

The University of California, Davis

**MARIJUANA & THE MEDIA:  
The Influence of Media Narratives on Legalization Outcomes**

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## ABSTRACT

For more than four decades, the War on Drugs has maintained harsh yet largely ineffective policies to deter marijuana usage. Numerous studies demonstrate how “get-tough” rhetoric supports such harshly punitive drug policies, yet research largely excludes narratives surrounding policies that *reverse* the degree of restriction. This study examines media narratives surrounding propositions to legalize marijuana in Oregon, California, and Colorado. Qualitative content analysis of 92 newspaper articles captured detailed descriptions of the various thematic narratives in each state. Newspaper coverage of the ultimately approved proposition in Colorado largely focused on the political challenges of implementation and on tensions with federal policies. In contrast, coverage related to California’s rejected proposition often described conflicts around legalization between social groups, as well as the potential negative consequences for public safety. Finally, newspaper coverage of Oregon’s similarly rejected proposition was diverse, with no dominant narrative emerging either to support or undermine the proposition directly. This project contributes to sociological understandings of the relationship between media portrayals and policy outcomes. Specifically, this research documents the variations in newspaper narratives connected to three recent state-level propositions to lessen harsh anti-marijuana policies.

## INTRODUCTION

Sociological research indicates that skyrocketing incarceration rates until recent years occurring in the context of stable or decreasing crime were closely related to shifts in the quantity and tone of media crime reporting (Beckett and Sasson 2004). Media narratives both transform and reinforce political discourses through creating a set of possible frameworks that individuals can choose to adopt and institutions can embrace through policy (Brown 2013). The manner in which media institutions promote these frameworks influences common understandings of and reactions to social issues such as crime or drug use, and has enabled pathways for the implementation of harsh drug policies. In this sense, the wave of harsh drug implementation over the past four decades are more closely related to shifts in popular outrage spurred by media representations of these issues, rather than the statistical volume of crime in society (Beckett and Sasson 2004). For example, sociological research indicates that the wave of restrictive drug policies known as the War on Drugs maintains a close relationship to media representations that promote “get-tough” frameworks for understanding drug crimes. These discourses frequently narrate drug crime issues in ways that highlight the influence of individual responsibility rather than structural barriers (Beckett and Sasson 2004). The result is a social environment hospitable to harsher and more restrictive drug policies.

These drug policies frequently have stratified and unequal effects, as they largely target nonviolent minority individuals in inner cities. Although data indicate that minority populations consume drugs, like marijuana, at *less* frequent rates than their white and suburban counterparts, Blacks and Latinos are arrested and convicted for drug possession and other low-level drug crimes at drastically higher rates (Levine, Gettman, and Siegel 2010). Once under the control of the correctional system, individuals are often disenfranchised, excluded from obtaining

government aid, unable to find stable employment or adequate housing, introduced to a vicious cycle of social control and recidivism, and are generally relegated to a second-class citizenship (Alexander 2010).

Therefore, an assessment of the drug policy implementation process and its relationship to surrounding media narratives merits sociological examination. This project assesses media narratives surrounding policies that attempt to reverse the degree of drug policy restriction. This contributes to sociological understandings of the discourses surrounding policies that aim to minimize the negative effects of the War on Drugs. Further, this project assesses media frameworks for understanding these policies, which may direct subsequent political responses. To evaluate the media influence on drug policies that attempt to implement less harsh sanctions, this study examines marijuana legalization narratives from three U.S. states that recently introduced similar ballot initiatives: California, Oregon, and Colorado. This research project assesses media discourses regarding marijuana legalization with qualitative content analysis of each state's largest newspaper: The Denver Post, The LA Times, and The Oregonian. The data illuminate distinct media narratives whose unique combinations in each state inform specific frameworks to portray marijuana legalization. Further, the analysis argues these discursive frameworks may have subsequently facilitated or hindered opportunities for political action and subsequent policy outcomes.

The dominant frames in the Denver Post focused on marijuana as a political challenge and as involving state-federal legal tensions. Articles in these themes outlined likely scenarios for the implementation and regulation of legalized marijuana, and highlighted the power struggle between the opposing forces of state and federal institutions. Together, this combination of media narratives inspires collectivist frameworks for understanding legalization that likely

unified political action on the state's behalf. In contrast, the dominant frames in the LA Times, the fractionalization and irresponsibility themes, highlighted polarized perceptions among various groups within California, as well as possible employee negligence and the danger the proposal might incite. This combination of narratives inspires individualistic frameworks that reflect traditional framings of crime, and likely undermined collective political support for the legalization measure. Oregonian articles contained a wider set of more evenly distributed narratives for interpreting and representing marijuana legalization. Likely, this even distribution of multiple framings undermined a consistent legalization framework, and diversified political responses.

The following sections include a literature review describing relevant research around contemporary drug narratives and policies. The subsequent section includes a description of the methodological approach and the data sources. The third section provides a descriptive summary and analysis of the major themes present within the media narratives. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the overall conclusions, social implications, and possible routes for future drug narratives and policies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **THE BROADER CONTEXT**

Over the past four decades, the United States has witnessed a dramatic increase in the severity and scope of drug policies. This wave of punitive policy implementation was not the result of a worsening crime problem, but rather reflects the efforts of political actors to shift perceptions of and policies regarding a variety of social problems, including crime and addiction, towards ones that demand harsher solutions (Beckett and Sasson 2004). This political strategy, known as the War on Drugs, was partly determined by institutional arrangements in order to

facilitate the economic advancement of various corporate enterprises, which helps to explain the skyrocketing prison rates (Campbell 2014). For politicians on both sides of the spectrum, advancing these corporate goals provides significant financial and political benefits, for example, in the form of campaign contributions and support. This exemplifies the symbiotic relationship of the institutions involved in the passage of harsh drug policies, and illuminates the powerful influence of interrelated corporate and political interests (Campbell 2014).

These policies are often enforced in disparate ways, as they largely target non-violent minority drug users in inner cities, rather than dangerous and violent kingpins (Alexander 2010). Although data indicate that whites consume marijuana at higher rates than Blacks or Latinos, Whites are arrested much less frequently (Levine, Gettman, and Siegel 2010). Overall, minority communities are excessively targeted by law enforcement, and the employment of other racially biased policies and practices have promoted opportunities to direct these efforts. For example, policies such as the Stop-and-Frisk law, or practices such as the discretion granted to officers for deciding whom to pull over in traffic stops, create avenues for law enforcement agencies to employ race-neutral policies in racially disparate ways (Alexander 2010; Fader 2014). In Torrance, CA, for example, African American communities make up 2.5% of the population but account for 25% of marijuana arrests (Levine, Gettman, and Siegel 2010). Overall, draconian drug policies, combined with a set of other available outlets for targeting certain communities, are used as tools to incarcerate many non-violent minority drug users.

This over-enforcement is partially attributed to the manner in which social institutions may view these communities as ‘easy targets’ or part of a ‘surplus population’ (Alexander 2010; Rehmann 2015). The accumulation of historic and contemporary structural barriers excludes these groups from adequate educational or employment opportunities, and works to maintain

existing inequalities (Fader 2014). Combined with high degrees of residential segregation, this exclusion creates geographic regions of concentrated disadvantage characterized by social, economic, and political inequities that permeate into nearly every sphere of daily life (Massey and Denton 1993; Sharkey 2013; Wilson 1987). For example, inadequate living conditions due to limited financial mobility encourage community interactions that occur in public spaces (Fader 2014). This means that interpersonal activities, including drug-related ones, are more likely to occur on street corners or other outdoor locations, which significantly increases the degree of police scrutiny present in their lives, and makes them easy targets for law enforcement (Goffman 2009).

From the perspective of law enforcement officials or other corporate and political institutions, these communities may be understood as part of a ‘surplus population’, whom due to their low socioeconomic statuses, are unable to meaningfully contribute to the larger society (Rehmann 2015). With this logic, their processing through a criminal justice system is a “way of “managing” the social consequences of high-tech capitalism” (Rehmann 2015). For example, rising economic inequality and shifts in market demands from unskilled to skilled laborers in the 1970’s and 1980’s provided the opportunity to reshape the definition of society’s outsiders towards one that viewed them as potential inmates (Western 2006). This enabled a view of incarceration as “surplus population management”, and is attractive due to the large degree of financial power it provides to the very political and corporate institutions that manage it (Rehmann 2015). These structural conditions encourage criminal justice agencies to target vulnerable communities.

The over-enforcement of drug crimes in these communities has given rise to our current era of mass incarceration and the perpetuation of an exploitative cycle of social control. Since

the 1970's, prison rates have more than quadrupled, proliferating into the largest prison population in the world (Travis et al. 2014). Disproportionately incarcerated are young, non-violent drug law violators or those who have committed an infraction against a previous drug crime probation or parole requirement. Once labeled a felon, these individuals are marked with a stigma that renders them to second-class citizenship (Alexander 2010). The control exerted by the state continues to influence their life trajectories long after their time spent incarcerated, as a felon label carries both social and institutionalized stigmas that impose a wide set of barriers to financial mobility or personal success (Alexander 2010).

For example, studies on racial disparities in hiring practices indicate that employers in the United States are more likely to hire white men with a criminal record over black individuals without one (Pager 2003). Moreover, Black men with criminal records have minimal chances with potential employers (Pager 2003). These social stigmas are incredibly difficult to overcome, however the institutional removal of rights and privileges enable a deeper degree of social control. This occurs as the felon label legally creates pathways to politically disenfranchise individuals from voting and jury service, and removes their ability to apply for educational grants or certain occupational licenses. Further, the felon label imposes probation or parole requirements that are difficult to meet, which creates a cycle of recidivism and criminal justice control (Alexander 2010). For drug law violators, the deterrent strategy of incarceration fails to deliver justice, and reveals an intimate relationship between legal rights and carceral control (Calavita and Jenness 2014).

#### SOCIAL, POLITICAL, & ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF LEGALIZATION

Motivated by these striking inequalities, this thesis examines three recent legalization initiatives designed to address them. Marijuana legalization policies bring significant social,

economic, and political benefits. First among the potential benefits, legalized marijuana will prevent the imposition of felony burdens onto cannabis users and minimize the arbitrary violations of their rights (Stanford 2012). Marijuana legalization weakens the state's exertion of control by minimizing the quantity of drug laws usable for defining individuals as criminal, which proves a sufficient mechanism to target and incarcerate vulnerable communities. A reversal in the degree of restriction minimizes the availability of legal outlets to exercise this form of state control (Hart 2013; Tiger 2013). Additionally, the removal of the felon label weakens the stigma associated to users, which opens a wide array of educational, employment, and interpersonal opportunities (Alexander 2010). Therefore, by removing the ability to define marijuana users as felons and eliminating the possibility of imprisonment, legalization policies increase accessibility to social, political, and economic opportunities for marginalized communities.

Further, the redirection of police practices and funds away from marijuana enforcement allows local departments to focus their efforts on other crimes. Legalization also assists in easing the burdens of prison overcrowding and its associated dangers, and enables the redirection of tax dollars for other uses (Stanford 2012). It is important to note, however, that the shift from incarceration to infraction will not minimize the over-enforcement of drug crimes in impoverished, urban communities (Tiger 2013). Although the vulnerable individuals in these communities may remain the primary targets of drug enforcement, the removal of felon penalties for marijuana possession advances many legal, economic, and social opportunities.

#### RECENT LEGALIZATION INITIATIVES

To address the influence of media narratives on policy outcomes, the employment of three recent state-level marijuana legalization measures proved useful. The legalization ballot

initiatives in California (2010), Colorado (2012), and Oregon (2012) proposed regulatory guidelines for the processing, distribution, transportation, and sale of less than one ounce of marijuana in licensed establishments (Corry 2012; Lee 2010; Stanford 2012). ). Further, the propositions intended to authorize local governments to oversee the commercialization process by imposing regulations and guidelines or collecting taxes. All three legalization measures prohibited sales to, possession by, and transportation or consumption of marijuana by minors, defined as individuals under 21 (Corry 2012; Lee 2010; Stanford 2012). Lastly, the measures maintained some prohibitions, for example on consumption on school grounds, in public, or while driving (Corry 2012; Lee 2010; Stanford 2012). Although the measures maintained a few points of separation, for example Oregon’s intention to include hemp in the commercialization process, overall, the measures proved eligible for comparative analysis due their common intention to oversee the removal of the state prohibition on marijuana and its implementation as a commercialized product.

#### RELEVANCE OF MEDIA NARRATIVES

As with many policies in the “War on Drugs,” media narratives surrounding legalization initiatives may strongly influence public opinion and support, and thus their ultimate success or failure. Media institutions narrate social issues such as crime or drug use in particular ways that have resonated with the public and have created a social landscape hospitable to the passage of punitive drug policies. As Beckett and Sasson (2004:6) argue, “shifts in the popular outrage about crime are more closely related to shifts in the quantity and tone of media crime reporting, rather than to the volume of crime in society”. This occurs as media narratives often frame crime as isolated events and ignore broader trends, as well as the crime-causing structural conditions of society (Beckett and Sasson 2004). These narratives often use cultural symbols to represent a

victim's innocence or purity, and to highlight the individual flaws of perpetrators. For example, victims are often white, female, or children, and the perpetrators are young, black men. Further, this form of crime news reporting is largely over-represented in comparison to other topics, attracting more media attention than any other issue on major network national newscasts between 1990 and 1999 (Beckett and Sasson 2004). This partially occurs as media institutions rely on government officials for news reporting sources, who, as previously mentioned, have supported the interests of the corporate elite by waging a war on drugs. Overall, this form of narrative creates a perception that crime rates are high, and generates a framework where individuals can be blamed for their criminal activities, rather than assisted in overcoming social, economic, and political inequities (Beckett and Sasson 2004). These characteristics of media crime reporting have created a "get-tough" framework for understanding crime, which implies the need for harsher and longer punishments, and creates a social environment favorable to the passage of harsher policies (Beckett and Sasson 2004).

This influence of media narratives on policy outcomes is visible across a range of policy outcomes, even beyond crime and punishment. For example, Hana Brown (2013) demonstrates how narratives surrounding welfare and immigration led to collective political action favoring restrictive welfare policies. She argues that the "mass media is a critical site for the contestation and consolidation of meanings", and that the measures proved consequential for welfare politics not because of objective statistics related to the issue, but because of the narratives used to explain them (Brown 2013: 298). Her results suggest that the attitudes generated by the available frames surrounding welfare politics altered the outcomes for social policy. "Framing choices shifted the wider discursive opportunity structure available...and affected the formation of political coalitions and changed the political stakes for welfare reform" (Brown 2013: 299).

Brown's work illuminates more clearly the manner in which narratives generate frameworks for understanding social issues that direct subsequent political actions. This research project borrows these theoretical definitions, where narrative refers to the unique portrayal of a specific issue, and framework refers to the broader understanding of the issue it assumes that may lead to specific political actions.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This project addresses media narratives on marijuana legalization to assess whether they reflect isolated and individualistic framings, or whether they depart from these traditional narrations to frame legalization as something different. Further, this analysis addresses the influence these narratives may carry on public perceptions and subsequent direction of political actions. To assess these research questions, three recent legalization proposals in Colorado, California, and Oregon provide an opportunity to empirically test the relationships between media narratives and variations in policy outcomes.

## METHODS

The study's main empirical portion includes qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles from the LA Times (n= 32), the Denver Post (n=30), and the Oregonian (n= 30). I select these papers because they have the largest statewide circulation. Articles were included into the LA Times sample frame when they contained the search term "Proposition 19", into the Denver Post sample frame when they included the term "Amendment 64", and into the Oregonian sample frame when they included the search term "Measure 80." Inclusion of each state's legalization measure in the search term filtered the sample frame to contain primarily articles that addressed marijuana narratives in the context of their associated ballot initiatives. Further, constricting the sample frames to consist of articles authored within the year before their ballot

vote enabled the assessment of each state's narrative on subsequent policy outcomes (and not policy outcomes on narratives). For analysis of the Denver Post and the Oregonian I employed systematic random sampling to select every 4<sup>th</sup> article of the sample frame for inclusion in the sample. Because the LA Times provided fewer articles with the designated search term, this sample included the first 32 articles in the sample frame. Sample frames included articles and editorials based on this systematic sorting scheme, but excluded advertisements and links to outside newspapers.

The qualitative content analysis occurred in multiple stages. I began the analysis by summarizing each article and extracting quotes that embodied key elements of the article. This process illuminated the presence of eight distinct themes that reflected the texts' reoccurring semantic, organizational, and socio-cultural characteristics. For example, a theme was generated when similar combinations of the aforementioned characteristics were detected in an article. The articles were subsequently coded based on the presence or absence of the various features of each theme. Multiple themes often appeared in each article, and were not exclusive to the newspaper in which originally found. For example, marijuana as a complex notion was originally identified in Denver Post articles, however its presence was further located in the LA Times and the Oregonian. The final stage of the analysis involved extensive reevaluations and revisions to ensure the proper categorization of articles and their corresponding themes.

## **RESULTS**

The section below describes the most commonly detected themes in the LA Times, the Denver Post, and the Oregonian samples. Each theme conveyed a unique narrative of marijuana legalization, and their descriptions are included in the fellow section. To compare differences

and highlight similarities among each state’s representation of legalization, Table 1.0 includes the numerical frequency of each theme’s detection throughout the content analysis.

**TABLE 1.0**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>DENVER POST</b>	<b>LA TIMES</b>	<b>OREGONIAN</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
POLITICAL CHALLENGE	<i>17</i>	2	<b>6</b>	25
COMPLEX NOTION	<b>8</b>	<i>13</i>	<i>10</i>	31
FRACTIONALIZATION	2	<i>17</i>	<b>5</b>	23
IRRESPONSIBILITY	2	<b>8</b>	2	12
FEDERAL V STATE	<i>15</i>	3	<b>5</b>	23
CONTROVERSY	0	2	<b>8</b>	10
MONEY	1	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	18
COMPARISON	1	0	<i>11</i>	12
<b>TOTAL ARTICLES</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>92</b>

- Articles may contain more than one theme

### **THE DENVER POST**

The data from the Denver Post indicated the presence of three common narratives for representing and interpreting marijuana legalization: as a) a political challenge, b) a complex notion, or c) as involving federal tensions. The complex notion frame is also present in the LA Times and Oregonian articles, whereas the political challenge and federal tensions themes are unique to the Denver Post in their higher prevalence. Because all three samples presented marijuana as a complex notion at similar rates, the analysis for this narrative is located in the cross-newspaper section. The combination of the political challenge and federal tensions themes highlight frameworks characterized by the pursuit of state rights and assumes an implicit support for state governments.

## THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE FRAME

The Denver Post's most prominent theme occurred in 57% of the sampled articles, and involved descriptions of potential mechanisms for the implementation and oversight of the amendment. Articles containing the political challenge theme primarily included discussions of the manner in which the policy would be regulated, highlighting the necessity of extensive supervision and intervention of multiple political and legal institutions. Although articles frequently mentioned the lack of clarity regarding definitive methods for implementation and regulation, those coded into this theme often provided descriptions of how legalized marijuana would make the transition into a commercialized product. For example, a quote capturing this notion is provided below.

“To make the work less overwhelming, the task force will divide into groups to focus on issues in five areas: business regulations for marijuana stores; the types of local regulations cities and counties can impose; taxes and matters of civil law, including employment issues; matters of criminal law; and social issues related to marijuana legalization, including consumer safety” (DP Article 5).

By introducing descriptions such as these, the political challenge frame highlighted diverse options for implementing legalized marijuana. This theme cited the potential employment of specific security requirements, described systems for the monitoring of marijuana plants as they are grown and shipped, and introduced the notion of auditors who perform site visits. Similar to how medical marijuana, tobacco, or alcohol is regulated, this theme described how marijuana would be monitored on college campuses or kept away from minors. For example, “People of all ages smoking pot on campus and those under 21 found possessing it would still be issued criminal tickets” (DP Article 7). This quote captures the regulatory nature of the political challenge theme. Overall, this frame included articles that involved discussions of

the specific strategies for overseeing the legalization of marijuana, as is distinct from articles coded under the federal tensions frame, which described the incongruence among federal and state marijuana policies.

Media narratives introducing legalization as a notion requiring extensive action on the part of multiple state institutions produce collectivist frameworks for conceptualizing marijuana. Descriptions of the task force's legalization responsibilities and their plans for overseeing the process encourage a framework that defines marijuana in terms of the mechanisms adoptable by state institutions to end the prohibition in Colorado. Framing legalization through the lens of a statewide implementation and regulation process assumes the collective competence of state actors. For example, this narrative reflects a well-defined plan for the execution of the amendment, focusing on the details and complexities of the actions to take, which illuminates an implicit assumption that state actors will be able to execute them. Articles that demonstrated this assumption were captured with quotes like the following, "We are evaluating the issues related to the passage of the constitutional amendment to ensure that required modifications to policy and the application to our operations are implemented in a well-considered manner," (DP Article 30). One potential implication of this assumption is that legalization falls under the domain of the state of Colorado, which frames the public and Colorado state institutions as a unified collective. This unity is even clearer in the federal tensions frame.

#### THE FEDERAL TENSIONS FRAME

Articles coded under this frame in the Denver Post involved descriptions of the tensions among federal policies, which prohibit recreational marijuana use, and Amendment 64's intention to end marijuana prohibition at the state level. This theme highlighted the struggle of power

between state and federal governments by describing the amendment in terms of potential actions either system could take that would affect the enforcement of the policy. Descriptions of federal actions largely included the available pathways for invoking federal law, and the manner in which these pathways might be employed. For example, “the federal government might choose to intervene by, among other options, filing a lawsuit arguing that the law's retail sales section violates the U.S. Constitution” (DP Article 14). In this sense, this theme highlighted the power of the federal government by narrating their options for overriding Amendment 64. Further, as the following quote narrates, this theme frequently described the Colorado state government’s available legal outlets for combating the attempted enforcement of federal laws.

“DAs announced they would no longer prosecute small amounts of marijuana possession, and acted in good faith to respect voters' will while not treading unduly on the federal interest at stake” (DP Article 10).

By introducing opportunities for state resistance, this quote more deeply illuminates the portrayal of legalization as involving a power struggle between state and federal institutions. Further, the Denver Post’s federal tensions theme illuminated the concrete actions available to the larger public for complying with the policy in ways that best suit state interests. For example, the following quote demonstrates this notion.

“More than 36,000 people have signed a petition to the White House that seeks protection for Colorado from federal drug laws so the state can craft a regulatory structure for a recreational-marijuana industry. "We need to know whether the federal government will take legal action to block the implementation of Amendment 64” (Article 25).

Overall, the federal challenge theme introduced in the Denver post characterized marijuana legalization as involving tensions between state and federal institutions. This is

exemplified by the article's descriptions of the available legal opportunities for state and federal government officials, as well as for the public of Colorado, to oversee the enforcement process in ways that suit their unique interests. Further, this form of narrative emphasizes the existence of a power struggle between the state of Colorado and its institutions and constituents, and the federal government.

Media narratives presenting marijuana in terms of state and federal tensions encourage collectivist frameworks for understanding legalization. By introducing marijuana through descriptions of the political incongruence between state and federal institutions, these narratives present legalization as an issue affecting the state of Colorado as a collective unit. The presentation of marijuana through the lens of federal or state interests creates a category of opposition that serves as a reference, which encourages Coloradans to define themselves in comparison to the federal government. The state versus federal presentation of marijuana advances understandings in these dichotomous terms, which strengthens an alliance among Coloradans and creates a perception of state solidarity. Therefore, by framing the issue in reference to the federal government, these narratives inform frameworks of marijuana legalization as a statewide occurrence that is taken on by the collective as a whole.

#### THE COMPLEXITY FRAME

27% of articles in the Denver Post introduced descriptions of the complexity of marijuana legalization, and highlighted the manner in which it carries a wide variety of social, political, and economic benefits and implications. Articles coded into this theme described many diverse possible ramifications of the amendment, such as how it could encourage a negative reputation of Colorado, increase health risks, or harm youth. For example, a quote capturing the anxieties surrounding the possible consequences for youth argues,

“The legalization of marijuana would draw more underage kids into its use and abuse. That's a reasonable assumption. Apparently, underage use is already a serious problem, even though marijuana is currently an illegal substance. Unfortunately, legalization may aggravate that” (DP Article 8).

However, articles coded into this theme also included arguments of how marijuana legalization would advance beneficial opportunities for the state of Colorado. For example, by increasing tax revenues, providing relief for individuals with debilitating conditions, or by redistributing state resources to more effective uses, this theme deeply assesses the manner in which legalization may help the state. This emphasis encompasses the social, political, and economic intricacies of the amendment, a notion that characterizes the logic of this theme. Below is a quote that captures the possibility of benefits for social welfare.

“The biggest benefit of legalization is the elimination of most crimes associated with illegal production and distribution. The legal, competitive market price of marijuana will drop sharply, especially since people will be allowed to grow their own for personal use or in non-profit co-ops. The price premium enjoyed by drug pushers and cartels when it was illegal will disappear and with it their artificial profit margins and customer base” (DP Article 8).

In short, this data illuminated the complexity of the proposition through describing a wide range of possible occurrences that could ensue, should the measure pass. By introducing both drawbacks and benefits of implementation, this theme deeply assessed a future with legalized marijuana, and appeared largely impartial in its presentation. Because this theme was not unique to the Denver Post sample, its analysis appears with the other two in the cross-analysis section.

## THE LA TIMES

The results of the data collection demonstrate the existence of distinct narratives surrounding California's Proposition 19. The LA Times largely presented marijuana legalization through one of the four following frameworks: a) legalization involving fractionalized support b) marijuana as a complex notion, c) marijuana involving notions of irresponsibility, and d) marijuana legalization as a movement seeking money. These themes also occurred in a small number in the Denver Post, and a more significant portion occurred in the Oregonian articles. The combination of the fractionalization and irresponsibility themes undermines support for legalization policies by producing frameworks involving notions of individualism. Because the themes of marijuana as a complex notion and as a movement seeking money also occurred in the other samples, their analysis takes place together in a later section.

### THE FRACTIONALIZATION FRAME

The fractionalization frame was detected in 53% of LA Times articles, and presented marijuana legalization as a divided and inconsistently supported notion. Articles coded under the fractionalization frame highlighted the controversial nature of Proposition 19 by describing incongruous polling patterns and signifying the lacking existence of unified perceptions among various demographic groups.

“The poll found the biggest drop in support among Democrats, who backed it by 60% last month and now supported it by 51%...Opposition also increased among women and voters who are 65 or older, but support remains strongest among the youngest voters. Voters ages 18 to 39 backed it by a 26-point margin last month and still favored it by a 16-point margin” (LAT Article 21).

Demographics implicitly or explicitly presented as conflicted included groups such as young versus elderly individuals, progressives versus conservatives, or men versus women. Further,

these frameworks included descriptions of polarization *within* demographic groups, for example among Democrats or within the Latino or African Americans communities.

“The campaign has won the endorsement of the state NAACP and the National Black Police Assn., but the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement opposed it. On Wednesday, the campaign announced the endorsement of the National Latino Officers Assn. Several major Latino organizations declined to endorse the initiative but have not opposed it” (LAT Article 6).

Although these frameworks frequently included information about the existence of such divisions, descriptions as to *why* these demographics held disparate perspectives were rarely included. Articles coded under the fractionalization frame included comparisons of the opinions among various demographic groups, and does not include discussions involving the polarized opinions of federal and state institutions, which were coded under the political tensions frame.

This form of legalization narrative generates frameworks that highlight the individualized nature of marijuana. By describing the proposition in terms of the existence of disparate support, this proposition is defined by the beliefs held by individuals or subgroups of individuals that share some demographic or social trait, or in-group categorization. In this sense, the fractionalization narrative emphasizes smaller components that make up the state of California, rather than assessing the state as a whole. These narratives illuminate the personalized nature of marijuana understandings, and inform individualistic frameworks based on in-group categorizations for understanding the issue of legalization.

## THE COMPLEXITY FRAME

41% of the time, LA Times articles largely contained the theme of marijuana as a complex notion, which presented the legalization proposition through describing potential benefits and drawbacks from various perspectives. These articles described the frequently competing views of

social institutions and their actors, such as federal institutions or union representatives. For example, a quote that embodies this notion states,

“Lloyd said the union decided to back the initiative because it could help raise revenue to avoid cuts to healthcare, home care, education and services for children, families, the elderly and people with disabilities” ( LAT Article 29).

Further, this theme frequently entailed research contributions on the policies themselves, such as possible effects of the proposition’s taxing plan. For example, a quote that captures the political and economic complexities of the taxing plan states,

“The report notes that Ammiano’s proposed tax is about 10 times the rate of state tobacco taxes. That high tax creates an incentive for tax evasion that is more financially rewarding than smuggling marijuana from Mexico to California and it could also encourage smokers to turn to the highest-potency marijuana to get more bang for their buck, the researchers concluded” ( LAT Article 12).

In addition, these articles addressed policy-related issues by describing potential effects on social and political structures, for instance on drug cartels or gang organizations. For example, the effects of legalization on drug cartels were frequently discussed throughout articles in this theme.

A quote describing these concerns states,

"Legalizing marijuana will not put an end to organized crime in Mexico and the wave of criminal violence threatening Mexicans ... especially as a measure taken at a local, unilateral level," Poire said" (LAT Article 22).

In short, articles coded under the complexity frame involved in-depth descriptions of the proposition’s potential consequences and benefits by describing likely effects on social, political, and economic relations. This theme introduced a deep form of analysis by drawing on a variety

of civic, academic, and political sources to make claims about the potential effects of the proposition.

### THE MONEY FRAME

A further theme detected in the LA Times, occurring in 28% of the articles, presented marijuana legalization as a movement seeking extensive financial support. Further, this frame highlighted the existence of competitive elements among proponents of the measure and those in opposition through describing the financially lacking side. For example, the following quote captures the logic of this theme,

“The No on 19 campaign has lagged in contributions. Its largest donation reported so far this month is \$25,000 from Sebastian Musco, the chairman of Santa Ana-based Gemini Industries, which recovers precious metals used in petroleum processing.” (LAT Article 9).

Further, this frame frequently included the numeric quantities of the donations, which provides a quantifiable understanding of the proposition’s support. Overall, articles coded into these theme narrated legalization as a movement seeking extensive financial support by tracking and reporting on monetary contributions made to either side.

### THE IRRESPONSIBILITY FRAME

Articles coded under the irresponsibility frame highlighted the perceived difficulties that would arise due to the reckless and negligent nature of marijuana users, a theme appearing in 25% of articles. These perceived difficulties included concerns about drivers operating their vehicles or employees working while under the influence of marijuana, and the manner in which this could result in dangerous and negligent practices. For example, a quote that embraces the logic of this theme states, “Prop. 19 could even allow BART engineers and school bus drivers to smoke marijuana right up until the moment they climb into the driver’s seat” (LAT Article 14).

This demonstrates how the irresponsibility theme frames marijuana through the flawed attributes of drug users. Further, articles coded under this theme often addressed concerns such as an employer's inability to address marijuana consumption until after an accident occurred, and the general anxieties surrounding this possible scenario. For example,

“The chamber maintains the initiative would undermine the rights of employers to ensure their workers are not high, raising the risk of injury, lawsuits and increased insurance costs... This means a worker could show up high and the employer could not act unless the worker caused an accident” (LAT Article 7).

In addition, articles were coded under this frame when they included specific words or phrases that created a negative perception of marijuana users and their advocates. For example, “She watched the pot proponents *saunter* up to the microphone and *beg* for votes” (LAT Article 18).

Overall, articles coded into this theme emphasized the flawed attributes among the subpopulation of drug users in California, and highlighted this group's lack of preparation for the implementation of legalized marijuana.

This form of marijuana narrative further informs individualistic conceptualizations of legalization. By describing the proposition in terms of how flaws in individual Californians may result in incompetent and possibly dangerous practices, these narratives frame legalization in terms of problems with individual citizen's decision-making processes. Rather than focusing on the attributes of the broader society and how they prepare (or fail to prepare) the state to address legalization, these narratives emphasize the influence of traits held by the subpopulation of drug users. By highlighting the existence of flawed attributes within this subgroup of Californians, these narratives produce legalization frameworks that also maintain individualistic, rather than collective orientations.

## THE FEDERAL TENSIONS FRAME

A latent theme, introduced in 9% of the LA Times articles, described the tensions that would arise among federal and state institutions in an environment with legalized marijuana. Frameworks portraying this tension highlighted the existence of a conflict between the fundamental nature of the proposition and federal laws that continue to define marijuana as an illegal substance. Articles coded under this framework provided descriptions of the aggressive approach federal officials intended to adopt should the proposition to legalize marijuana pass.

“The Obama administration has cranked up its efforts to defeat the measure. Last week, U.S. Atty. Gen. Eric Holder said he would “vigorously enforce” federal narcotics laws” (LAT Article 21).

Overall, articles coded into the LA Times federal tensions theme highlighted the existence of a power struggle between state and federal institutions by citing the unconstitutionality of the proposition.

## THE OREGONIAN

The Oregonian sample illuminated the presence of a wider set of narratives surrounding the state’s legalization measure. These narratives occurred in a more evenly distributed manner, which provided a larger set of frameworks for understanding marijuana legalization. The primary frameworks included a) legalization in comparison to other state’s measures, b) legalization as a complex notion, c) legalization as a controversial issue, and d) legalization as movement seeking money. The more even dispersion of themes neither undermines nor supports the legalization measure. The existence of many evenly appearing themes illuminates a wide range of frameworks for understanding legalization, which undermines direct support for any single conceptualization or direction of political action. Because the complexity and money-seeking frames occurred in other samples, their analysis will appear together.

## THE COMPARISON FRAME

The dominant frame in the Oregonian, introduced in 37% of articles, presented frameworks of Measure 80's marijuana legalization proposal by comparing it to aspects of the legalization proposals in Washington or Colorado. Articles coded under this theme frequently included descriptions of the ways in which Measure 80 differs from other measures. For example, variations in polling indications of public support and degrees of financial support indicated the presence of this theme.

"Marijuana legalization is also on the ballot this year in Oregon and Colorado.

Polls so far show the Washington measure has the best chance of passing.

Barreto noted that sponsors of I-502 have been able to afford a strong television advertising campaign while organized opposition has been minimal" (O Article 8).

Further, articles coded into the comparison frame described variations in the degrees of restrictions proposed or mechanisms of implementation. For example, a quote that embraces the logic of this notion states,

"Similar pot legalization measures in Washington and Colorado were ahead in late vote tallies. Oregon's had the distinction as the least restrictive, allowing adults to grow and possess unlimited amounts for personal use, and setting up a separate state commission to license growers and sell to the public in state-run stores." (O Article 10).

In short, articles coded under this theme highlighted variations in different aspects of the legalization measures. The logic of this theme emphasizes the differences and similarities between Washington, Colorado, and Oregon's measures by introducing an analysis of each measure's details and presenting them through the lens of comparison.

This form of marijuana narrative encourages frameworks that highlight a degree of association to and of separation from Oregon, Washington, and Colorado's legalization attempts. By framing the proposition in terms of comparison with other states, these narratives highlight the manner in which Oregon's legalization effort is both part of and separate from the wider national movement. Overall, Oregon's comparison narratives potentially diversified political responses by highlighting in and out-group categorizations.

### THE COMPLEXITY FRAME

30% of Oregonian articles presented marijuana legalization as a complex notion involving many beneficial and harmful aspects. Articles coded under the theme described the arguments made by the measure's proponents, as well as the claims made by those in opposition, to present the complicated nature of the measure's intention to legalize marijuana. For example, a quote that captures this idea states,

“Supporters said it would have generated revenue for the state and saved money by reducing the amount of police time and jail space devoted to marijuana possession crimes” (O Article 23).

This introduces marijuana through the lens of complex social, political, and economic benefits or ramifications. For instance, this theme often described the measure's possible impact on aspects such as social stigmatization or access to children, tax benefits, or the redirection of law enforcement resources. The following two quotes exemplify these complexities.

““We're wasting so much time and so much energy and so many people's lives with our current policy,” Bradbury says. “We're putting them in jail at the prime of their lives. It's just ridiculous”” ( O Article 7).

“There are also good reasons for refusing to legalize it, among them preventing easier access by children” (O Article 25).

Although it is important to note that some of these articles provided descriptions of only benefits, or only drawbacks, the majority of articles coded under this theme included descriptions of both the positive and negative aspects of marijuana legalization. Overall, this indicated the introduction of a deeper assessment of the potential realities of statewide marijuana legalization.

This form of marijuana narrative suggests a willingness to engage with the movement by introducing a deeper form of analysis. By framing the measure in terms of the potential benefits and ramifications associated with legalization, Oregonian narratives introduce an element of complexity that captures the nuances of legalization implementation procedures. This framework more accurately represents the realities of legalization in the current sociopolitical context, which strengthens the notion of engagement attributed to the measure. In this sense, it is plausible that the complexity narrative supports the measure by introducing a deeper analysis that demonstrates a heavier involvement with the movement.

#### THE CONTROVERSY FRAME

27% of Oregonian articles introduced the controversy frame, which employed a unique organizational technique that introduced the concept of marijuana together with publically disputed issues. Through grouping together discussions of legalization with widely debated measures, this form of marijuana narrative encourages an association to other policy notions involving complex social, emotional, moral, or political elements. For example, authors frequently provided descriptions of, or polling results for, Oregon’s Measure 80 in the same sentence they provided similar information about pro-gambling measures, tax breaks, or gay marriage. The following two quotes demonstrate this unique organization scheme,

“The same poll also finds two pro-casino measures well behind while marijuana legalization is losing by a smaller margin. Voters are largely undecided about whether to abolish corporate "kicker" tax rebates” (O Article 22).

“If the marriage, marijuana and pro-gambling votes hold up in other states, it could be a national red-letter day for libertarian-minded voters who want more elbow room to decide what to do with their private lives” (O Article 23).

Articles were then coded under the controversy frame when they included this systematic grouping- representation pattern when discussing aspects of the measure.

The introduction of Measure 80 in this organizational pattern generates frameworks that define legalization in terms of its controversial nature. By narrating the measure in this way, the Oregonian illuminates the relationship between legalization and notions of morality or intense emotionality by highlighting its associations to other highly disputed political issues. For example, a quote capturing this interpretation states, “The poll was taken Oct. 18-31, describing simultaneous support and opposition for both gay marriage and marijuana legalization initiatives” (O Article 8). This framework undermines support for the measure by directing political responses towards action on the basis of individual understandings of right and wrong in the context of a combined set of highly emotional political issues.

#### THE MONEY FRAME

26% of Oregonian articles included a theme presenting marijuana legalization as a concept seeking extensive financial support from various donors. Articles coded under this theme described specific campaign donors, and frequently provided the numeric amounts of their donations. In this sense, the money theme frames legalization through the notion of financial competition. For example, a quote capturing this element of financial support states,

“Stanford's political committee, Oregon Cannabis Tax Act 2012, raised \$333,052 in contributions and spent \$345,580 to get the initiative on the ballot.

When other loans and balances are factored in, the committee is running a deficit of \$2,802, according to the records” (O Article 27)

Overall, this theme involved the in-depth tracking and analysis of financial support and competition surrounding the legalization measure, and tended to provide quantitative data to support the claims introduced. Because this theme also appear in the LA Times sample, their analysis will appear together in the following section.

## **CROSS-NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS**

### **STATE COMMONALITIES**

Certain themes appeared in articles from multiple states, highlighting the congruence in marijuana frameworks between different geographic and political bodies. The federal tensions frame appeared in all three state’s articles, providing support for the notion that marijuana legalization is often understood as a political endeavor involving constant interactions and negotiations between state and federal governments. Although this may be the case, the much larger presence of the federal tensions frame in the Denver Post merits recognition, as it likely influenced the state’s overall frameworks in more severe ways. Further detected in all three newspapers, the complexity frame also illuminates the existence of more universal definitions of legalization. The appearance of a legalization framing in all three samples that highlights the interconnection with complex social, political, and economic processes, points to the idea that many Americans conceptualize legalization as a complicated issue that cannot easily be addressed. Further, the even distribution and degree of analysis this frame introduced across all three samples indicates that it likely influenced subsequent legalization frameworks in similar ways, and therefore provides little information about unique influences on public perceptions or

political responses. Lastly, the money-seeking frame appeared in both the LA Times and the Oregonian, which supports the notion that the marijuana frameworks in these states may also define legalization through quantifiable degrees of financial support.

#### THE FEDERAL TENSIONS FRAME: OREGON, CALIFORNIA, & COLORADO

All three newspapers introduced the frame of marijuana involving federal tensions. The Denver Post's tension frame maintained a smaller emphasis on the expected aggressive nature of the federal government should the measure pass, but occurred more frequently (50%) in comparison to its Oregonian (17%) and LA Times (10%) counterparts. Further, unlike the Oregonian and the LA Times, Denver Post articles frequently addressed practical mechanisms for addressing the conflict with the federal government, for example how District Attorneys would prosecute marijuana crimes, or how Coloradans might address federal intervention. In contrast, federal tensions present in the LA times and Oregonian typically focused discussions around the existence of such tensions, without suggesting solutions for addressing them. Due to the larger prevalence and greater degree of detail presented by the Denver Post, these discrepancies among the state's narratives likely manifest with different levels of influence on each state's overall frameworks and political responses.

#### THE COMPLEXITY FRAME: OREGON, CALIFORNIA, & COLORADO

Each state introduced marijuana as a complex notion at relatively similar rates, and further described comparable drawbacks and benefits for the implementation of their respective measures. All three newspapers described the possible drawbacks of increased access of cannabis to youth, and the fear of increased youth consumption. Further, all three newspaper introduced similar benefits of legalization, such as the reduction in profits for the illegal drug market, increased taxes available for public purposes, and the redirection of law enforcement

resources to more efficient uses. This framework moves away from one-sided moralistic representations of the measure, which suggests that this narrative is more deeply engaged with the movement. In this sense, the complexity frame likely supported the success of the measure by illuminating the depth of thought involved. Although each state introduced a set of unique possible outcomes for the implementation of their legalization proposal, the majority of the articles located in the complexity frame introduced similar arguments. Due to the similar rate of introduction and depth of analysis, it is likely that the complexity frame maintained a similar degree of influence for the overall production of each state's marijuana frameworks and subsequent political responses.

#### THE MONEY FRAME: OREGON & CALIFORNIA

The LA Times and the Oregonian both introduced marijuana legalization as a movement seeking extensive financial support. Both newspapers conveyed the money-seeking narrative through citing the specific organizations and donors involved, and by including the numeric amounts of the donations. However, while the Oregonian articles only introduced discussions of the financial support among those in favor, the LA Times frequently highlighted the lack of financial backing among those in opposition. In short, California and Oregon frameworks illuminated the monetary element present in narratives of marijuana legalization by introducing the notion of financial competition.

This form of narrative reflects the attempt to quantify political support and measure the degree of influence held by external parties. By introducing marijuana legalization in combination with a quantifiable degree of financial contributions, the money-seeking narratives not only indicate the degree of support for each side, but also illuminate the powerful actors involved in the legalization initiatives. For example, Peter Lewis, an affiliate of the Drug Policy

Alliance, and Paul Stanford, the president of the Hemp and Cannabis Foundation, were frequently mentioned donors in both the Oregonian and the LA Times. These actors and their contributions likely diversified political responses by highlighting the degrees of corporate support associated to the various stances on marijuana legalization.

#### THEME DEPARTURES AMONG STATES

The most notable departure between the various states involved the significantly larger set and more even dispersion of marijuana themes detected in the Oregonian. While the LA Times and Denver Post presented legalization through two distinctive themes, the Oregonian articles provided a much broader approach to legalization understandings. This departure from Colorado and California narratives merits recognition due to the manner in which it complicates perceptions among Oregonians, discouraging solidarity and unified action in any one direction. Other departures among the states include the Denver Post's larger presentation of marijuana as a federal challenge. Although this theme was detected in each sample, its overrepresentation in Colorado likely attracted the public in greater degrees.

In short, although each state introduced unique narratives, many frames overlapped across the newspapers. All three states presented marijuana legalization as involving tensions with federal institutions, and further framed it as a complex notion involving many potential benefits and ramifications for social, political, and economic processes. At nearly identical rates, the Oregonian and the LA Times presented marijuana as a movement seeking extensive financial support, however this theme did not appear in the Denver Post. The largest degree of departure among the state's narratives involved the Oregonian's introduction of many evenly distributed narratives, while the LA Times and the Denver Post presented two unique frameworks each. Overall, it is likely that the parallels among the state's complexity frames manifested with

similar degrees of influence over each states overall frameworks. In contrast, the greater presence of the federal tensions frame in the Denver Post likely influenced public perceptions and political actions more heavily. In Oregon, the presence of many evenly distributed themes likely held the largest influence over the subsequent legalization frameworks.

## **DISCUSSION**

Overall, the data gathered from the content analysis indicated the presence of distinct narratives within each state's media coverage of marijuana legalization. Although the narratives and frameworks proved diverse, each state's news coverage did share certain themes, whose influences have previously been discussed. After accounting for these comparisons, the data suggest that Oregonian news coverage centered on a variety of unique themes, which combined to created multiple frameworks for defining the measure. For example, marijuana conceptualizations included legalization in the context of other state's measures, as a complex or controversial notion, and as a movement seeking financial support. In California, the LA Times largely framed marijuana legalization in terms of fractionalized support and anxieties around negligent and dangerous drug users. Colorado newspapers largely defined the amendment through the frame of the challenges faced by state and administrative institutions and the existence of tensions with the federal government.

Further, the data suggest that variations in media legalization narratives combine to produce different frameworks that influence public reactions and subsequent political responses. In Oregon, media institutions presented multiple framings of legalization, which undermines support for policy implementation consistent with any one perspective. In this sense, Oregon media institutions likely diversified political responses to the measure. The coupling of the fractionalization and irresponsibility themes in California newspapers combine to frame

legalization in terms of personal orientations and characteristics, creating an overall individualistic framework that minimizes the likelihood of unified political action on the collective behalf. In contrast, the political challenge and federal tensions themes presented by Colorado media institutions frame Amendment 64 in ways that ultimately strengthen collective state loyalties and perceptions of Colorado as a unified body. This framing introduces the state as a single unit prepared to oversee the commercialization process and combat the enforcement of federal policies, which advances opportunities for mass political action on the collective behalf. The larger conclusions drawn from this analysis suggest that as marijuana narratives shift away from individualistic orientations, and towards descriptions of legalization as a social or collective issue with practical modes of implementation, new understandings are informed and a different set of policy outcomes are plausible. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of the combined effects of the combination of frames in each state.

## OREGON

The diverse and more evenly distributed combination of narratives present in Oregonian articles informs multiple frameworks for the conceptualization of marijuana legalization. The introduction of Measure 80 alongside elements of comparison, controversy, and financial necessity generates a wide range of marijuana conceptualizations. This increase in possible definitions minimizes the likelihood of policy action consistent with any one narrative. In this sense, media institutions in Oregon neither support nor undermine the 2012 legalization initiative.

## CALIFORNIA

The combination of the fractionalization and irresponsibility themes encourages individualistic frameworks for understanding marijuana legalization that ultimately undermine

the proposition. Both themes illuminate the personalized nature of marijuana legalization, either through introducing degrees of fractionalized support among individual groups, or by highlighting flaws with the decision making processes of individual Californians. By highlighting this personalized component, California media institutions encourage frameworks of marijuana legalization that view the proposition through the individual attributes and perceptions of Californians. By emphasizing this element, California newspapers ignore the attributes and perspective of the collective unit of California, which takes the movement out of context and undermines support for the statewide measure.

This mirrors traditional frameworks of drug crimes, as Beckett and Sasson (2004) describe, “In general, crime related news stories provide detailed accounts of individual criminal events, with comparatively little attention paid to broader trends in crime. Few stories attempt to put the crime problem in a larger perspective”. The parallel emphases on individual orientations that ignore broader perceptions illuminate this consistency with previous drug related news stories. These legalization frameworks share a further similarity to traditional narratives by employing cultural symbols of innocence to depict those defined as victims. For example, the California article that described how the proposition would allow “school bus drivers to smoke marijuana right up until the moment they climb into the driver’s seat” exemplifies this notion. This quotes draws on collective anxieties surrounding fear for the safety of children, highlighting their cultural definitions of vulnerable individuals, to draw support in a specific direction. Therefore, the manner in which the proposition ultimately failed to pass suggests a consistency between previous crime frameworks and restrictive policy outcomes, and further highlights how these narratives undermined support for the policy.

## COLORADO

The political challenge and the federal tension themes combine to create frameworks of marijuana legalization characterized by collectivism. Both themes frame legalization under the umbrella of state associations. While the political challenge theme highlights the existence of strong state institutions and the popular belief in their competency, the federal tensions theme presents legalization through the dichotomous lens of the state versus the federal government. Both forms of narratives strengthen perceptions of marijuana as an issue that affects the state as a collective unit. This social or group framing of marijuana increases the likelihood that civic actors will come together and act as a collective unit to advance a common goal. In this sense, the collectivist frameworks inspired by Colorado media institutions likely advanced opportunities for legalization policy outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the conclusions drawn from this research highlight the parallels between traditional media drug narratives that introduce individualistic frameworks, and subsequent punitive drug policy implementation. Further, these findings indicate how a departure from this framework may enable the implementation of less restrictive policies. The portrayal of marijuana legalization as individualistic in nature and tending to ignore broader social attributes may shape public perceptions and direct political support away from the movement. For example, California emphasis on personal views and flaws highlights the logic of this notion. By ignoring the degree of preparation and support felt by Californians as a collective unit, it is unlikely that unified political action on the collective behalf will occur. In contrast, as narratives shift away from a personalized nature, and towards collectivist frameworks that define legalization as under the domain of a unified body as a whole, policy outcomes consistent with that notion prove much more plausible. The data from Colorado supports this conclusion, as the presentation of a

state/federal dichotomy and the ability and willingness of state institutions to take on the challenge of legalization serves to frame the policy through the lens of Colorado as a unified body of peoples who are capable of acting politically in this manner.

Overall, this form of data collection falls short by solely assessing the influence of the media, and ignoring other powerful mechanisms that influence the implementation of restrictive and exploitative drug policies. In this sense, future research on drug policies may find it useful to employ the data from this assessment in combination with a deeper evaluation of political campaign contributions and the relationship between the pursuit of governmental and corporate interests, to track drug policy implementation. Further limitations include the manner in which this project only analyzed data from a single media platform, mainstream newspapers, and excluded the narratives of marijuana legalization on other platforms, such as TV news broadcasting or social media.

This analysis does, however, support the conclusion that media institutions hold considerable power on shaping perceptions about social and political issues that may influence subsequent political action. Due to the manner in which legalization minimizes opportunities for criminal justice control over vulnerable communities, this influence merits recognition. As powerful institutions continue to present social issues such as legalization in ways that reflect individualistic orientations, it is likely that future initiatives will fail to attract the collective support they demand.

## **APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATIONS**

The selection of newspaper articles as the units of analysis occurred due to the influence of media rhetoric on public opinion and political opportunity (Beckett and Sasson, 2004). Each framing of marijuana legalization creates distinct opportunities for policy implementation. This occurs as narratives about social issues such as drug crimes acquire meaning through the manner in which they are represented and interpreted by social institutions. This process influences how they will be responded to, or if they will be addressed through policy (Beckett and Sasson 2004). These characteristics of media influence drove the employment of the most widely circulated newspapers of each state for analysis. The employment of content analysis enabled the qualitative assessment of specific words and phrases in order to categorize their meanings and establish a better understanding of the various discourses surrounding marijuana legalization in each state, and provides data for the analysis of their affects on policy outcomes.

## **APPENDIX II: MEASURE DESCRIPTIONS**

### **CALIFORNIA & PROPOSITION 19**

The Regulate, Control, and Tax Cannabis Act, a failed initiative placed on the ballot in California in 2010, proposed to legalize marijuana under state and local laws by allowing “the Legislature to adopt a statewide regulatory system for a commercial cannabis industry” (Lee 2010). The originator of Proposition 19, Richard Lee, works as a marijuana advocate and medical marijuana provider in Oakland, California, and appointed political consultant Chris Lehane to head the campaign and pass the measure. Lee argues that current marijuana policies prove ineffective and exploitative in nature, and seeks to implement change through commercializing marijuana production (Hoeffel).

The measure proposed that local governments implement regulatory guidelines for the processing, distribution, transportation, and sale of marijuana in licensed establishments. For example, the initiative authorized local governments to oversee the locations, sizes, hours of operation, and signs and displays of cannabis distribution centers. The measure's legalization of marijuana further permitted local governments to impose benefit assessments and fees, and required licensed marijuana establishments to pay all applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Further, the measure proposed to permit individuals 21 years and older to possess, consume, cultivate, and transport up to one ounce of cannabis for personal use, however authorized various penalties for consumption on school grounds, in public, in the presence of minors, and for driving while intoxicated. In addition, the measure prohibited state and local law enforcement agencies from confiscating or destroying cannabis use in accordance with these measures.

\*2009 Initiative Analysis: The Regulate, Control, and Tax Cannabis Act of 2010

#### OREGON & MEASURE 80

Oregon Cannabis Tax Act Initiative, a statewide measure defeated on the November 2012 ballot, proposed to replace current statutes relating to the prohibition of marijuana, except for those relating to underage consumption and the operation of motor vehicles while intoxicated. Paul Stanford, president of the Hemp and Cannabis Foundation, drafted the document and worked with Secretary of State Kate Brown to place the measure on the ballot in the General Election. The initiative proposed that persons twenty-one years of age, and not previously convicted of drug sales to a minor, could cultivate, process, purchase, or possess marijuana for personal use without any formal license or registration. The measure further permitted the governor to appoint a seven-person cannabis commission to set standards and oversee the legalization process. For example, the measure proposed the commission regulate the cultivation

and sale of cannabis, establish guidelines for administrative practices and licensure requirements, and set retail prices to generate taxes. Further, the initiative permitted the commission to set standards, test the purity and grade potency of cannabis, and labeled the contents. The measure restricted sales to and possession by minors, and prohibited public consumption, permitting the application of fines and other civil penalties for failure to comply with the proposed regulations.

\*Oregon Cannabis Tax Act Initiative (2012)

#### COLORADO & AMENDMENT 64

Amendment 64 of the Colorado Constitution passed as a voter initiative in 2012, repealing the state's marijuana prohibition for adults twenty-one years and older. Authored by attorney Robert Corry, Jr. and signed into law by Governor Hickenlooper, the Colorado Marijuana Legalization Initiative speaks to the state's concerns for health and public safety. Corry argues that the statewide legalization of marijuana will weaken the ability of the criminal justice system to function as a regulatory social tool. He argues the elimination of criminal consequences for a marijuana conviction, such as incarceration and subsequent difficulty in obtaining housing or employment, functions to promote public wellbeing (Corry 2014).

The amendment allows for the purchase, possession, consumption, and transportation of less than one ounce of cannabis, and permits the home cultivation of up to six plants. Further, the initiative authorizes local governments to establish a regulatory structure for taxing and overseeing a system of cultivators, manufacturers, and retail establishments for the distribution of cannabis. The measure allows local governments to regulate cannabis commercialization by establishing, for example, the qualifications for retail licensure and security requirements for establishments, labeling guidelines and advertising restrictions for marijuana and related products, or civil penalties for failure to comply with regulations. The amendment prohibits

driving under the influence of marijuana, and public consumption of cannabis or consumption that endangers others. Further, it forbids the purchase, possession, consumption, transportation, or cultivation of cannabis by minors, and giving assistance to minors with any of these acts.

\*Colorado Marijuana Legalization Initiative (2012)

## APPENDIX III: DATA

Table A1: The Denver Post

date	author	title
October 7, 2012		Election 2012: Obama vs. Romney
September 7, 2012		Appeal by Springs manin fatal fire rejected
November 19, 2012	Jeff McAbee	Lighting up with grandma in the kitchen
December 18, 2012	John Ingold	Colorado marijuana task force holds first meeting
December 11, 2012	Tim Hoover	Hickenlooper signs proclamation
December 6, 2012	John Ingold	Pot still against college rules
November 29, 2012	Mike Rosen	Anti- reefer madness
November 25, 2012	John Ingold	Following win, Colorado marijuana activists debate how hard to push
November 20, 2012	Troy Eid	Guest Commentary: Amendment 64 and the way forward on pot in Colorado
November 17, 2012		DAs right to drop charges for pot
November 11, 2012	John Ingold	Sober politics fueled victory
November 10, 2012	John Ingold	Hick, Holder discuss Colo.'s pot decision
November 8, 2012	John Ingold	Colorado officials seek clarity after passage of marijuana measure
November 6, 2012	Jeremy P. Meyer	What to watch for Tuesday
November 1, 2012	John Ingold	Pot shop regulations hazy if Amendment 64 passes in Colorado
October 28, 2012	Vincent Carroll	Wanted: one state to go it alone
October 18, 2012	John Ingold	Marijuana debate argues whether state goes to pot
October 15, 2012		Amendment 64 is the wrong way to legalize marijuana
October 1, 2012	John Ingold	Voters debate blazing trail
September 23, 2012	Betty Aldworth	Amendment 64: Should pot be legal in Colorado? Yes
September 11, 2012		Panel erred in blue book edits
September 24, 2012	The Associated Press	Marijuana-legalization efforts in Colorado, Wash. draw big donors
September 23, 2012	Kenneth R. Buck	Amendment 64: Should pot be legal in Colorado? No
November 24, 2012	Allison Sherry	Petition would protect Colorado pot law
December 17, 2012	Clayton Woullard	Parker bars pot shops, sets rules on growing
December 10, 2012	John Ingold	Colorado will rewrite med pot business rules by Dec. 28
12/02/2012	The Denver Post	Pot taverns? No, that's not what Amendment 64 said
November 27, 2012	John Ingold	Hickenlooper to create task force on Colorado marijuana legalization
November 15, 2012	Kurtis Lee and Yesenia Robles	Denver joins Boulder in dropping prosecution of limited pot possession
November 10, 2012	The Denver Post	DeGette stands up for Colorado pot law

Table A2: The LA Times

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>
December 10, 2010	Jessica Guynn	Marijuana growing on facebook
Novembe 2, 2010	Shelby Grad	Voter Voices: Projected defeat of Prop 19 is met with humor, disappointment by marijuana legalization backers
October 31, 2010	Shelby Grad	New poll: support fading for marijuana proposition
October 28, 2010	Shelby Grad	Latinos arrested for marijuana possession at higher rates than whites, report says. Does this help prop 19?
October 27, 2010	John Hoeffel	Prop 19 backers cite higher marijuana arrests rates for Latinos
October 22, 2010	John Hoeffel	California chamber begins radio ads to defeat Prop 19
October 20, 2010	Carlos Lozano	Legalizing marijuana in CA not the answer to drug war, federal official says
October 16, 2010	John Hoeffel	Retired insurance company executive throws cash and support behind Prop. 19
October 8, 2010	BILL KISLIUK	Pot proposition burning topic at forum
October 7, 2010	SHELBY GRAD	Mexico president concerned about legalizing marijuana in California. Do you agree?
July 7, 2010	John Hoeffel	Prop. 19 approval could decrease marijuana costs, increase consumption, report says
November 4, 2010	John Hoeffel	Despite rejecting Prop. 19, Californians lean toward legalizing marijuana, poll finds
OCTOBER28,2010	John Hoeffel	Proposition 19 backers turn to Jon Stewart, Colbert and Comedy Central with marijuana ads
OCTOBER25,2010	John Hoeffel	Proposition 19 campaign will run TV ad in Los Angeles area
NOVEMBER2,2010	Maria L. La Ganga	Proposition 19: Backers of legalizing marijuana say 'the world is watching'
NOVEMBER4,2010	Alexandra Le Tellier	The conversation: Campaign to legalize marijuana still fired up
NOVEMBER1 ,2010	Maria L. LaGanga	Backers of legalizing marijuana in California are counting on support from young voters
November 3, 2010	John Hoeffel	Californians say 'no' to legal pot but 'yes' to pot taxes
OCTOBER29 ,2010	Margaret Wappler	Colt Jackson's 'American Made': A Proposition 19 anthem
October 31, 2010	John Hoeffel	Latest Field Poll shows voters turning against marijuana proposition
NOVEMBER2,2010	Tracy Wilkinson	Mexico nervous about California's Prop. 19 vote
NOVEMBER2 ,2010	Tony Pierce	Prop 19 gets props from celebrities, little old ladies and Twitter
NOVEMBER 3, 2010	John Hoeffel	Prop. 19: Marijuana initiative drew strongest support in Bay Area, but failed in 'Emerald Triangle'
November 3, 2010	Sam Allen	Prop. 19: Medical marijuana patients say they were skeptical about Prop. 19 campaign [updated]

NOVEMBER2,2010	Shelby Grad	Prop. 19: Youth vote considered key in marijuana legalization battle [Updated]
NOVEMBER2,2010	Nicole Santa Cruz	Voter Voices: West Adams accountant says Prop. 19 will draw much-needed revenue
July 14, 2010	John Hoeffel	Union endorses initiative to legalize marijuana in California
September 20, 2010	John Hoeffel	Marijuana initiative gains backing of state's largest labor union
August 19, 2010	John Hoeffel	National Black Police Assn. supports California's marijuana legalization initiative
October 29, 2010	John Hoeffel	Marijuana legalization backers plan final ad blitz
September 13, 2010	Catherine Saillant	Legalizing pot would free up police to fight violent crime, law enforcement group says [Updated]
July 12, 2010	John Hoeffel	Feinstein backs effort to defeat marijuana legalization

Table A3: The Oregonian

Date	Author	Title
September 11, 2012	Shelley Fox-Loken	Yes on Measure 80: Regulating marijuana would increase public safety
July 13, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Marijuana legalization measure qualifies for Oregon ballot
October 22, 2012	John Fisher	Reasons why voters should legalize marijuana with Measure 80
October 15, 2012	Michelle Cole	Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber says he won't weigh in on pot or kicker tax measures
September 12, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Oregon marijuana measure wins over Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps
October 18, 2012	Harry Esteve	Marijuana would be treated like liquor in Oregon if legalization measure passes
November 1, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Poll finds support growing for Washington's gay marriage and marijuana legalization measures
July 28, 2012	Susan Nielsen	Marijuana in Oregon: Pot legalization measure would give kids quite an education
November 6, 2012	Harry Esteve	Oregon voters say no to marijuana, casinos, estate tax breaks
August 16, 2012	Brendan Monaghan	Oregon's marijuana legalization measure would ignite a futile legal battle
May 22, 2014	Jeff Mapes	Oregon marijuana measure gets another \$100,000 from out-of-state group tied to George Soros
October 2, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Washington pot measure continues powerhouse fundraising, hits \$4 million mark
July 27, 2012	Janie Har	Legalizing marijuana, casino gambling, death and taxes: 2012 Oregon ballot measures
September 18, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Obama leads by nine points in Oregon; casino, marijuana measures behind, poll says
November 6, 2012	Jeff Mapes	In Colorado, marijuana legalization measure leads in early returns
November 4, 2012	Associated Press	Town of Arcata, California, targets industrial marijuana growers with ballot measure
November 7, 2014	Noelle Crombie	Legal marijuana in Oregon: A look at the state's pot history
November 6, 2012	Associated Press	State measure 80: Legalization of marijuana fails

October 22, 2012	John Fisher	Reasons why voters should legalize marijuana with Measure 80
October 01, 2012	Harry Esteve	Pot measure explanation missing crucial information about limits, DA says
October 29, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Obama leads in Oregon thanks to support from women; but marijuana measure failing on opposition from women (Oregonian poll)
November 06, 2012	Harry Esteve	Oregon stays put on pot while other states may make historic changes
October 12, 2012	Associated Press	Oregon AG won't answer sheriff's question about marijuana measure
July 28, 2012	Editorial Board	Oregon pot legalization measure hard to take seriously
October 19, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Washington marijuana legalization initiative pitches campaign to Joe Six-pack
August 28, 2012	Harry Esteve	Pot legalization supporters failed to pay petition circulators
September 22, 2012	Jeff Mapes	Big pro-marijuana donors bypassing Oregon legalization measure for more promising initiatives in Washington and Colorado
July 31, 2012	Janie Har	Oregonians will vote on Ballot Measures 77 through 85 on Nov. 6
September 22, 2012	Noelle Crombie	Drug traffickers exploit Oregon medical marijuana program's lax oversight and loose rules
October 19, 2012	Janie Har	Merkley, BOLI race, PolitiFact Oregon, marijuana measure: Oregon Politics Roundup

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