



# Morality versus Money: The Adoption of Recreational Marijuana Laws Across the United States



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## Abstract

Most cannabis policy scholarship focuses on medical marijuana laws (MMLs) rather than recreational marijuana laws (RMLs). Debates around MMLs center around tradeoffs between (contested) healthcare benefits and the morality of drug legalization. On the other hand, debates about RML adoption instead focus on the tradeoffs between morality and the economic benefits to the state. In this paper, I investigate the influence of morality and fiscal needs on state-level adoption of RMLs. RMLs bring a growing industry, tax revenue, and interest group activity to a state, all of which encourage political actors to embrace RMLs. I find that both state morality (as measured from CCES survey responses) as well as state fiscal concerns (as measured by state budget deficits, GDP growth, and campaign contributions) increase the probability that a state adopts RMLs.

## Introduction

Scholars have dedicated substantial time to causes and effects of medical marijuana laws (MMLs) across the United States. However, due to the recent legalization laws of recreational marijuana throughout the United States, research examining the determinants of recreational marijuana laws (RML) is still sparse. Previous literature in regard to MML adoption cannot be used to understand RML adoption because although they are closely related, the politics surrounding them are distinct. The politics surrounding RML adoption lies at the intersection of morality politics and fiscal politics.

This study provides a new theoretical perspective on the adoption of Recreational Marijuana Laws, by distinguishing RML adoption from MML adoption due to the overwhelming financial benefits to government as well as industry by adopting RMLs.

## Methods

This paper utilizes Event-history analysis specifically Logistic Regression to test its hypotheses.

Dependent Variable: Whether RML is adopted in the given state-year

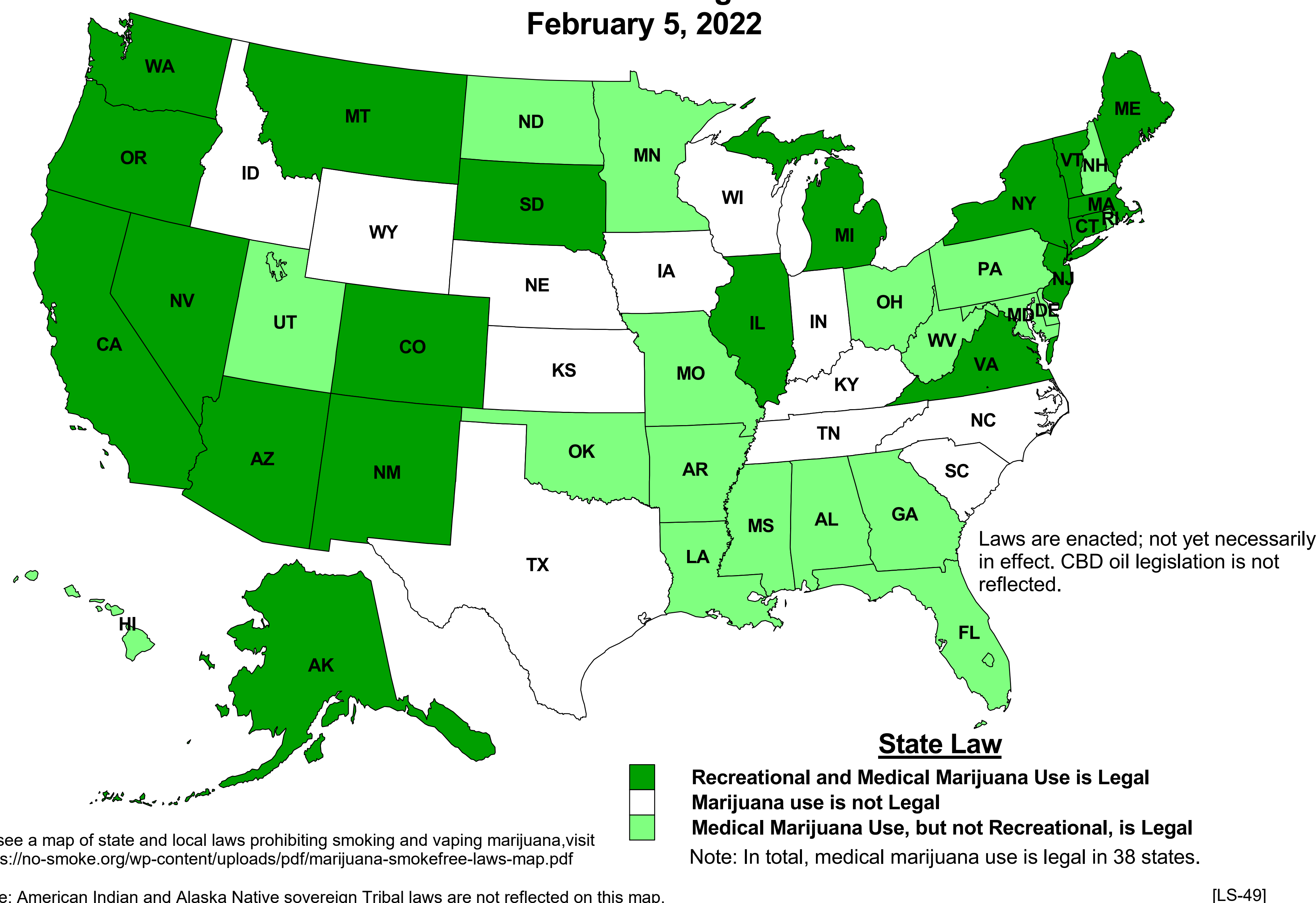
Unit of Analysis: State-year

Independent Variables: State Ideology, Fiscal Health, Percent Change in GDP, Legislative Salary, Pro-Legalization Interest Group Contributions, Party Control, Year of RML Adoption, Proportion of Neighbors with RML, etc.

## Results

- The Morality Hypothesis - As a state becomes more conservative, they are less likely to adopt RMLs
  - $\sigma = 0.202$  1 SD change in ideology from liberal towards conservative is associated with a 20.1% decrease in the likelihood of adoption
- The Fiscal Health Hypothesis - states that require the financial benefits of RMLs have a greater likelihood of adopting RMLs
- Pro-legalization campaign contributions do have a statistically significant effect on RMLs.
  - A one standard deviation (442,313.9) increase in campaign contributions is associated with a 44.2% increase in the likelihood of adopting recreational marijuana.

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February 5, 2022



## Conclusion

- The study provides evidence that both morality politics and fiscal politics are determinants of RML adoption.
- Direct democracy and previous MML adoption also influences RML adoption.
- RMLs are uniquely situated as a morality policy which grounds the public's attitudes toward the expansion of RMLs across the states.
- Fiscal politics has distinguished RMLs from MMLs and explains why the fiscal health of a state and marijuana interest group activity affect the likelihood of adoption.
- The results show that expanding the years of analysis is important as more states continue to adopt RMLs.
- Future studies of legalization should examine how implementation differs across the states, especially in terms of how states gain revenue from RMLs.

## References

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