



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: November 11, 2011

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SUBJECT: THE MARIJUANA VOTE

Los Angeles, CA: An October 2011 editorial in the Christian Science Monitor lauded the federal crackdown on medical marijuana in California by suggesting that "Pot smokers are a small [containable] minority."

Common Sense for Drug Policy (CSDP) believes that well researched and documented facts are important to the debate with respect to issues surrounding substance use and abuse, including marijuana.

CSDP contends that facts dispute the Monitor's claim. History shows that minorities can exercise significant political influence during elections. A match of 2008 U.S. Census election data (1) against the results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)(2) computes an estimate of the number and percentage of "marijuana voters" in 2008 to demonstrate the influence of the "marijuana vote."

According to the U.S. Census, approximately 131 million U.S. citizens voted in 2008, or 63.6% of all citizens. Among minority groups, 16 million voters were Black, 12.3% of the total vote. About 9.8 million Hispanics and 3 million Asians cast their ballots respectively at 7.4% and 2.6% of the 2008 vote.

The youth vote, those age 18-24, had a "statistically significant increase in turnout" in 2008 and numbered 12.5 million, 9.5% of the total vote. The Census reported that 2008 was "the second straight presidential election where young citizens significantly increased their voting rates."

For 2008, the NSDUH reported that approximately 22.5 million American citizens over age 18 had used marijuana in the past year, with 13.5 million using in the past month. Applying the Census Bureau's reduction factor of actual voters to total citizens by age, to these user groups by age, computes the "marijuana vote."

The "marijuana vote" comprised about 13 million voters in 2008, with around 7.8 million making up the "medical marijuana vote." Each equaled respective 9.8% and 5.9% totals of the 2008 vote. These counts and percentages for the "marijuana vote" are well within the ranges that define minority voting blocs like Hispanics, Asians and youth.

Further, the 18-24 age range – with the largest increase in voter turnout – represents one the largest groups of marijuana users, with almost 40% reporting either past year or monthly use. About one quarter of 25-34 year-olds claim similar use patterns. Together, these two groups alone cast 3.4% of the total 2008 vote, more than the Asian community.

According to Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan (3), "[V]oting Margins [in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections] become magnified when we consider that minorities comprised a larger part of the voter base in 2008 ... there were almost 1 in 4 voters who were minorities in 2008." The Center went on to state that "the minority support for Obama was instrumental in his success."

In addition, an article from the Searle Center on Law, Regulation and Economic Growth (4) noted that, "in 2004 less than 2.5 percentage points separated President Bush and Senator Kerry and the margin in 2000 between then-Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore was less than half a percentage point...." As we know, George W. Bush won the 2000 presidential election by a tiny margin.

CSDP concludes that the minority vote, including the "marijuana vote," can and does influence elections. "Pot smokers" are not necessarily a small, containable minority.

COMMON SENSE for Drug Policy

These data and facts emanate from Drug War Facts <<http://www.drugwarfacts.org>>, a project of CSDP. Drug War Facts offers reliable information with applicable citations on important public health and criminal justice issues. Its extensive factbase now exceeds 1,500 direct quotes – Facts – from over 800 sources that include government reports, peer-reviewed journals, think tank analyses, and other authoritative sources.

A bi-monthly newsletter that covers important and timely additions to the factbase is available by free subscription at <<http://drugwarfacts.org/cms/subscriptions>>.

The one-page flyer, "The Marijuana, Minority and Marginal Vote," containing the aforementioned facts, can be found at <<http://drugwarfacts.org/cms/files/Marijuana-Minority-&-Marginal-Vote.pdf>>.

Common Sense for Drug Policy <<http://www.csdp.org>> is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to reforming drug policy and expanding harm reduction. CSDP disseminates factual information and comments on existing laws, policies and practices and provides advice and assistance to individuals and organizations and facilitates coalition building.

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(1) "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008: Population Characteristics," U.S. Census Bureau (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, May 2010), Table 2, p. 4.

<<http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf>>

(2) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2010). Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Volume I. Summary of National Findings (Office of Applied Studies, NSDUH Series H-38A, HHS Publication No. SMA 10-4586Findings). Rockville, MD., Table 1.12A.

<<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k9NSDUH/tabs/Sect1peTabs11to18.pdf>>

(3) Frey, William H., "How Did Race Affect the 2008 Presidential Election?," Population Studies Center (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, September 2009), pp. 2 & 3.

<http://www.frey-demographer.org/reports/R-2009-2_HowRaceAffect2008Election.pdf>

(4) Burch, Traci, "Did Disfranchisement Laws Help Elect President Bush? A Closer Look at the Characteristics and Preferences of Florida's Ex-Felons," Searle Center on Law, Regulation, and Economic Growth (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University School of Law: November 3, 2008), p 2.

<<http://mapinc.org/url/A90aAaVV>>

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