

# Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0167-2681(18)30038-6  
DOI: [10.1016/j.jebo.2018.02.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.02.005)  
Reference: JEBO 4270

To appear in: *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*

Received date: 30 December 2016  
Revised date: 29 January 2018  
Accepted date: 6 February 2018

Please cite this article as: Davide Dragone, Giovanni Prarolo, Paolo Vanin, Giulio Zanella, Crime and the legalization of recreational marijuana, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* (2018), doi: [10.1016/j.jebo.2018.02.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.02.005)

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# Crime and the legalization of recreational marijuana\*

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January 29, 2018

## Abstract

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. Four possible mechanisms are discussed: the direct psychotropic effects of cannabis; substitution away from violence-inducing substances; reallocation of police effort; reduced role of criminals in the marijuana business.

*Keywords:* cannabis, recreational marijuana, crime

*JEL codes:* K23, K42

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\*A previous version of this paper circulated under the title “Recreational cannabis reduces rapes and thefts: Evidence from a quasi-experiment”. We are grateful to Sebastian Galiani, Ernesto Schargrodsy, an anonymous referee, as well as seminar participants at the University of Padova, the Social Choice Research Group 2016 meeting in Florence, the America Latina Crime and Policy Network 2017 meeting in Santiago del Chile, and the 2017 Workshop on Inequality, Intergenerational Mobility, and Organized Crime in Trapani for valuable comments and suggestions. All errors are ours.

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