

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

Field Research Corporation
222 Sutter Street, Suite 700
San Francisco, CA 94108-4411
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com
www.field.com/fieldpollonline

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**STRONG SUPPORT FOR
IMPLEMENTATION OF PROP. 215, THE
STATE'S MEDICAL MARIJUANA LAW.
CALIFORNIANS' ATTITUDES ABOUT THE
DRUG HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

There is now greater voter support for allowing the medical use of marijuana than there was when California voters first approved the groundbreaking law eight years ago.

In 1996 a 56% majority of this state's voters passed Proposition 215, the medical marijuana initiative, which exempts from state criminal laws patients or caregivers who possess or cultivate marijuana for medical use when prescribed by a doctor. However, implementation of Prop. 215 has bogged down or been blocked by numerous obstacles raised by federal, state or local authorities.

In a survey completed earlier this month, *The Field Poll* finds that three in four voters (74%) favors implementation of the law.

Voter support for the implementation of Prop. 215 cuts across all partisan, ideological and age subgroups of the state.

Table 1
Do you favor or oppose implementation of Proposition 215,
to allow for the medical use of marijuana in California?
(among registered voters)

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Statewide	74%	24	2
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	83%	16	1
Republicans	63%	33	4
Non-partisans/others	73%	27	*
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	53%	44	3
Middle-of-the-road	78%	21	1
Liberal	92%	6	2
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 29	76%	24	*
30 – 39	79%	19	2
40 – 49	77%	21	2
50 – 64	77%	22	1
65 or older	59%	39	2

* Less than ½ of 1%.

Comparing marijuana use to the consumption of alcohol

Underlying voters' current strong support for the medical marijuana law are some rather profound changes in the attitudes that Californians have about the drug. For example, back in 1969 *The Field Poll* found that only 16% of this state's residents agreed that the use of marijuana was no more dangerous than the use of alcohol, while 75% disagreed. Now, half of the voting public (50%) believes that marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol, while slightly fewer (46%) disagree.

Attitudes about the perceived dangers of marijuana use are directly related to whether a voter admits to having ever smoked marijuana before. Among those who have (which includes about half – 49% – of all voters), 63% feel that the use of marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol. On the other hand, of those who say they have never used the drug, just 37% feel this way.

Table 2
Agree/disagree: “The use of marijuana is no more dangerous than the use of alcohol.”
(among registered voters)

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Statewide</u>			
2004	50%	46	4
1983	44%	52	4
1969	16%	75	9
<u>Usage (2004)</u>			
Have smoked marijuana	63%	34	3
Never smoked marijuana	37%	59	4

Note: In this and all succeeding tables in this report, previous surveys were conducted among all adults.

Does marijuana use lead to more dangerous drugs?

The belief that marijuana leads a person to use more dangerous drugs has also declined over time. In 1969, 83% of the California public supported the view that marijuana leads a person to use more dangerous drugs. Now, opinions are more divided, with 52% saying it does and 45% maintaining that it does not.

Opinions are related to one's past use of marijuana, as well as to a voter's level of education. Majorities of those who have smoked marijuana in the past or who are college graduates disagree that marijuana leads to the use of more dangerous drugs. By contrast, majorities of those who have never smoked marijuana or who have not graduated from college feel that it does lead a person to other, more dangerous drugs.

Table 3			
Agree/disagree: “While marijuana may not be more dangerous than alcohol, its use leads a person to more dangerous drugs.”			
(among registered voters)			
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Statewide</u>			
2004	52%	45	3
1983	58%	39	3
1969	83%	12	5
<u>Usage (2004)</u>			
Have smoked marijuana	39%	59	2
Never smoked marijuana	66%	30	4
<u>Education (2004)</u>			
High school or less	61%	37	2
Some college/trade school	62%	35	3
College graduate	41%	56	3
Post graduate work	38%	56	6

Some reservations about marijuana still exist

Californians’ support for the medical use of marijuana has not eliminated some long-held reservations about the use of the drug in non-medical situations.

For example, in 1983, 65% of Californians agreed that the use of marijuana can make a person lose control of what he or she is doing. The current survey finds that a large majority of Californians (58%) still hold to this view.

Three-fourths (77%) of those who have never smoked marijuana agree that the drug can result in a person losing control, compared to only 40% of the past marijuana smokers who believe this is the case.

Table 4			
Agree/disagree: “Marijuana is a dangerous drug that can make a person lose control of what he or she is doing.”			
(among registered voters)			
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Statewide</u>			
2004	58%	39	3
1983	65%	31	4
<u>Usage (2004)</u>			
Have smoked marijuana	40%	56	4
Never smoked marijuana	77%	19	4

Note: question not asked in 1969.

Legalize marijuana?

By a five to three margin (56% to 39%), California voters disapprove of the idea of legalizing marijuana and selling it like alcohol or tobacco, so that it can be taxed to generate needed tax moneys for the state.

These findings are not a great deal different from opinions held in 1983, when this idea was opposed by a 64% to 35% margin.

Table 5			
Agree/disagree: “Marijuana should be legalized and sold like alcohol or tobacco, so it can be taxed to generate needed tax monies for the state.”			
(among registered voters)			
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Statewide</u>			
2004	39%	56	5
1983	35%	64	1
<u>Usage (2004)</u>			
Have smoked marijuana	52%	44	4
Never smoked marijuana	27%	69	4
<u>Political ideology (2004)</u>			
Conservative	22%	75	3
Middle-of-the-road	43%	52	5
Liberal	54%	41	5

Note: question not asked in 1969.

Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a telephone survey conducted January 5-13, 2004 in English and Spanish among a random sample of 500 registered voters in California.

Sampling was completed by means of random digit dialing, which selects telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California in proportion to population. Within each exchange a random sample of telephone numbers was created by adding random digits to the telephone exchange selected, permitting access to both listed and unlisted telephones. Up to five attempts was made to reach a randomly selected voter at each number dialed. After the completion of interviewing, the sample was adjusted slightly to Field Poll estimates of the state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, results from the overall sample of registered voters have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

There are other possible sources of error in any survey in addition to sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through omissions or errors in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

I am going to read some statements that have been made about marijuana. For each, please tell me whether you agree or disagree. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER.) (SEE RELEASE FOR STATEMENTS READ)

As you may recall in November 1996, California voters approved Proposition 215, the medical marijuana initiative, which exempted from state criminal laws patients or caregivers who possessed or cultivated marijuana for medical use when prescribed by a doctor. Do you favor or oppose the implementation of Prop. 215 to allow for the medical use of marijuana in California?