

Marijuana Regulation and Crime Rates

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

"First-pass evidence is provided that the legalization of the cannabis market across US states is inducing a crime drop. We exploit the staggered legalization of recreational marijuana enacted by the adjacent states of Washington (end of 2012) and Oregon (end of 2014). Combining county-level difference-in-differences and spatial regression discontinuity designs, we find that the policy caused a significant reduction in rapes and property crimes on the Washington side of the border in 2013- 2014 relative to the Oregon side and relative to the pre-legalization years 2010-2012. The legalization also increased consumption of marijuana and reduced consumption of other drugs and both ordinary and binge alcohol. ... The concern that legalizing cannabis for recreational purposes may increase crime occupies a prominent position in the public debate about drugs. Our analysis suggests that such a concern is not justified."

[Crime and the legalization of recreational marijuana, Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 2018](#)

"Our models show no negative effects of legalization and, instead, indicate that crime clearance rates for at least some types of crime are increasing faster in states that legalized than in those that did not. ... [T]he current evidence suggests that legalization produced some demonstrable and persistent benefit in clearance rates, benefits we believe are associated with the marijuana legalization proponents' prediction that legalization would positively influence police performance."

[Marijuana legalization and crime clearance rates: Testing proponent assertions in Colorado and Washington state, Police Quarterly, 2018](#)

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

"The objective of this study is to investigate whether a particular element of MMLs, namely allowance for dispensaries, affects local crime and other indicators of marijuana misuse. We find no evidence that ordinances allowing for marijuana dispensaries lead to an increase in crime. In fact, we see some evidence of a reduction in property crime. ... Our study appears to reinforce the conclusions from other studies that fail to find an increase in the type of crime predicted by law enforcement. We find no effects on burglary, robberies, or assaults, which are the types of crimes one would expect if dispensaries were prime targets as a result of their holding large amounts of cash. ... Our findings indicate that policymakers should be careful in how they regulate the presence of dispensaries, while not jumping to the conclusion that dispensaries are clearly crime generating hot-spots. ... Our findings suggest that it is possible to regulate these markets and find a common ground between safety and access to medical marijuana."

[High on Crime? Exploring the Effects of Marijuana Dispensary Laws on Crime in California Counties, IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper Series, May 2018 "](#)

"[T]he introduction of medical marijuana laws (MMLs) leads to a decrease in violent crime in states that border Mexico. The reduction in crime is strongest for counties close to the border (less than 350 kilometres) and for crimes that relate to drug trafficking. In addition, we find that MMLs in inland states lead to a reduction in crime in the nearest border state. Our results are consistent with the theory that decriminalisation of the production and distribution of marijuana leads to a reduction in violent crime in markets that are traditionally controlled by Mexican drug trafficking organizations."

[Is legal pot crippling Mexican drug trafficking organizations? The effect of medical marijuana laws on US crime, 2018. The Economic Journal](#)

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](#)

"Tobacco shops, medical marijuana dispensaries (MMD), and off-sale alcohol outlets are legal and prevalent in South Los Angeles, California—a high-crime, low-income urban community of color. This research is the first to explore the geographic associations between these three legal drug outlets with surrounding crime and violence in a large low-income urban community of color. ... Results indicated that mean property and violent crime rates within 100-foot buffers of tobacco shops and alcohol outlets—but not MMDs—substantially exceeded community-wide mean crime rates and rates around grocery/convenience stores (i.e., comparison properties licensed to sell both alcohol and tobacco)."

[The geography of crime and violence surrounding tobacco shops, medical marijuana dispensaries, and off-sale alcohol outlets in a large, urban low-income community of color, Preventive Medicine, 2017](#)