



Study finds legalized marijuana does not affect crime or economics

Samantha-Jo Roth

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In just a few short weeks, voters in five states will consider legalizing recreational marijuana. Although, no matter which way the vote goes, a new study from the Libertarian-leaning Cato Institute says the impact of legalization does not affect crime or economics.

The war of words is ramping up between groups battling over legalizing pot, bombarding voters in five states with TV ads. Although, a new study from the Cato Institute finds the impact of marijuana legalization has been minimal on crime and economics.

“Overall all of the changes are really small. So, mainly the direct impact on any of these outcomes is very hard to detect,” said Jeffrey Miron, a Harvard University professor and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

Miron, an author of the study, analyzed data on crime, employment and drug use in four states where marijuana is legal -- Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska.

“The most important impact is that it allowed people who want to consume marijuana to do so without fear of being arrested by state police,” Miron said.

Although, opponents of the ballot measures disagree, saying pot legalization led to an increase in crime in Denver and fueled a jump in the number of traffic accidents linked to marijuana use.

“They just sort of generalize and say, ‘Well it's not really a meaningful increase.’ That's code for basically take our word for it,” said Jeffrey Zinsmeister with Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

Zinsmeister says the report is misleading because it only shows the number of fatal car crashes involving marijuana.

“I think that it's very convenient for them to focus on the overall fatality rates because they get the benefits of this falling alcohol related fatality numbers and it kind of gets mixed in with the marijuana numbers,” Zinsmeister said.

Although, Miron says if the study focused on the overall number of incidents where THC was found in the blood stream, it wouldn't tell the whole story.

“There is more testing of people for the presence of marijuana. So that one finds many more examples of people who have tested positive. Whether or not that led to any accident or fatality,” Miron explained.

According to a new Gallup poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans say recreational marijuana should be legal.