MARIJUANA POLL

Gallup: Adult pot users in U.S. above 33 million

Marijuana use could overtake cigarette use in a few years.

By Christopher Ingraham Washington Post

A new Gallup poll out today finds that the percentage of American adults who say they currently smoke marijuana has nearly doubled over the past three years.

A woman walks with a sign supporting legalizing marijuana during the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia last month. A new poll finds the number of American adults who admit they smoke marijuana has nearly doubled since 2013. SPENCER PLATT / GETTY IMAGES
In 2013, only 7 percent of adults said they were marijuana smokers. When Gallup asked again in July of this year, 13 percent admitted to current marijuana use. That works out to more than 33 million adult marijuana users in the U.S. If America’s marijuana users resided in one state, it would be bigger than Texas and second only to California in population.

There are currently about 40 million cigarette smokers in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Given that cigarette use is in decline, marijuana use could become more prevalent than cigarette use in just a few years’ time.

There are likely several factors driving these numbers. Since 2013, recreational marijuana markets opened in Colorado and Washington, and several other states voted to legalize marijuana in the fall 2014. It’s likely that adults in those places are taking advantage of the new opportunities to indulge legally.

Part of the rise may also be due to decreased social stigma surrounding marijuana use. National surveys show support for legal marijuana hovering in the 55 percent to 60 percent range. Certain legislators have called for restrictions on marijuana to be loosened at the federal level use or to legalize it completely.

Recreational marijuana use remains illegal at the federal level and in most states. Police are arresting people for possessing marijuana at record-high rates — more than 1,700 per day, according to 2014 FBI data.

Still, attitudes toward marijuana use have come a long way from the “this is your brain on drugs” era of the 1980s and ‘90s, when Ronald Reagan was calling marijuana “the most dangerous drug in the United States” and top law enforcement officials were publicly calling for marijuana smokers to be “taken out and shot.”

Much of this shift in attitudes could be due to lived experience. In the late 1960s, fewer than 5 percent of adults told Gallup they had ever smoked marijuana. Today that number is up to 43 percent. Regardless of whether they use it currently, nearly half of American adults now have first-hand experience using marijuana.

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