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Illinoisans Keen on Marijuana Decriminalization, Legalization

Large majorities of Illinois voters support marijuana decriminalization and legalization for recreational use, according to the results of the latest poll from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

The Simon Poll™ was conducted Saturday, March 4th to Saturday, March 11th. The sample included 1,000 randomly selected registered voters and a margin for error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. Sixty percent of the interviews were with respondents on cell phones.

Three-quarters, 74 percent, of voters support or strongly support decriminalization of marijuana where people in possession of small amounts for personal consumption would not be prosecuted but may be fined. One in five voters, 21 percent, oppose or strongly oppose decriminalization and 5 percent answered otherwise. In 2016, Governor Rauner signed a law decriminalizing up to 10 grams of marijuana. Under the new law people caught with up to 10 grams can face fines of \$100 to \$200 and potential municipal penalties instead of facing a class B misdemeanor and potentially six months in jail and \$1,500 in fines.

Support is also strong for legalization of marijuana for recreational use. Two-thirds of voters, 66 percent, support or strongly support legalization of recreational marijuana if it is taxed and regulated like alcohol. A notable 45 percent of voters support legalization strongly. Only 31 percent of voters oppose or strongly oppose and 3 percent answered otherwise.

“Illinois voters are growing increasingly comfortable with the idea of decriminalizing marijuana,” said Jak Tichenor, interim director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, “and we now have evidence that most see it as a potential revenue source for the state.” A March, 2016 Simon Poll showed 51 percent opposed recreational use of marijuana while 45 percent approved. When coupled with the idea of regulating and taxing it like alcohol, this year’s poll showed a 21 percent increase in the number of people who approve recreational use.

Decriminalization by Region. In Chicago, 80 percent of voters support or strongly support decriminalization statistically the same as their neighbors in suburban Cook and the collar counties who support or strongly support at 79 percent. In the rural regions outside Cook and the collar counties, 63 percent of voters supported or strongly supported decriminalization.

Opposition or strong opposition by voters in Chicago is 16 percent, in suburban Cook and collar counties is 17 percent, and 31 percent outside Cook and the collar counties.

Decriminalization by Political Party. Among Democrats, Republicans and independents, Democrats support is strongest with 81 percent stating they support or strongly support decriminalization. Only 15 percent of Democrats oppose or strongly oppose decriminalization and 4 percent answered otherwise. Independent voters followed Democrats with 76 percent of independents supporting or strongly supporting decriminalization and 17 percent opposing or strongly opposing. Two-thirds, 66 percent, of Republicans support or strongly support decriminalization and 30 percent oppose or strongly oppose.

Decriminalization by Age Group. Illinois voters younger than 35-years-old show the most approval with 83 percent supporting or strong supporting decriminalization. Fifteen percent are opposed. Voters thirty-five to fifty-years-old support or strongly support at 81 percent, and oppose or strongly oppose at 15 percent. Three-quarters, 77 percent, of fifty-one to sixty-five-year-old voters support or strongly support decriminalization. One in five, 19 percent, oppose or strongly oppose. Two-thirds, 67 percent, of baby boomers and the greatest generation sixty-six and older support or strongly support decriminalization while 28 oppose or strongly oppose.

“These data show that virtually all Illinoisans have opinions on cannabis decriminalization and legalization. Few people seem indifferent on these issues,” said Delio Calzolari, associate director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute and one of the designers of the poll. “A vast majority appear to philosophically agree with decriminalization like the steps taken last year, although the definition of decriminalization and amounts in question are debatable. There is also overwhelming support for new cannabis public policy for recreational use shown.”

Recreational Legalization by Region. In Chicago, 74 percent of voters support or strongly support legalization of marijuana for recreational use if taxed and regulated like alcohol. In suburban Cook and the collar counties support or strong support is 70 percent. In the rural Illinois outside Cook and the collar counties, 54 percent of voters supported or strongly supported legalization. Opposition or strong opposition by voters in Chicago is 22 percent, suburban Cook and collar counties is 27 percent, and 43 percent outside Cook and the collar counties.

Recreational Legalization by Political Party. Among Democrats, Republicans and independents, Democrats support is strongest among the three groups with 76 percent stating they support or strongly support recreational legalization if taxed and regulated like alcohol. Only 21 percent of Democrats oppose or strongly oppose recreational legalization and 3 percent answered otherwise. Independent voters followed Democrats with 68 percent of independents supporting or strongly supporting recreational use and 27 percent opposing or strongly opposing. A slight majority of Republicans, 52 percent, support or strongly support legalization while 46 percent oppose.

Recreational Legalization by Age Group. Illinois voters younger than 35-years-old show the most favorability to legalization of recreational marijuana if taxed and regulated like alcohol. Four in five, 83 percent, support or strongly support the proposition. This percentage is identical

to the same support for decriminalization. Seventeen percent are opposed. Voters thirty-five to fifty-years-old support or strongly support at 77 percent, and oppose or strongly oppose at 22 percent. Among fifty-one to sixty-five-year-old voters 69 percent support or strongly support legalization and 28 percent oppose or strongly oppose. Baby boomers and the greatest generation sixty-six-years-old and older are split on the issue with 51 percent stating they support or strongly support legalization of recreational marijuana if taxed and regulated like alcohol and 45 percent stating they oppose or strongly oppose.

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The margin of error for the entire sample of 1,000 voters is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the population proportion would be within plus or minus the reported margin of error for each subsample. For subsamples, the margin of error increases as the sample size goes down. The margin of error was not adjusted for design effects.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas using the random digit dialing method. The telephone sample was provided to Customer Research International by Scientific Telephone Samples. Potential interviewees were screened based on whether they were registered voters and quotas based on area code and sex (<60 percent female). The sample obtained 51 percent male and 49 percent female respondents. Interviewers asked to speak to the youngest registered voter at home at the time of the call. Cell phone interviews accounted for 60 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available.

Field work was conducted from March 4 through March 11. No auto-dial or “robo” polling is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. The data were not weighted in any way. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute’s polling web site, simonpoll.org.

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative. AAPOR works to encourage objective survey standards for practice and disclosure. Membership in the Transparency Initiative reflects a pledge to practice transparency in reporting survey-based findings.

The Institute’s polling data are also archived by four academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The four open source data repositories are: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (<http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/>), The University of Michigan’s Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://openicpsr.org>), the University of North Carolina’s Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

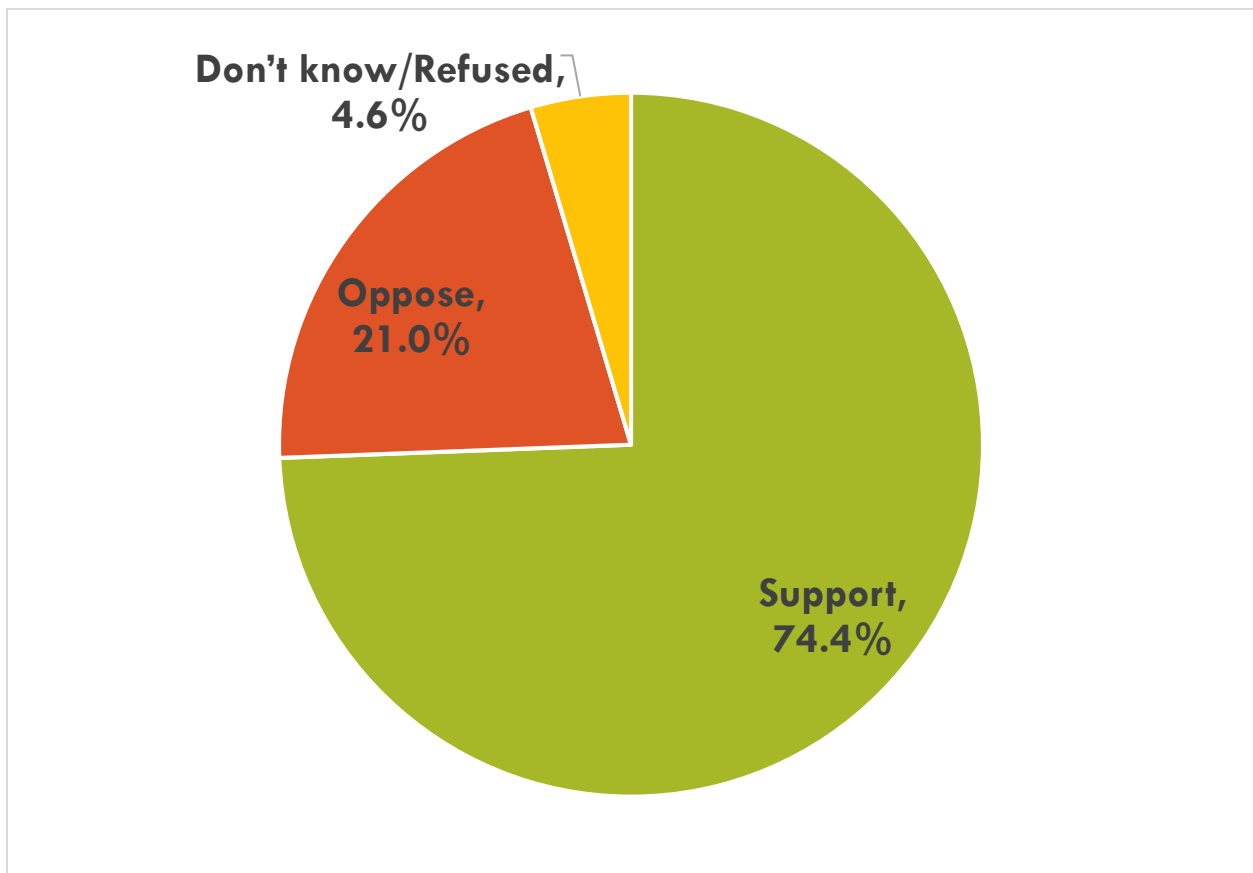
Note: The “Simon Poll” and the “Southern Illinois Poll” are the copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use and publication of these polls is encouraged- but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU Carbondale.

Frequency Tables¹

MARIJUANA DECRIMINILIZATION

Do you support or oppose decriminalizing marijuana where people caught with marijuana for personal consumption won't be prosecuted but may be fined?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Support	74.4%
<i>Strongly support</i>	46.6%
<i>Support</i>	27.8%
Oppose	21.0%
<i>Oppose</i>	7.7%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	13.3%
Don't know/Refused	4.6%

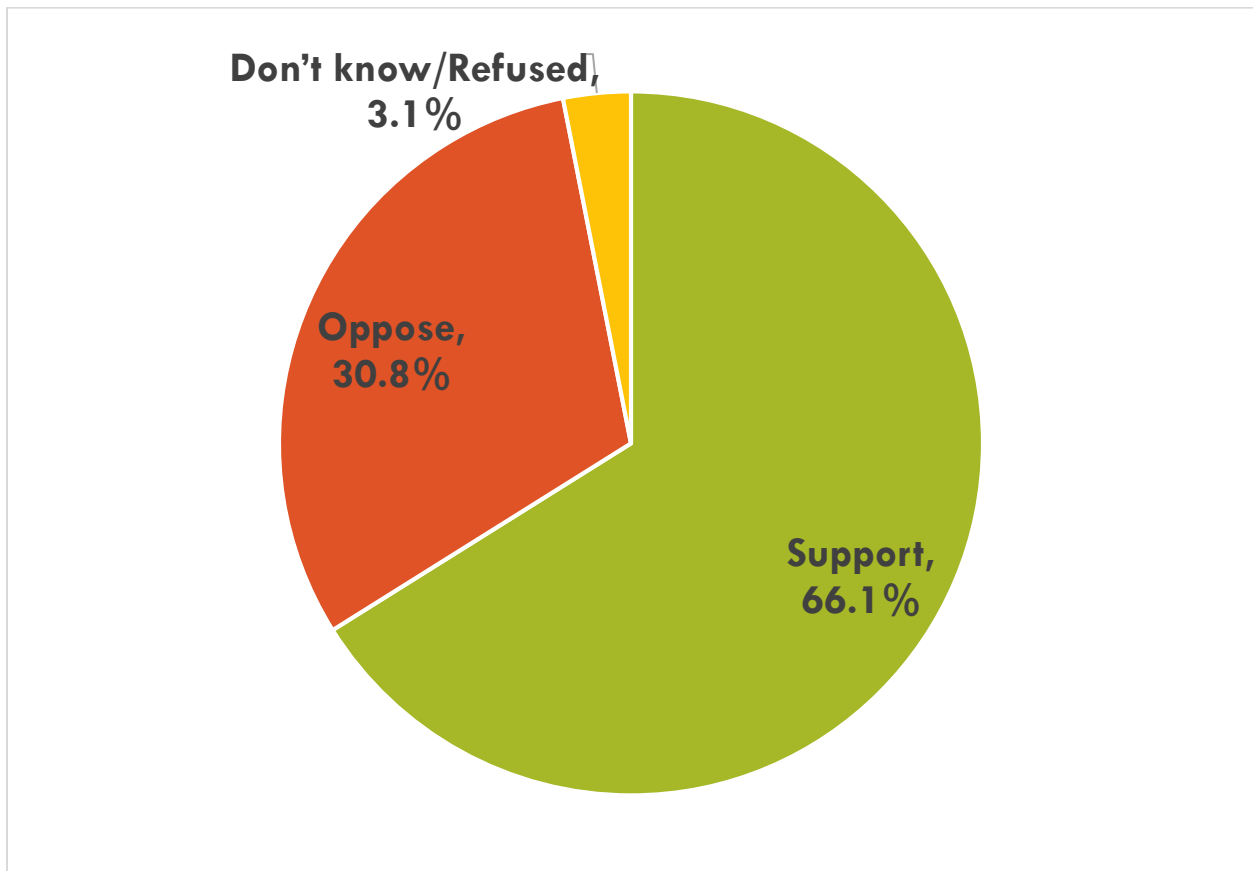


¹ Values are rounded and may not sum to 100 percent.

RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

Do you support or oppose the legalization of recreational marijuana if taxed and regulated like alcohol?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Support	66.1%
<i>Strongly support</i>	45.3%
<i>Support</i>	20.8%
Oppose	30.8%
<i>Oppose</i>	12.2%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	18.6%
Don't know/Refused	3.1%



Demographic Crosstabs and Historical Trends

MARIJUANA DECRIMINILIZATION

By AREA

	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Support	80%	79%	63%
Oppose	16%	17%	31%
Don't know/Refused	4%	4%	6%

By PARTY

	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Support	81%	76%	66%
Oppose	15%	17%	30%
Don't know/Refused	4%	7%	4%

By AGE

	<35	35-50	51-65	66+
Support	83%	81%	77%	67%
Oppose	15%	15%	19%	28%
Don't know/Refused	2%	4%	4%	5%

RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

By AREA

	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Support	74%	70%	54%
Oppose	22%	27%	43%
Don't know/Refused	4%	2%	4%

By PARTY

	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Support	76%	68%	52%
Oppose	21%	27%	46%
Don't know/Refused	3%	5%	2%

By AGE

	<35	35-50	51-65	66+
Support	83%	77%	69%	51%
Oppose	17%	22%	28%	45%
Don't know/Refused	0%	2%	3%	4%