondent lived in a state with either legalized recreational marijuana, medical marijuana or both. This variable was named *legalpot*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Frequency of marijuana use by respondents in Table 1 is presented below. The distribution of use within the sample reports a fairly normal distribution with negative kurtosis as the extreme tails of the bell curve are represented by a similar number of users while the middle categories see a lower rate of response in comparison. I then report a series of logistic regression models that predict the likelihood of individuals in the sample to publicly protest as well as attend political rallies/meetings. The initial regression model does not divide the sample by political affiliation; it simply looks at the entire sample of respondents and how general marijuana use affects public protest and political rally attendance. However, after finding intriguing results from this model, the decision to further segment the remaining models by political affiliation was made.

Table 1

Frequency of Marijuana Use in Prior 40 Days in BRS IV Data

# of times used	Frequency	Percent
0	1,423	91.39
1-2	33	2.12
3-5	19	1.22
6-9	12	.77
10-19	13	.83
20-39	28	1.80
40 +	29	1.86
Total	1,557	100.00

Table 2 displays estimated odds ratios from four logistic regression models predicting the effect marijuana use has on the likelihood of a respondent to participate in public protest. The first model controls for standard demographic variables whereas model two, three and four include all control variables that pertain to the general views of government, political ideology and legal status of marijuana by geography. Marijuana users report a highly significant relationship in Model 1, which suggests that those who responded yes to using marijuana in the past month have a much higher likelihood of participation in public protest. Model 2 displays similar findings when adding in the controls that report respondent political ideology and views of government. However, Models 2, 3, and 4 have been constructed separately. Each one accounts for a different cross-section of political party affiliation – Model 2 considers Democrats, Model 3 considers Republicans while Model 4 considers political independents. Furthermore, these models take into account all the controls that are considered within this study.

Within Model 2, which accounts for the Democrats in my sample, the only control that reports any type of significant relationship to my dependent variable is *conlib*, which considers the political ideology respondents adhere to – either conservative or liberal. The odds ratio reports that as respondents become more liberal in their ideology, they are more likely to protest. Democratic marijuana users report a 181 % higher likelihood in attending a public a protest than those who do not. Likewise, the findings for Republican marijuana users are equally as significant with respondents reporting a 577 % higher likelihood in attending a public protest than those who abstain from usage. Other variables that report significant relationships in Model 3 are those who trust the government being 67% less likely to attend a public protest.

Table 2

Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Models Predicting Public Protest Participation

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographic Effects				
age	1.01	1.02	1.00	1.01
education	1.26*	1.03	1.44	1.50
female	.96	1.05	.97	.61
black	1.74	1.37	22.01	11.39*
married	.57+	.64	1.11	.67
alcohol	1.05	1.04	.91	1.24
income	.84	.85	1.43	.50
Political Effects				
govtoomuch		.43	.24	1.69
violencegovernment		.63	.37	.26+
trustgov		1.62	.33+	.64
conlib		1.62*	.76	1.46
Marijuana Use Effects				
marijuanauser	1.27**	2.81*	6.77*	4.29**
Geographical Effects				
legalpot		.82	1.68	1.40
Model Fit Statistics				
- 2 log likelihood	-235.59	-96.66	-46.26	-46.19
Pseudo R-square	.04	.12	.20	.26
N	1,413	543	423	368

Notes: + p < .10 *p < .05 p** < .01 ***p < .001

The findings for those who describe themselves as being politically independent reveal the most telling results of the three sub-sections represented in my models. These respondents have a 329% higher likelihood of attending a public protest than abstainers and they also report a more significant relationship than marijuana using Republicans and Democrats. Likewise, black respondents in model 4 also report a significant relationship towards publicly protesting while those who see violence against the government are 74% less likely to attend a public protest.

Table 3

Odds Ratios Predicting the Likelihood of Political Rally Participation

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographic Effects				
age	1.01**	1.02*	1.02*	1.01
education	1.12+	1.08	1.32	1.07
female	.75	.85	.68	.73
black	1.78*	1.30	8.56	3.37*
married	.65*	.54*	1.27	.42*
alcohol	1.00	1.11	.73	1.15
income	1.11	1.27	.73	1.22
Political Effects				
govtoomuch		.40*	.26*	1.16
violencegovernment		1.11	.46*	.59
trustgov		1.27	.84	1.05
conlib		1.18	.48***	.85
Marijuana Use Effects				
marijuanauser	1.18**	1.36	3.14	3.09**
Geographic Effects				
legalpot		.94	.87	1.02
Model Fit Statistics				
- 2 log likelihood	-493.67	-197.08	-124.71	-116.03
Pseudo R-square	.03	.08	.14	.10
N	1,412	543	423	367

Notes: + p < .10 *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Table 3 reports odds ratios from four logistic regression models predicting the effect marijuana use has on the likelihood of a respondent to attend political rallies. Models are treated the same as those in Table 2, with Model 1 containing only the standard demographic control variables and only testing for general marijuana use without dividing by political party affiliation. Again, Model 2 considers the Democratic respondents, Model 3 considers Republican respondents while Model 4 considers political independents.

As with my analysis regarding public protest, Independent respondents report similar findings when it comes to attending political rallies. The marijuana users who do not ascribe themselves to a political party report a 209% higher likelihood of attending a political rally. Black respondents within this model also report a significant odds ratio that signifies a 237% higher likelihood of attending a political rally. Likewise, those who report being married have a 58% lower likelihood of attending rallies. On the other hand, however, both Democratic and Republican marijuana users both show no propensity towards participating in political rallies. Furthermore, the only control variable that shows a greater likelihood towards rally attendance within Models 2 and 3 is that of age. Those who feel the government is doing too much and those who feel violence against the government is justified report highly significant odds ratios that indicate they are less likely to attend a rally. As with Model 4, those respondents who reported being married reported a moderately significant relationship in being less likely to attend a political rally.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

The results presented here clearly indicate that marijuana users feel compelled to participate in collective political action at a much more significant rate than individuals who abstain from using the drug. Both of the dependent variables show strong relationships pertaining to the likelihood of marijuana users to publicly protest and attend political rallies. These findings hold true when controlling for political ideology and general views of government as well as standard demographic variables. Furthermore, these findings are maintained when separating the sample and running regression models by political party identification. Marijuana users from all three party affiliations are significantly more likely to publicly protest, with political independents having the strongest likelihood. This suggests that legalization of marijuana use in America pervades party lines.

More than 1/6 of American adults now admit to annually using marijuana; and there is evidence that marijuana usage does not produce the same adverse public health effects as alcohol and other narcotics (Newcombe et al. 1992). Despite this, laws pertaining to marijuana only have gotten stricter over time. Along with its illegality, stigma regarding marijuana use remains. But growing public tolerance of use has brought about the opportunity for marijuana users to be more forthright about their usage and also more likely to be politically active. My findings show that marijuana users are taking advantage of this opportunity to advance a movement that is legalizing marijuana at state levels at extraordinary rates. This collective action signifies a shift in resources that has

allowed marijuana using individuals to begin shedding the stigma of being someone who partakes in a deviant culture and is looked down upon by much of society for it.

For the longest time, marijuana users have not only been stigmatized in a cultural sense but also pushed aside within the realm of American politics. No major American politician has ever had significant success using the idea of marijuana legalization as a platform, nor has a party with significant political clout ever advocated for it as a collective cause. This helps explain why Democratic and Republican users of the marijuana report no significant relationship to rally attendance, while Independent users do. However, Republicans and Democrats do maintain similar relationships to attending public protests.

This points to a fundamental difference between a political rally and public protest participation. A political rally expresses support for political candidates or a political party that are attempting to bring about societal change through traditional, institutional processes. While individuals publicly protest for issues that also receive structural support from politicians and their parties, the most recent movements highlighted by public protest (i.e. Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ rights, Occupy, the Tea Party movement) were mostly comprised of those who felt they were being left out of the current system. Instead of looking for institutional support, those who protest look to one another to build a movement that will gain the attention of the public. Perhaps this is why Republicans and Democrats who use marijuana are less likely to attend political rallies. Due to the lack of traditional political support for marijuana legalization on either side of the aisle, Democratic and Republican voters who use marijuana are not as inclined

to fervently support candidates and parties that don't represent a cause that would serve their personal interests. Instead, they take to the streets in the form of public protest.

Future research could improve the analysis of these relationships presented in this study by gathering a larger group of marijuana users within a sample. Furthermore, I am only able to show these relationships while theorizing broadly about causes. Future research could offer insights into the reasons behind these marijuana users feel drawn to political action; sadly, the BRS does not gauge respondents' views on the legalization of marijuana use.

The tide of legalization at state levels of government gives further support for the idea that a cultural shift is taking place and why users would be more likely to be politically active. Since 2008, every political election cycle has seen at least one state government legalize either recreational or medicinal marijuana usage. This trend makes marijuana an unavoidable topic in the future of American politics, as it has gained the national spotlight and only gains exposure as time progresses. In the 2016 presidential election, Bernie Sanders narrowly lost the Democratic party's nomination for president while including the idea of federal legalization as one of his primary platform items. This was the first time in American history that a potential presidential candidate had such success running on the platform of legalizing marijuana across the board. Meanwhile, the "third-party" candidates representing the Libertarian and Green Parties for president both ran on platforms that included plans to legalize marijuana at a federal level as well.

In the 1960's, marijuana began a significant normalization process that has only grown throughout the subsequent decades and continues to this day. Media portrayal has been the resounding driver of this normalization due to a subculture within the American

entertainment industry that profits handsomely off the portrayals of marijuana and its use. Furthermore, the Internet offers marijuana users anonymous online communities such as *Reddit.com* where the page devoted to marijuana use (/r/trees) is the 67th most popular forum on a website with more than 5,000 active, niche communities. Other social media avenues such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* all house accounts whose sole purpose is to promote marijuana culture and the legalization of such behavior. People within these mediums come from all walks of life to be heard from regarding the ways in which they use marijuana. It represents a marked change in how marijuana is publicly discussed.

A 100 year “war” is still raging between the United States federal government and its citizens that use marijuana. The repercussions of prohibition and the penalties attributed to it have had an alarming and eye-opening effect on multiple factions of American society over time. Meanwhile, little has been done from a research standpoint to understand who uses this drug and how it affects them in their day to day lives. With continued efforts by the United States federal government to stifle legalization progress at lower levels of government, further research regarding the individual and societal effects of marijuana are needed more than ever to inform a peculiar discrepancy in policy that has the ability to affect a significant number of American citizens.

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