



Women Age 30-50 Key to Pot Legalization Triumphs

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By Jennifer G. Hickey

One of the keys to winning approval for marijuana legalization ballot initiatives in 2012 was the strategic targeting of female voters between the ages of 30 and 50 years, finds a new [study by British researchers](#).

"Having learned from experiences in California, campaign strategists for Colorado's Amendment 64 and Washington's Initiative 502, consequently identified key demographic groups, particularly women aged 30-50," researchers at Global Drug Policy Observatory at Swansea University in Britain assert in a new paper, "Selling Cannabis Regulation."

The researchers examined why ballot initiatives to legalize marijuana won the support of voters in Washington State and Colorado, but failed in Oregon.

In Washington state and Colorado, voters overwhelmingly backed measures (both by 55 percent), while Oregon's initiative was solidly defeated with 53 percent of voters rejecting it.

Currently, marijuana use is legal in four states (Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska) and the District of Columbia and 14 states have passed laws decriminalizing possession for specific amounts.

The study notes that while a majority of voters do not hold marijuana use in a positive light, they also believe laws prohibiting use for non-medical and non-scientific purposes are not effective.

Therefore, strategists decided to rely on poll-driven messaging, which was well-organized and well-financed.

"Research shows that women were the key demographic in these historic marijuana campaigns. Activists directed much of their attention on 30 to 50-year-old women and, at the end of the day it was women who made history," Dave Bewley-Taylor, one of the co-authors of the paper, says in an [interview with The Daily Beast](#).

It is important, therefore, for pro-reform campaigners to keep women on the 'yes' side. Women responded positively to well-crafted messaging," adds Bewley-Taylor.

"One of the most crucial lessons the cannabis policy reformers learned was to target their campaigns at key demographic groups, particularly 30-50 year old women, who were likely to be

initially supportive but then switch their allegiance to the 'no' vote.

"Well-crafted messages that spoke to this demographic – particularly emphasizing that youth access can be better controlled through legally regulated markets than prohibition – seem to have worked in keeping women on the 'yes' side. In both Washington and Colorado, the percentage of females in support of regulated markets was greater than the national average," the researchers found.

If more states are to achieve similar success in moving toward marijuana legalization, some suggest focusing on key messages, including the economic arguments that legalization, taxation and regulation will free up scarce law enforcement resources to focus on more serious crimes and also will create new tax revenue for worthy causes.

"You've got tough economic times: States are looking for new sources of revenues, ways to cut expenses. And maintaining the drug war costs money, and throwing people in prison for marijuana costs money," Robert Mikos, a marijuana law expert at Vanderbilt University Law School, [told The Christian Science Monitor](#).

Although it does not ensure victory for pro-legalization forces, national attitudes toward decriminalization are changing, with more people supporting reform.

Gallup finds that [support for legalization](#) has increased since the organization first asked the question in 1969, when just 12 percent of adults were in favor.

Support for legalization has steadily increased from 34 percent in 2003 to 58 percent in 2013, according to Gallup's analysis of its long-term polling trend.

Gallup's Lydia Saad does note the 2013 poll was conducted during a period of heavy media coverage of ballot initiatives, which would explain why [support fell](#) to 51 percent in Gallup's most recent poll.

Attitudes toward marijuana legalization are heavily influenced by region and political persuasion.

Among those who lean toward or identify themselves as Democrats, 64 percent back making it legal, compared with only 39 percent of Republicans.

Similarly, Gallup finds a solid majority supporting legalization of marijuana in the East and West, which are more liberal, while in the South and Midwest, fewer than half voiced support in 2014.

"As long as support hovers around the 50 percent mark, it will be difficult for proponents to promote legalization beyond the more Democratic and liberal-oriented states. The South and Midwest are likely to remain less hospitable, at least for the time being.

"But with a super-majority of younger Americans supportive – 64 percent of those aged 18 to 34,

contrasted with 41 percent of those 55 and older – it seems inevitable that this will eventually change," asserted Saad following the midterm elections.

"Yet despite the compelling case for legalization, and progress toward legalization at the state level, ultimate success is not assured," says Jeffrey Miron of the Cato Institute in a [CNN opinion piece](#), who notes that another five to 10 states will likely consider legalization in 2016.