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Crime and the legalization of recreational marijuana^{*}

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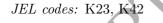
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Abstract

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



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