



Racial Disparity in Marijuana Arrests

Black Americans are arrested for violating marijuana possession laws at nearly four times the rates of white Americans, yet both consume marijuana at roughly the same rates.

Weighted for their populations, in 2025 Black people were 6.4 times more likely as white people to be arrested for marijuana crimes in California, a jump from 2024, when they were 5.2 times as likely. The disparity for Latinos also saw a jump in 2025, when they were 2.26 times more likely to be arrested than white people, versus 1.97 times in 2024.

[California NORML, Blacks and Latinos Disproportionately Arrested for Cannabis Crimes in California, 2026](#)

A 2024 Justice Department investigation of the Memphis Police Department determined "that the department cites or arrests Black adults for marijuana possession at 5.2 times the rate of white adults, based on data from 2018 to 2023."

[US Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, Remarks on Department Findings of Civil Rights Violations by the Memphis Police Department, 2024](#)

A 2022 Washington Post analysis determined, "While marijuana arrests overall dropped in the year since Virginia became the first state in the South to legalize, Black adults accounted for nearly 60 percent of marijuana-related cases before the state's general district and circuit courts, an analysis of marijuana-related code citations in the state's court system concluded, despite Black people accounting for about 20 percent of the state population."

[The Washington Post, After Virginia legalized pot, majority of defendants are still Black, 2022](#)

A 2021 analysis of marijuana-related arrests in 2020 in New York City's five boroughs reported that people of color comprised 94 percent of those arrested.

[amNY, People of color made up 94 percent of marijuana arrests by NYPD in 2020, data from Legal Aid says, 2021](#)

A 2021 analysis from the Milwaukee County, Wisconsin District Attorney's Office reported that Black Wisconsinites were 4.3 times more likely than their white counterparts to be convicted for having marijuana. The worst disparities in Wisconsin are in Ozaukee County, where Black people are 34.9 times more likely to be arrested and Manitowoc County, where Black people are 29.9 times more likely to be arrested.

[Wisconsin Public Radio, Report: Black Wisconsinites 4.3 Times More Likely To Be Convicted For Possession Of Marijuana, 2021](#)

A 2020 analysis by the American Civil Liberties Union, concluded, "Black people are 3.64 times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession, notwithstanding comparable usage rates." Authors reported, "In every single state, Black people were more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession, and in some states, Black people were up to six, eight, or almost ten times more likely to be arrested. In 31 states, racial disparities were actually larger in 2018 than they were in 2010."

[American Civil Liberties Union, A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform, 2020](#)