Survey of Local Views on Pot, Gay Marriage Finds Area Is Blue Enclave in a Purple State

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va., June 25, 2014 — Voters in the Charlottesville region hold more liberal attitudes than the state as a whole on issues related to the legalization of marijuana and gay marriage, a new University of Virginia study reports.

The latest wave of the Jefferson Area Community Survey, a recurring omnibus survey conducted by U.Va.’s Center for Survey Research, polled 826 registered voters in the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa and Nelson counties.

Asked if they supported or opposed the legalization of marijuana for personal use, 61 percent of voters indicated that they would support such an effort. Young adults are generally more favorable toward legalization, with 84.3 percent of voters ages 18 to 25 supporting legalization compared to only 37 percent of those over 64. Support for legalization was stronger among men (66.8 percent of whom support it) than among women (56.4 percent) and stronger in Charlottesville and Albemarle County than in outlying areas. The greater tolerance of marijuana in the immediate Charlottesville region is in keeping with the spirit of a 2012 resolution approved by the Charlottesville City Council that calls on the state government to consider the decriminalization of marijuana.

Voters indicate even stronger support for the legalization of marijuana for medicinal use, with 93.1 percent in favor. Support is robust across demographic categories. Voters were also asked to assess the danger of marijuana in comparison with that of alcohol. Slightly less than half (47 percent) of voters indicated that the two substances were equally dangerous, with 40.4 percent calling marijuana less dangerous than alcohol and 12.6 percent calling it more dangerous than alcohol.

When compared to a statewide survey of Virginia voters conducted by Quinnipiac University in March, the JACS results indicate a more liberal orientation in the Charlottesville region than in the state as a whole. The Quinnipiac survey found 46 percent of voters statewide supporting legalization of marijuana for personal use and 84 percent supporting legalization for medicinal purposes, compared to regional figures of 61 percent and 93 percent, respectively, in Central Virginia.

Local voters are also more liberal than the state as a whole when it comes to same-sex marriage. The Jefferson Area Community Survey finds that 68.1 percent of voters support allowing same-sex couples to marry in Virginia, while the Quinnipiac survey reports that 50 percent of voters in Virginia support allowing same-sex marriages. While lower than the regional figure, the statewide figure still reflects a change since 2006, when 57 percent of Virginia voters approved an amendment to the state constitution banning gay marriage.

The JACS survey finds that support for the legalization of same-sex marriage is strongest among those living in Charlottesville and Albemarle County and among young voters; among self-identified students, support was unanimous, with 25 students indicating their support and none indicating opposition.
The Jefferson Area Community Survey is a regional omnibus survey carried out twice a year, reaching adults across the region via landline and cellular telephones. Interviews with 909 adults – of whom 826 reported that they were registered voters – were completed between April 23 and June 18, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

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