

The Marijuana, Minority and Marginal Vote

The “Marijuana Vote” The table to the right offers rough estimates of the “marijuana vote.” These values reflect the number and percentage of voters in 2008 who would have had a self interest and thus a propensity to cast their ballots based on a candidate’s position concerning marijuana.

According to the U.S. Census, approximately 131 million U.S. citizens voted in 2008, or 63.6% of all citizens. Among minority groups, 16 million voters were Black, 12.3% of the total vote. About 9.8 million Hispanics and 3 million Asians cast their ballots respectively at 7.4% and 2.6% of the 2008 vote.

The youth vote, those age 18-24, had a “statistically significant increase in turnout” in 2008 and numbered 12.5 million, 9.5% of the total vote. The Census reported that 2008 was “the second straight presidential election where young citizens significantly increased their voting rates. Over the last two presidential elections, young citizens have increased their voting rate by a total of 12 percent, compared to 4 percent for 25- to 44-year-olds and 1 percent for 45- to 64-year-olds. ... Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 made up about 1 million of these additional voters.”

The “marijuana vote” comprised about 13 million voters in 2008, with around 7.8 million making up the “medical marijuana vote.” Each equaled respective 9.8% and 5.9% totals of the 2008 vote. **These counts and percentages for the “marijuana vote” are well within the ranges that define minority voting blocs like Hispanics, Asians and youth and may comprise the margin on which a close election can pivot.**

Further, the 18-24 cohort – with the largest increase in turnout – represents one the largest groups of marijuana users, with almost 40% reporting either past year or monthly use. About one quarter of 25-34 year-olds claim similar use. Together, these two groups alone cast 3.4% of the total 2008 vote, more than the Asian community.

Table Methodology: Both the Census and the NSDUH break their estimates down by age ranges to reflect patterns that vary with age. If the percentages of citizens who voted by age were roughly the same as the percentages of marijuana users (citizens according to the NSDUH) who voted by age, then the former percentages can be applied the latter’s estimates of “past year” and “monthly” marijuana users by age to compute the number and percentage of “marijuana voters.”

Those who consumed marijuana in the last year and especially in the past month are violating federal law. It is unlikely that these individuals would vote against their self interest – vote for a candidate who could potentially have them arrested. Consequently, they would be more likely to support candidates who take a softer stance on marijuana. These voters represent the “marijuana vote.” Since voters who use cannabis therapeutically would likely do so on a regular basis, monthly marijuana use could translate into the “medical marijuana vote.”

| U.S. Census Voters 2008 in 000 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Age Range | Citizen population | Voters | Voters by Age | Voters % of Citizens |
| Total | 206,074 | 131,145 | 100.0% | 63.6 |
| 18 to 24 | 25,791 | 12,515 | 9.5% | 48.5 |
| 25 to 34 | 34,218 | 19,501 | 14.9% | 57.0 |
| 35 to 44 | 36,397 | 22,865 | 17.4% | 62.8 |
| 45 to 54 | 41,085 | 27,673 | 21.1% | 67.4 |
| 55 to 64 | 32,288 | 23,071 | 17.6% | 71.5 |
| 65+ | 36,295 | 25,520 | 19.5% | 70.3 |
| NSDUH Marijuana Users 2008 in 000 | | | | |
| Age Range | NSDUH past year users | Past year users % of citizens | NSDUH monthly users | Monthly users % of citizens |
| Total | 22,530 | 10.9% | 22,530 | 6.6% |
| 18 to 24 | 8,262 | 4.0% | 4,955 | 2.4% |
| 25 to 34 | 6,123 | 3.0% | 3,600 | 1.7% |
| 35 to 44 | 3,733 | 1.8% | 2,095 | 1.0% |
| 45 to 54 | 2,871 | 1.4% | 1,737 | 0.8% |
| 55 to 64 | 1,389 | 0.7% | 1,041 | 0.5% |
| 65+ | 152 | 0.1% | 119 | 0.1% |
| Marijuana Voters 2008 in 000 | | | | |
| Age Range | Past Year User Voters | Past year user voters % total voters | Monthly User Voters | Monthly user voters % total voters |
| Total | 12,877 | 9.8% | 7,770 | 5.9% |
| 18 to 24 | 4,009 | 3.1% | 2,404 | 1.8% |
| 25 to 34 | 3,490 | 2.7% | 2,052 | 1.6% |
| 35 to 44 | 2,345 | 1.8% | 1,316 | 1.0% |
| 45 to 54 | 1,934 | 1.5% | 1,170 | 0.9% |
| 55 to 64 | 992 | 0.8% | 744 | 0.6% |
| 65+ | 107 | 0.1% | 84 | 0.1% |

Data Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, May 2010 and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). 2010.

Minority and Marginal Voting Trends “[V]oting Margins [in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections] become magnified when we consider that minorities comprised a larger part of the voter base in 2008. Two million more blacks voted in 2008 than in 2004, as well as almost 2 million more Hispanics and close to a million more Asians. ... About a half million fewer whites voted in 2008 than in 2004.. So the composition of the voting population shifted more to minorities.... there were almost 1 in 4 voters who were minorities in 2008.” Source: *Population Studies Center, University of Michigan, 2009*

“In the last two presidential races, voters gave almost equal support to Democratic and Republican candidates; in 2004 less than 2.5 percentage points separated President Bush and Senator Kerry and the margin in 2000 between then-Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore was less than half a percentage point. Even more startling, in 2000, the margin between Vice-President Al Gore and Governor George W. Bush was less than 6000 votes in four states.” Source: *Searle Center on Law, Regulation and Economic Growth, Northwestern University School of Law, 2008.*