



Marijuana Regulation and Crime Rates

Adult use marijuana laws are not associated with an uptick overall criminal activity

"The overarching result from our [study] is that medical legalization reduces property crime, while recreational legalization reduces violent crime. Such effects support the ... hypothesis that legalization drives out crime. ... The diverse and potentially time-varying impacts of medical and recreational legalization raise a cautionary note for policymakers: those considering legalization should wait a few years before pronouncing on the cost-benefit impact, focus on the specific type of legalization, and study closely the outcomes from similar states."

[How does marijuana legislation affect crime? Medical and recreational laws across 50 states, *Economic Modeling*, 2026](#)

"This review summarizes extant literature on the effect of drug policy liberalization on crime, traffic safety, law enforcement, and racial disparities. ... Overall, the literature suggests that cannabis legalization has resulted in some benefits to public health and public safety, even while some studies have produced mixed findings with regard to particular outcomes. ... Much of the literature regarding the impact of marijuana legalization on crime shows promising effects, including decreases in violent and property crime, reductions in drug-related arrests, and an improvement in crime clearance rates."

[Effects of drug policy liberalization on public safety: A review of the literature, Ohio State Drug Enforcement and Policy Center research paper, 2022](#)

"The legalization of marijuana for recreational use continues to expand across America. Colorado and Washington were the first states to legalize marijuana in 2012. A primary concern regarding legalization is how these policy changes affect crime rates. Researchers have begun to estimate the effect marijuana legalization has had on crime rates. We extend this literature by using a different analytical approach. State level data covering years 2000–2019 were analyzed using the synthetic control method to find that legalizing marijuana for recreational use in Colorado and Washington was generally not associated with variations in index crime rates. These findings substantiate prior research. Increased crime rates should not be a primary concern as more states move to adopt recreational marijuana use legislation."

[Crime in a time of cannabis: Estimating the effects of legalizing marijuana on crime rates in Colorado and Washington using a synthetic control method, *Journal of Drug Issues*, 2022](#)

"Using data covering the period 2000-2019 from a variety of national sources (the National Survey of Drug Use and Health, the Uniform Crime Reports, the National Vital Statistics System, and the Treatment Episode Data Set) this study is the first to comprehensively examine the effects of legalizing recreational marijuana on hard drug use, arrests, drug overdose deaths, suicides, and treatment admissions. Our analyses show that RMLs increase adult marijuana use and reduce drug-related arrests over an average post-legalization window of three to four years. There is little evidence to suggest that RML-induced increases in marijuana consumption encourage the use of harder substances or violent criminal activity."

[Is recreational marijuana use a gateway to harder drug use and crime? National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021](#)



Adult use legalization laws are associated with improvements in crime clearance rates

"Based on Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) data from 2007 to 2017, this study used difference-in-differences (DID) analysis and the synthetic control method (SCM) to examine the effect of recreational marijuana legalization on the clearance rates for multiple types of violent crimes in Oregon (OR), a state that legalized recreational marijuana in late 2014. Results offer evidence suggesting a beneficial impact of legalization on violent crime clearances, as manifested by significant increases in the clearance rate for overall violent crimes and that for aggravated assault in OR counties relative to those in the non-legalized states following legalization."

[Effect of recreational marijuana legalization on clearance rates for violent crimes: Evidence from Oregon, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 2021](#)

"[M]arijuana legalization and sales have had minimal to no effect on major crimes in Colorado or Washington. We observed no statistically significant long-term effects of recreational cannabis laws or the initiation of retail sales on violent or property crime rates in these states...Our results from Colorado and Washington suggest that legalization has not had major detrimental effects on public safety."

[The cannabis effect on crime: Time-series analysis of crime in Colorado and Washington State, *Justice Quarterly*, 2019](#)

Medical cannabis regulatory laws are not associated with an uptick overall criminal activity

"In this paper we attempt to answer the question, does prohibition lead to a reduction in crime? To do so, we take advantage of the growing trend in medical marijuana laws in the U.S. that effectively end federal prohibition of marijuana. We employ a difference-in-differences empirical strategy to exploit natural variation in these laws across states and time. ... [W]e estimate significant reductions in violent crime rates in states that legalize medicinal marijuana. Moreover, we find evidence that ending marijuana prohibition results in larger reductions in violent crime rates in states that border Mexico and in urban counties. We also find evidence that medical marijuana legalization reduces property crimes, with larger reductions in states that border Mexico."

[Smoke and Fears: The Effect of Marijuana Prohibition on Crime, Appalachian State University Department of Economics Working Paper, 2021](#)

Retail cannabis facilities are not positively associated with increased criminality, and may play a role in the prevention of certain crimes, like larceny

"This paper studies the effects of marijuana legalization on neighborhood crime and documents the patterns in retail dispensary locations over time using detailed micro-level data from Denver, Colorado. ... The results imply that an additional dispensary in a neighborhood leads to a reduction of 17 crimes per month per 10,000 residents, which corresponds to roughly a 19 percent decline relative to the average crime rate over the sample period. ... Overall, our results suggest that dispensaries cause an overall reduction in crime in neighborhoods, with no evidence of spillovers to surrounding neighborhoods. ... Our results are consistent with theories that predict that marijuana legalization will displace illicit criminal organizations and decrease crime through changes in security behaviors or substitution toward more harmful substances. ... Lastly, there is no evidence that increased marijuana use itself results in additional crime."

[Not in my backyard? Not so fast. The effect of marijuana legalization on neighborhood crime, *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 2019](#)