

# AMERICAN VALUES AND BELIEFS ABOUT MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

What do American adults think about who should create marijuana policy, and who should benefit from marijuana legalization?

This study was created and conducted by Parabola Center for Law and Policy, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank, in collaboration with RTI International, an independent nonprofit research institute. The research was overseen by Jane Allen, a senior scientist in the Center for Communication and Media Impact at RTI International.



## SUMMARY

To date, marijuana has been legalized for adult use in 24 states, and advocates are continuing to push for legalization nationwide. Before federal legalization occurs, it is important to preemptively examine who will benefit from marijuana legalization and what policies will need to be put in place to ensure equitable access to marijuana and equitable distribution of profits from the marijuana industry. In the context of the cannabis industry, equity means support for individuals and communities who have been harmed by cannabis criminalization and the War on Drugs.

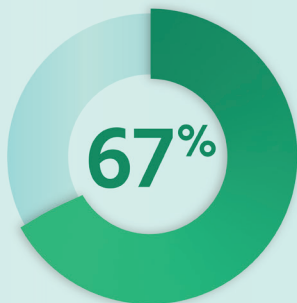
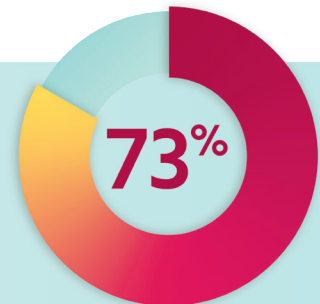
Good marijuana policies will protect public health, promote economic justice, and prevent exploitation of workers in the cannabis industry. These policies will recognize that some communities, particularly communities of color, have been disproportionately harmed by the War on Drugs and aim to repair that harm through social and economic means. Good policies will also prevent large, private businesses from exerting too much influence on a burgeoning industry.

Historically, policies championed by large businesses including the tobacco, alcohol, and pharmaceutical industries have led to large profits for those industries, pushed out small business owners, and negatively impacted vulnerable communities. These industries, along with others with financial interests, are trying to exert influence on upcoming policy changes.

This study, to our knowledge the first of its kind, documents the beliefs that American adults hold about who should benefit from marijuana legalization and who they trust to create good, equitable cannabis policy.

We conducted a survey of adults across America in the fall of 2023. This is what we learned.

**73% — American adults who think cannabis legalization should benefit workers in the cannabis industry**



**67% — American adults who trust people with lived experience to create good cannabis policy**

## WHO AMERICANS TRUST TO CREATE GOOD CANNABIS POLICY

- Among American adults, the majority trust people with lived experience to create good marijuana policy.
- More than half of Americans also trust people who use marijuana and people who are working for social equity to create good cannabis policy.
- American adults are less likely to trust the federal government, tobacco industry executives, pharmaceutical industry executives, or alcohol industry executives to make good marijuana policy.

## WHEN IT COMES TO CREATING GOOD CANNABIS POLICY, I TRUST...



## POLICY VALUES

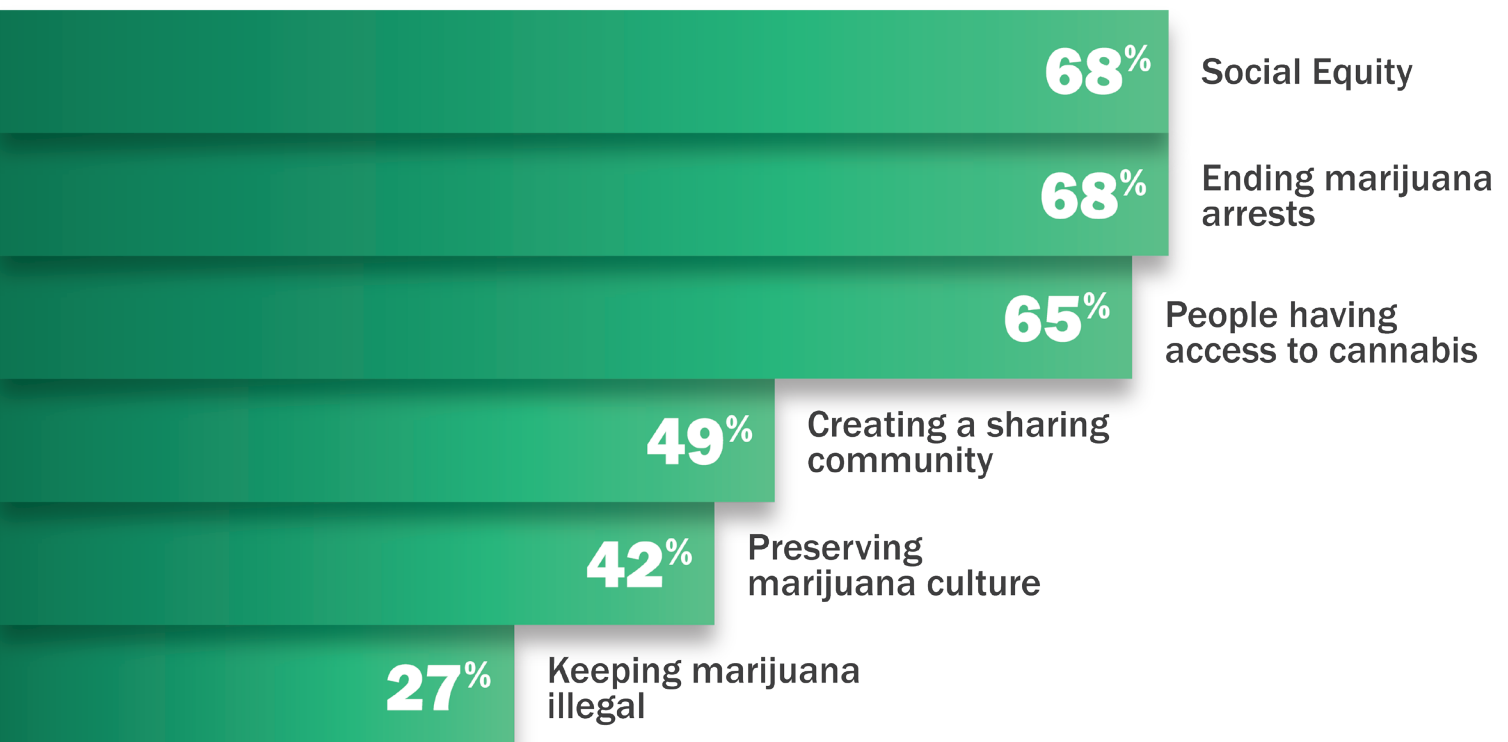
When it comes to cannabis policy, social equity is one of the most important considerations for American adults. In the survey, social equity was defined as, “the idea that we should try to repair some of the harm caused by past enforcement of marijuana laws.”

American adults also care about ending marijuana arrests and people having access to marijuana.

### STAY TUNED...

In a future publication, we will share experimental findings that show public education about cannabis policy is a promising tool to promote policies that benefit small businesses and people who use cannabis. A separate set of participants who saw educational videos had greater agreement that when it comes to cannabis policy, they care about creating a sharing community.

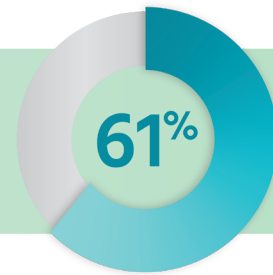
## WHEN IT COMES TO CANNABIS POLICY, I CARE ABOUT...



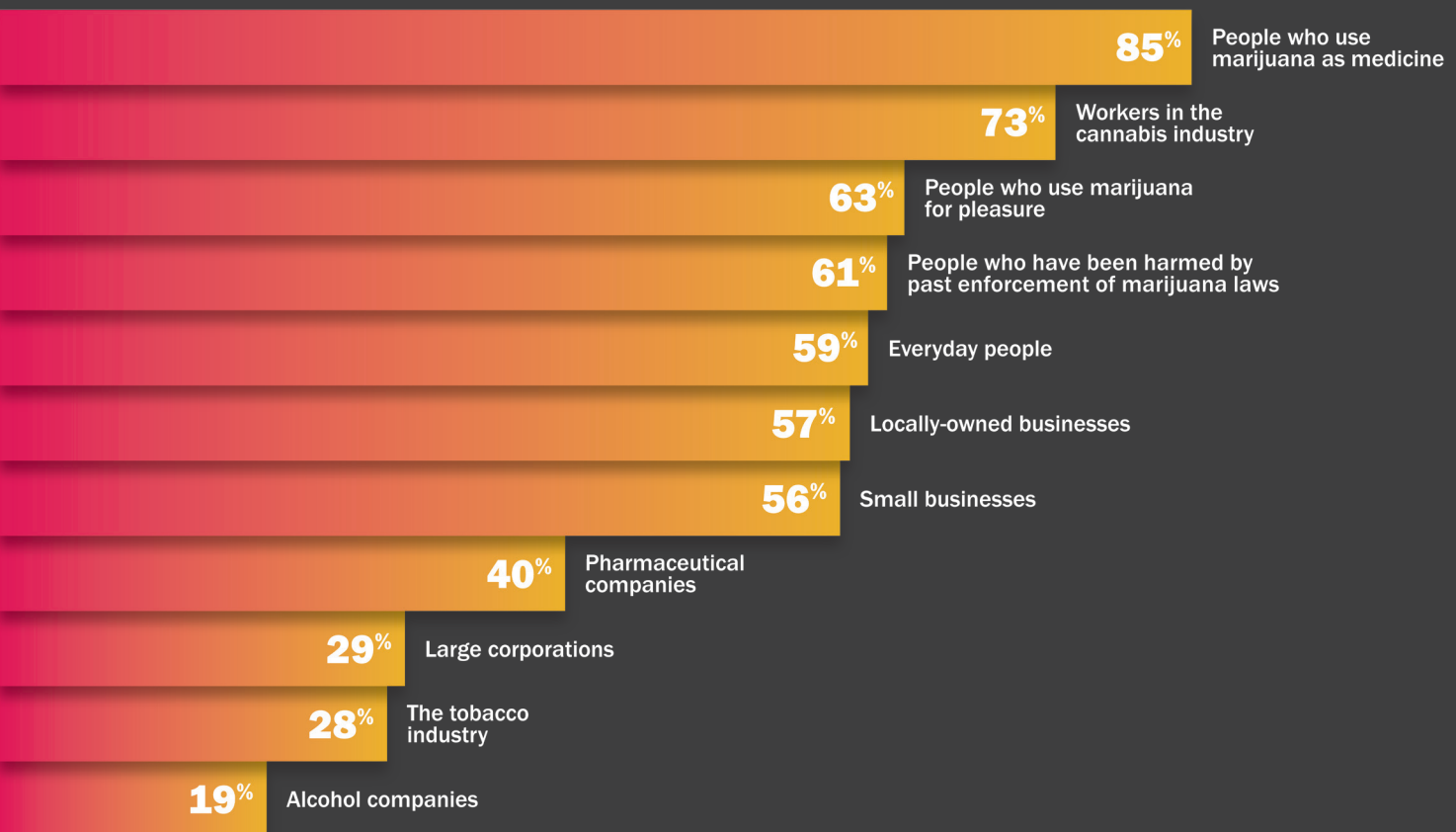
## WHO SHOULD BENEFIT FROM MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

- The vast majority of American adults think that people who use marijuana as medicine should benefit from marijuana legalization.
- More than 70% of Americans say that workers in the cannabis industry should also benefit from marijuana legalization.
- A majority of American adults also believe that locally-owned businesses and small businesses should benefit. They do not say the same about large corporations, pharmaceutical companies, or the tobacco and alcohol industries.

61% — Americans who say that people who have been harmed by past enforcement of marijuana laws should benefit from cannabis legalization



## I THINK CANNABIS LEGALIZATION SHOULD BENEFIT...



## EXPERIMENT

We conducted an experiment to find out if educational videos can increase support for equity in marijuana policy.

- We sent an online survey to 404 adults across the United States.
- We showed half of the participants six videos featuring marijuana policy experts before asking their opinions about cannabis policy.
- The other half took the survey before watching the videos. The results of their surveys are shown on pages 3-5.
- Among those who viewed the videos, we observed a pattern of effects showing that public education can be used to decolonize U.S. cannabis policy by educating people about corporate capture and promoting policies that benefit small businesses and people who use cannabis. We will detail these findings in a future publication.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS STUDY

**1**

The majority of American adults think these key demographics should benefit from marijuana legalization:

- People who use marijuana as medicine
- Workers in the cannabis industry
- People who have been harmed by marijuana laws

**2**

Many American adults trust these groups to create good marijuana policies:

- People with lived experience
- People who use marijuana
- People who are working for social equity

**3**

Most American adults do not trust these groups to create good marijuana policies, and do not think these groups should be the beneficiaries of marijuana legalization:

- Pharmaceutical companies
- Alcohol companies
- Tobacco companies

## ***Who conducted this study?***

This study was conducted by Parabola Center for Law and Policy, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank, in collaboration with RTI International, an independent nonprofit research institute.

## ***Why did we conduct this study?***

This survey was conducted to document American beliefs and values about marijuana policy, including who should benefit from marijuana legalization, and who Americans trust to create good cannabis policy. The experiment was conducted to assess whether educational videos can increase support for policies that promote cannabis equity.

## ***How was this study conducted?***

We surveyed 404 American adults, age 21 and over, in September 2023. We recruited survey participants through an established research panel. About half of the participants (201) watched six educational videos before taking a survey. The other half (203) took the survey before watching the videos. The unweighted sample is not representative of the United States. However, we weighted the data to create estimates that represent the U.S. adult (18+) population. This study was approved by RTI's IRB.

Except for the estimates relating to the experiment, the estimates in this report are based on data from the 203 participants who answered survey questions before watching the videos.

## ***Who was included in this study?***

The mean age of the people that we surveyed was 48 years old. We surveyed people who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (12.4%), Asian (12.1%), Black (29.5%), Hispanic or Latino/a/e (13.9%), Native Hawaiian (2.7%), multiracial or another racial identity (9.4%), and white (45%). Most of the people we surveyed identified as women (49.5%) and transgender women (0.5%), men (49%) and transgender men (0.5%). A very small percentage (0.2%) described themselves as questioning or identity not listed. No participants identified as nonbinary, genderqueer, or genderfluid. By political philosophy the people we surveyed identified as very conservative (11.6%), somewhat conservative (18.3%), moderate (35.4%), somewhat liberal (19.6%), very liberal (12.9%), or none of the above (2.2%).

## ***Acknowledgments:***

The authors would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this report and to the educational videos used in our study: Axel Bernabe, Paul Bologna, Kassandra Frederique, Tyler Giles, Chelsea Higgs Wise, Sarah Hinzman, Wanda James, Martin Jelsma, Kojo Karam, Shanel Lindsay, Laury Lucien, Philasande Mahlakata, Chris Michalakis, Òscar Parés, Steve Rolles, Leah Rosenbaum, Lisa Sanchez, Keitulo Salipira, Danielle Schumacher, Amber Senter, Blaise Sewell, Shaleen Title, Jindřich Vobořil, and Matt Wilson.