

Canadians disjuncted on pot plan: Most support the bill, but think it will fail in its key goals

Two-in-three say the proposed law will fail to prevent kids from using more pot once it's legal

April 20, 2017 – With tens of thousands expected to bask in a celebratory haze over the prospect of soon getting legally high on their own supply of pot this 4/20, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians in favour of the draft legislation that would legalize marijuana use, but less mellow as to whether it will achieve the goals the government has set for it.

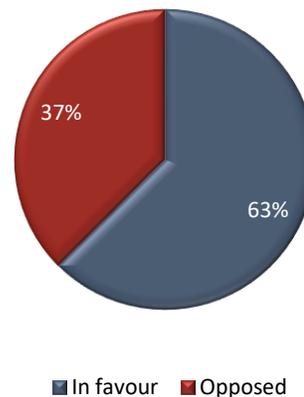
More than six-in-ten Canadians say they support the proposed Cannabis Act. But once into the weeds on the details of it, an even larger number (66%) expect it to fail in its key mission of making it more difficult for young people to use the drug. Likewise, a small majority think the bill will fail to cut organized crime out of the marijuana industry, and half expect it to fail to prevent a surge in the number of people driving impaired.

Canadians are also somewhat divided on the 30-gram limit the bill sets for marijuana possession, with fewer than half (45%) saying this is “about right,” and the rest more likely to say it is too high than too low.

Key Findings:

- Six-in-ten Canadians (63%) say they are in favour of the Cannabis Act proposed by the federal government. That's slightly lower than the two-thirds (68%) said “make it legal” when the Angus Reid Institute asked about the subject [last year](#)
- Canadians are divided evenly over whether new proposed punishments for driving under the influence of marijuana will have the desired effect. Half (49%) say they expect the measures to discourage marijuana-impaired driving, while 51 per cent remain unconvinced

Overall, based on whatever you've seen or heard about this, would you say you are in favour or opposed to this plan to legalize marijuana in Canada?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 17 – 19, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,467 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- Two-in-three (66%) say the new law, if passed, will fail to prevent young people from using even more pot than they already do – something the government has made a key goal of its legalization effort

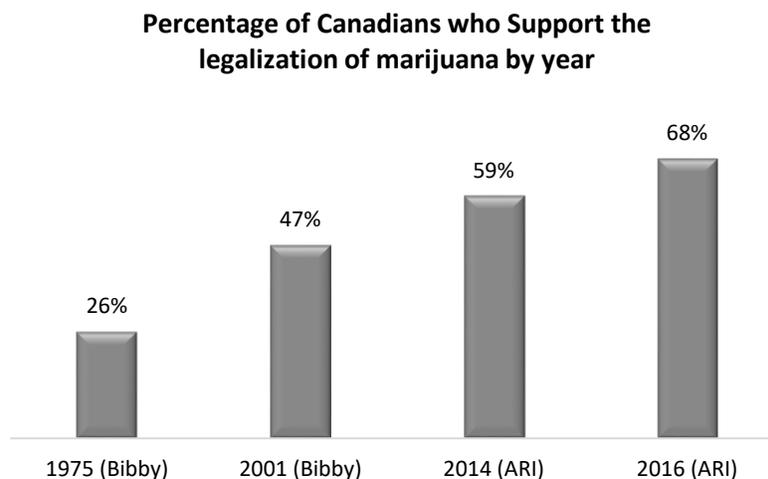
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Most support the bill, divided on its contents

After 94 years of prohibition, marijuana appears set to become legal in Canada next year. Last week, the federal government introduced two pieces of legislation, Bill C-45 – also known as the Cannabis Act – and Bill C-46, which will combine to overhaul the landscape of marijuana use in this country.

The push to legalize marijuana in Canada is reflective of a long-term shift in public opinion. As recently as 2001, [polls showed](#) fewer than half of Canadians supporting legalization of cannabis for recreational use. By last year, [an Angus Reid Institute poll](#) found that support had grown to more than two-in-three, as seen in the following graph:



During the 2015 election, the Liberal Party promised to legalize and regulate marijuana, something government commissions have twice recommended – [first in the 1970s](#), and [again in 2002](#).

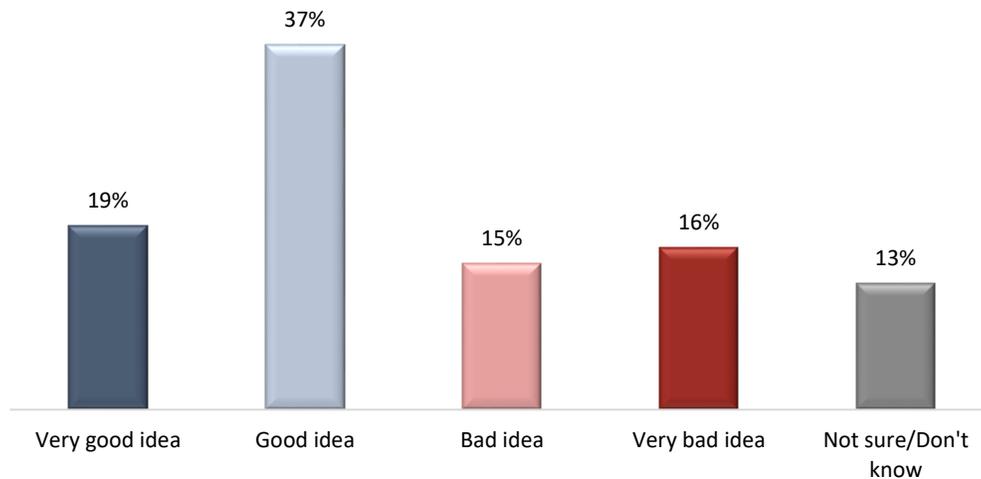
Perhaps reflecting this long debate, Canadians express a high degree of awareness of this issue. Some three-in-four (76%) say they have been seeing at least some media coverage and having the odd conversation about the legalization effort, and fewer than one-in-20 – just 3 per cent – haven't seen or heard anything about it.

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Asked whether marijuana legalization is a good idea or a bad idea, overall, a small majority of Canadians (56%) choose the former, while fewer than one-in-three (31%) choose the latter. The rest (13%) are uncertain:

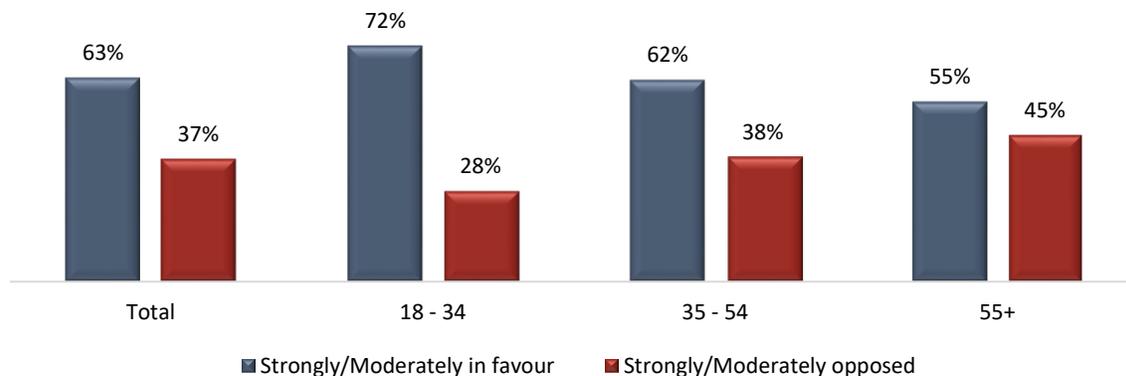
Would you say legalizing marijuana is a good or bad idea?



On the government's specific proposal, however, some six-in-ten (63%) voice their support.

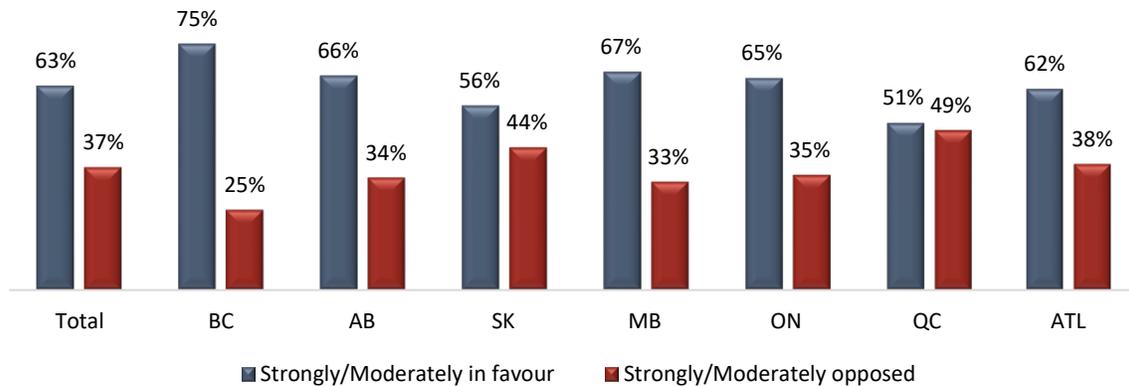
The two bills are favoured across all age groups and regions, but younger people (those ages 18 – 34) and British Columbians are the most enthusiastic. Quebec residents and those ages 55 and older, meanwhile, are least supportive, as seen in the graphs that follow:

Would you say you are in favour of or opposed to this plan to legalize marijuana in Canada?



Perhaps surprisingly, more traditionally conservative Albertans are slightly more supportive than the national average:

Would you say you are in favour of or opposed to this plan to legalize marijuana in Canada?

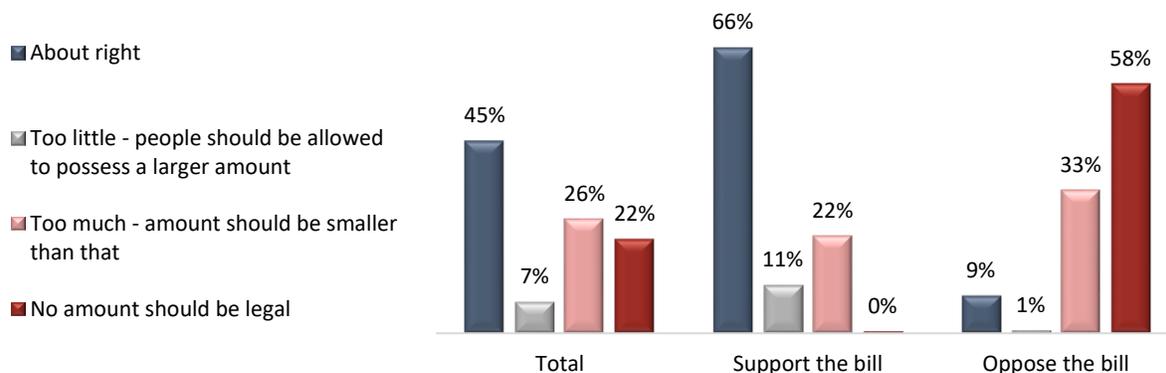


While this overall support for the legislation is quite high, it is slightly lower than the percentage of Canadians who have previously said they support legalizing marijuana. One possible explanation for this is that Canadians have disagreements with certain provisions of the proposed law.

The Cannabis Act allows for adults to possess up to 30 grams of dried marijuana or its equivalent in cannabis oil. This is roughly one ounce – enough to roll dozens of joints. For many Canadians – particularly those who oppose the legislation – this limit is too high.

Overall, 45 per cent of respondents say 30 grams is “about right,” but a similar number (48%) say the legal limit for possession should be lower. Opponents of the bill overwhelmingly choose a lesser amount, while supporters largely think the 30-gram limit is about right, as seen in the following graph:

Would you say this proposed maximum of 30 grams/1 ounce for legal personal possession of marijuana is:

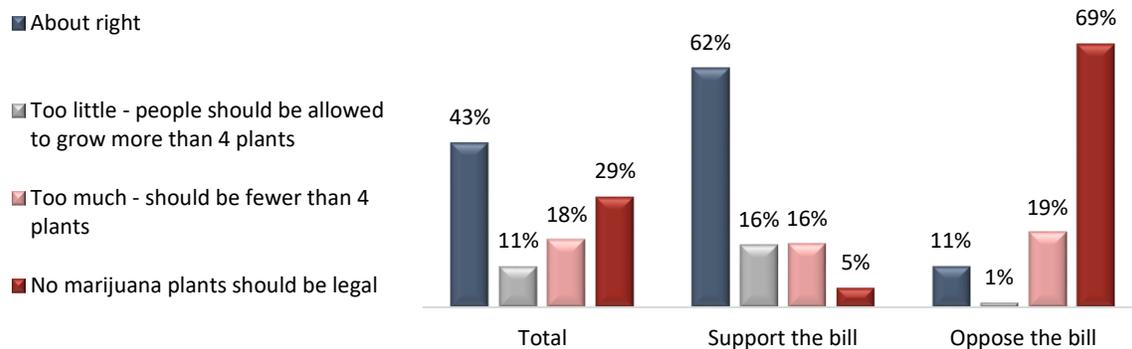


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Divisions also exist on the government’s proposal to allow Canadians to grow up to four marijuana plants of less than one-metre in height for their own personal use. While the largest group (43%) says the proposal is “about right,” almost three-in-ten (29%) say “no marijuana plants should be legal.” Even among supporters of the bill, some one-in-five say the four-plant limit should either be lower or should not exist:

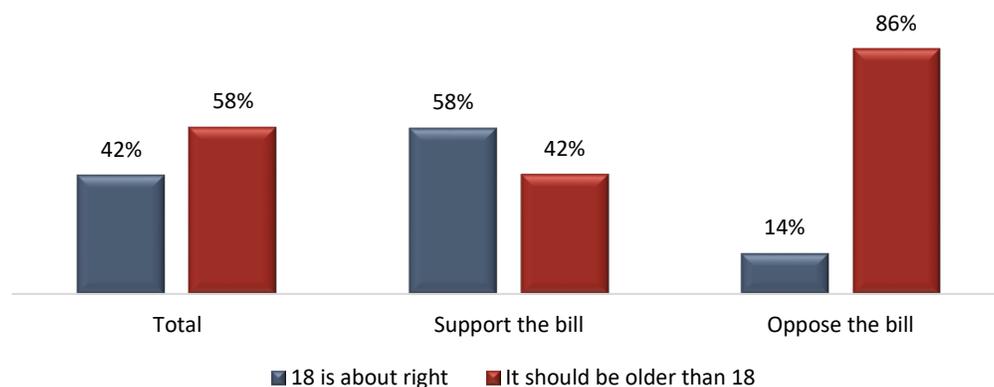
The proposed legislation will allow people to grow up to 4 marijuana plants for their own use. Do you think this is:



The draft law sets the federal minimum age for legal marijuana use at 18 – considerably lower than the 25 [recommended by medical professionals](#) in the government’s legalization task force – though provinces have the option to set a higher age within their own jurisdictions.

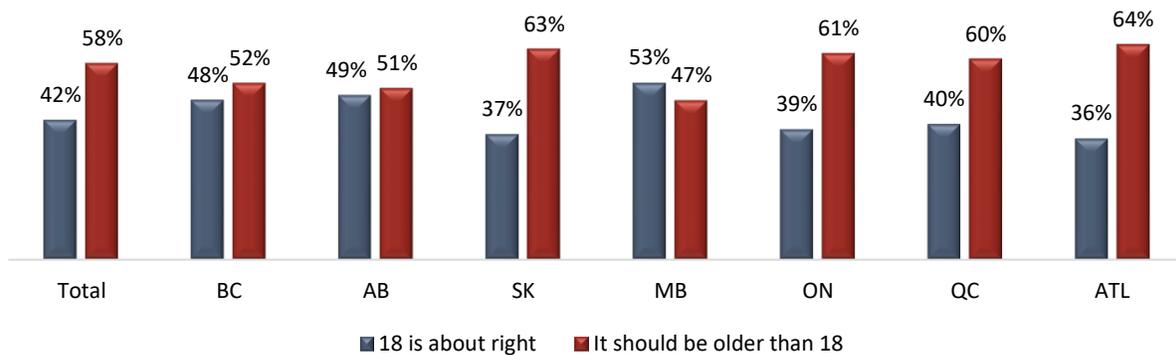
This provision is among the most controversial for Canadians, with a majority (58%) saying the age should be higher than 18. Opponents of the bill are largely united in this view, while those in favour of the legislation are more divided:

Assuming legalization goes ahead, in your opinion, what should be the minimum legal age for marijuana use?



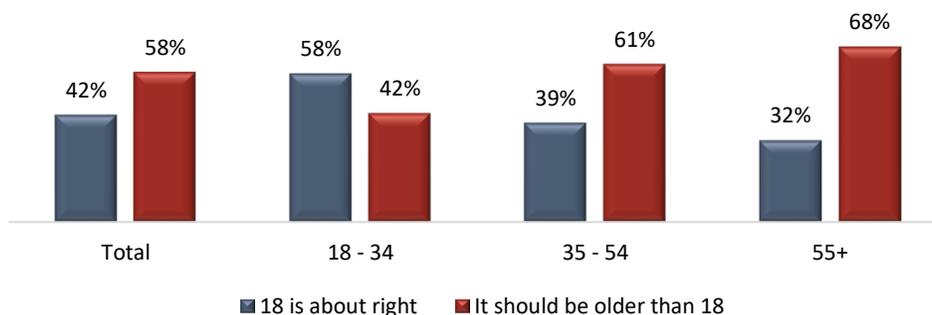
While provinces would not be able to lower the legal age for usage, they would however, be able to raise the minimum. In the minds of many Canadians, this would be a good move. Strong majorities in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada say the age restriction should be raised:

Assuming legalization goes ahead, in your opinion, what should be the minimum legal age for marijuana?



As might be expected, those who were recently 18 themselves are more likely to say 18 is about right, while older respondents largely say the minimum age for marijuana use should be older than 18:

Assuming legalization goes ahead, in your opinion, what should be the minimum legal age for marijuana use?



Legislative aims and expectations

In proceeding with this legalization, the federal government says it's upholding a key campaign promise while attempting to accomplish three main goals:

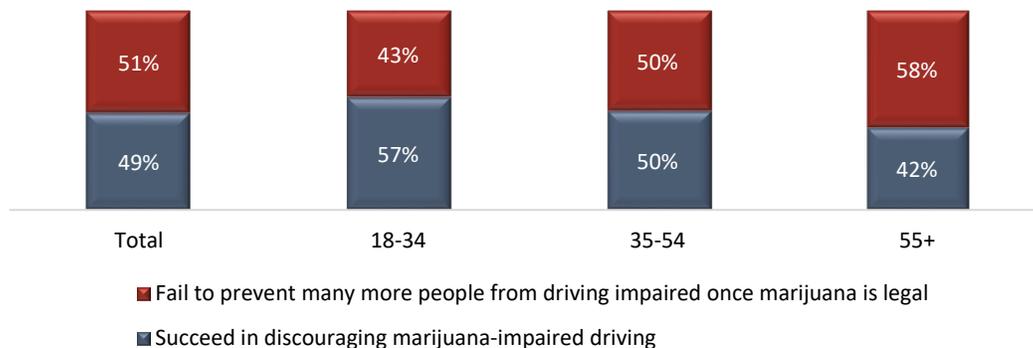
- to keep cannabis out of the hands of children
- to dissuade users from driving under the influence
- and to minimize the profit available to organized crime by undercutting their market share

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Whether or not the legislation will achieve these desired effects is a subject of debate. The accompanying Bill C-46, a part of the legislative bundle the Liberals have proposed in their legalization strategy, would create new criminal charges for those who sell cannabis to those underage, as well as allow for saliva testing to determine THC levels for drivers. Canadians are evenly divided over whether these measures will succeed in discouraging marijuana-impaired driving:

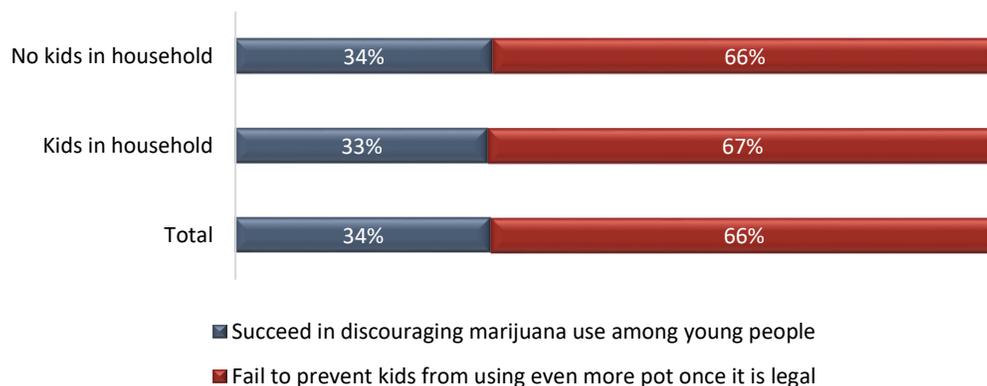
There will be new penalties for drivers caught under the influence of marijuana (and alcohol); will these new measures:



The proposed punishment regime for sale of cannabis to a minor are comparatively strong when considering the penalties for selling tobacco or alcohol to the same age group. The latter two substances carry a fine for first-time offenders, while marijuana could net an offender 14 years in prison. Even with age limits and punishments in place, many Canadians doubt kids will have a harder time getting pot.

Fully two-thirds (66%) say measures in the Cannabis Act will fail in this objective. Notably, responses are identical among those who have children and those who don't.

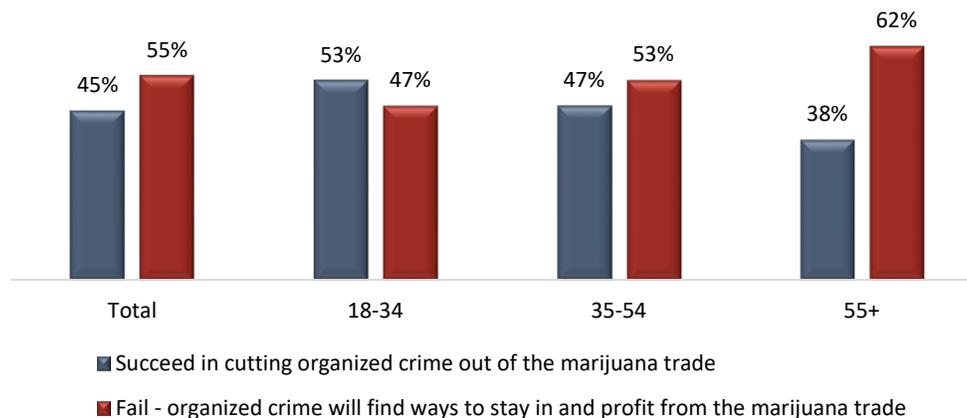
The draft law also contains measures to discourage marijuana use and abuse among young people. Will these measures:



Another piece of the legalization, long [lauded by proponents](#), is the potential to remove a reliable funding source from organized crime in communities. Marijuana accounts for [approximately half of global drug gang profits](#), though the RCMP have, to this point, said that it is too soon to gauge the impact legalization will have on the illicit market.

Just over half of Canadians say they expect organized crime to find ways to stay in the marijuana trade and maintain some level of profit, with most of the cynicism coming from those over 55 years of age:

The government has said that a main objective of legalization is to stop organized crime from profiting from marijuana. Overall, do you think the legalization plan will:



As it will be up to the provinces to decide how to tax cannabis, each region will have a role to play in just how effective the attempts to undercut the illegal market will be. While the draw of tax revenue will likely be strong, McGill business professor [Kenneth Lester has suggested](#) little to no tax would be the best strategy to “hurt the black market as much as we can”.

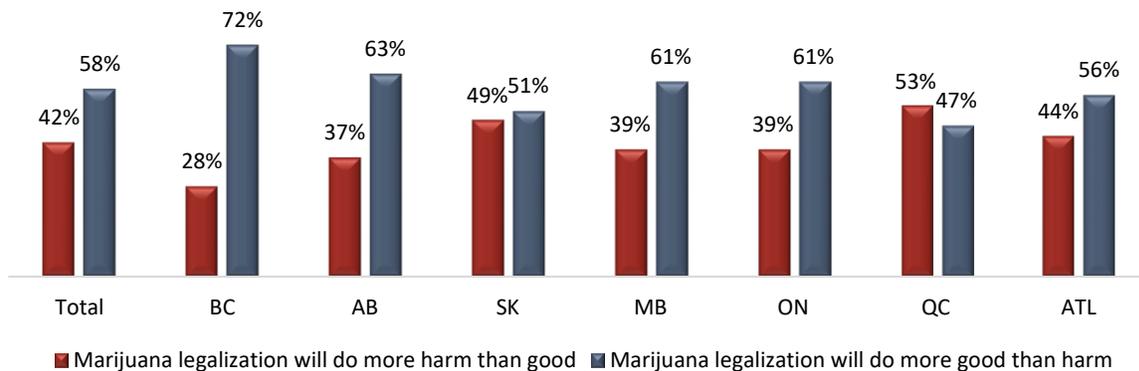
Will legalization do more good than harm?

Asked to consider the overall effect of legalization on Canadian society, a fair bit of hesitation is still noted for a portion of the population. While six-in-ten (58%) say that they expect more good to come from this policy change than harm, a substantial minority of 42 per cent say the opposite. This gap in opinion is particularly profound when looking at the story regionally:

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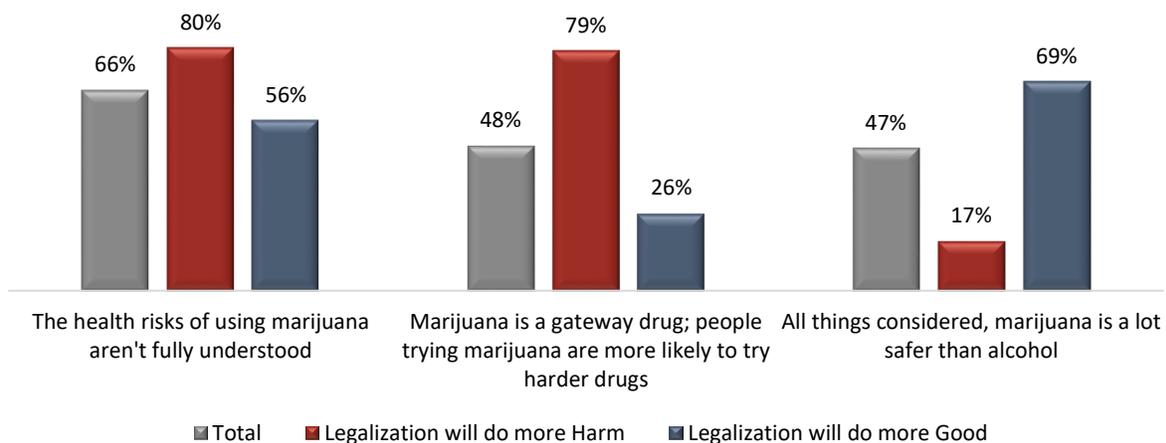
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All things considered, which of the following broad statements about marijuana legalization is closer to your own opinion?



The social divide is explained by the view of each group regarding the substance and its potential health effects. Those who say that legalization will do more harm than good are three times more likely to view marijuana as a 'gateway drug' that may lead users to seek out other, harder drugs. They are also far less likely to say that marijuana is safer than alcohol:

Do you agree or disagree with these statements?



The one aspect of legalization that two-thirds of Canadians (66%) agree on is that the health risks of the substance aren't fully understood. Much of the research on marijuana and its effects, both positive and negative, has been stunted by its [continued categorization as a Schedule 1 drug](#) in the United States.

Where should marijuana be sold?

The Cannabis Act – as currently proposed – leaves some critical components of the framework for marijuana legislation undefined. Not only does it delegate the minimum age for using the substance to the provinces, but also the task of determining where and by whom marijuana may be sold. The only

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requirements the bill places on distribution is that sellers be licensed by the provinces, and that marijuana products not be sold in vending machines.

Within these limits, a wide range of options are available to provincial governments, and this poll finds Canadians supportive of many of them:

**Would you support or oppose organizing the distribution of marijuana in each of the following ways in your own province?
Percentage of Canadians saying 'Support' shown**



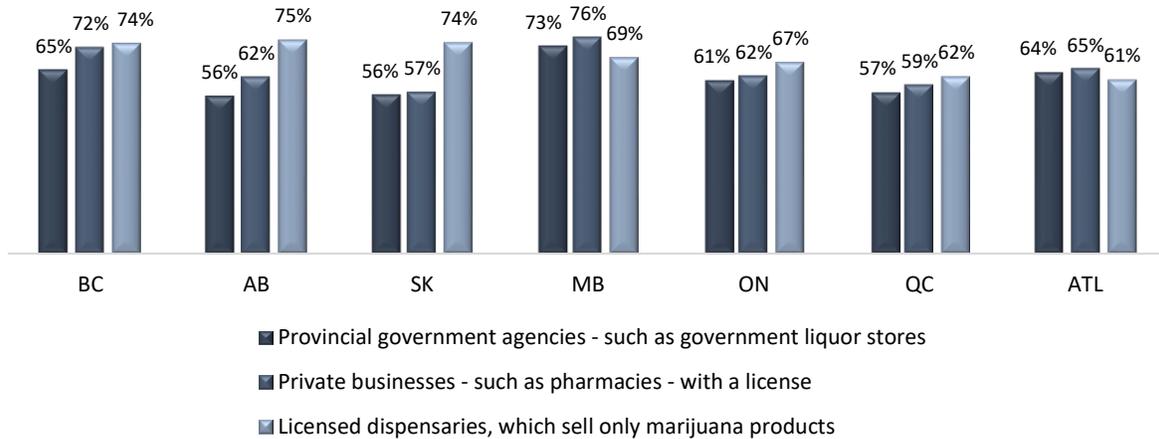
The three most popular options listed in the preceding graph receive majority support across all regions of the country, though some regions are more enthusiastic about certain options.

In British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, roughly three-quarters of the population supports selling marijuana in dispensaries, while fewer than seven-in-ten favour this option elsewhere.

In Manitoba, three-quarters (73%) support selling marijuana through government agencies like liquor stores. No other province voices more than two-thirds support for this option.

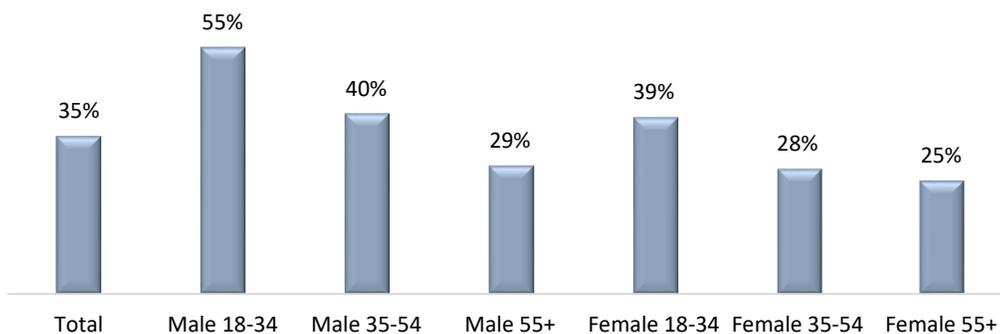
Quebecers, continuing the pattern seen elsewhere in these results, are most likely to oppose each of these three methods for organizing the sale of marijuana, though each one still receives majority support in la belle province:

**Would you support or oppose organizing the distribution of marijuana in each of the following ways in your own province?
(Summary of Support)**



Again, younger respondents take a decidedly pro-access view, with higher support for each of the options canvassed ([see comprehensive tables](#)). Even online ordering – by far the least palatable option overall – receives the support of nearly half (47%) of 18-34-year-olds. Among young men, a full majority support distributing marijuana by mail, as seen in the following graph:

**Would you support or oppose organizing the distribution of marijuana in each of the following ways in your own province?
People can order online and have it delivered via mail**



Also unmentioned in the Cannabis Act is any plan for taxation of legal marijuana sales. When asked last year, the vast majority of Canadians (85%) agreed with the statement, “Tax revenues will increase if marijuana is legalized.” As discussed above, how government goes about meeting this rather reasonable expectation will reflect the delicate balancing act necessary to find a price-point that will undercut the black market.

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Do you agree or disagree with these statements? Summary of Agree			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1467)	Legalization will do more harm than good (610)	Legalization will do more good than harm (857)
The health risks of using marijuana aren't fully understood	66%	80%	56%
Marijuana is a gateway drug; people trying marijuana are more likely to try harder drugs	48%	79%	26%
All things considered, marijuana is a lot safer than alcohol	47%	17%	69%

The draft law also contains specific measures to discourage marijuana use and abuse among young people. Based on what you've heard so far, will these measures:			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1467)	Kids in Household (393)	No kids in household (1059)
Succeed in discouraging marijuana use among young people	34%	33%	34%
Fail to prevent kids from using even more pot once it is legal	66%	67%	66%

Would you say this proposed maximum of 30 grams/1 ounce for legal personal possession of marijuana is:			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1467)	In favour of the bill (917)	Opposed to the bill (550)
About right	45%	66%	9%
Too little - people should be allowed to possess a larger amount	7%	11%	1%
Too much - amount should be smaller than that	26%	22%	33%
No amount should be legal	22%	0%	58%

The proposed legislation will allow people to grow up to 4 marijuana plants for their own use. Do you think this is:			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1467)	In favour of the bill (917)	Opposed to the bill (550)
About right	43%	62%	11%
Too little - people should be allowed to grow more than 4 plants	11%	16%	1%
Too much - should be fewer than 4 plants	18%	16%	19%
No marijuana plants should be legal	29%	5%	69%

Assuming legalization goes ahead, in your opinion, what should be the minimum legal age for marijuana use?			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1467)	In favour of the bill (917)	Opposed to the bill (550)
18 is about right	42%	58%	14%
It should be older than 18	58%	42%	86%