

Association between Cannabis laws and Cannabis Possession Arrest Rates in the US

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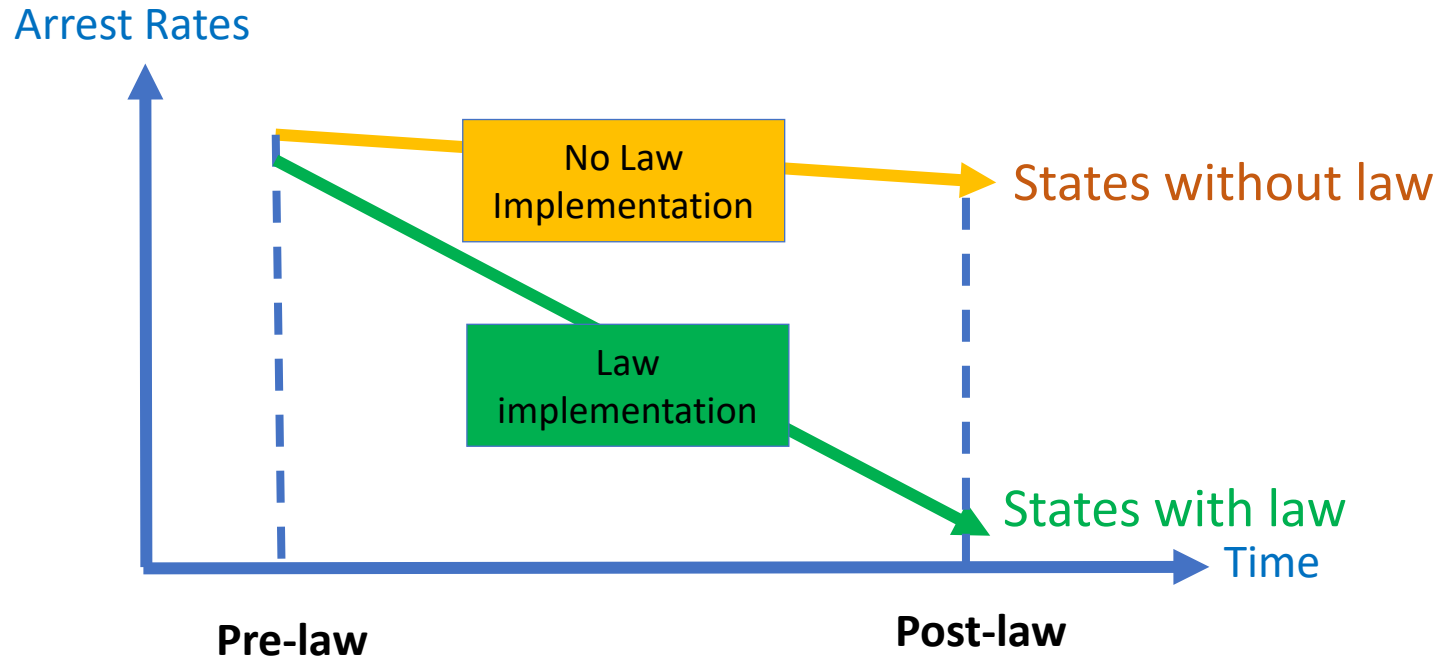
Background

Decriminalization: penalties of a small amount of cannabis possession are changed from criminal to civil infractions
Legalization: no penalties of a small amount of cannabis possession

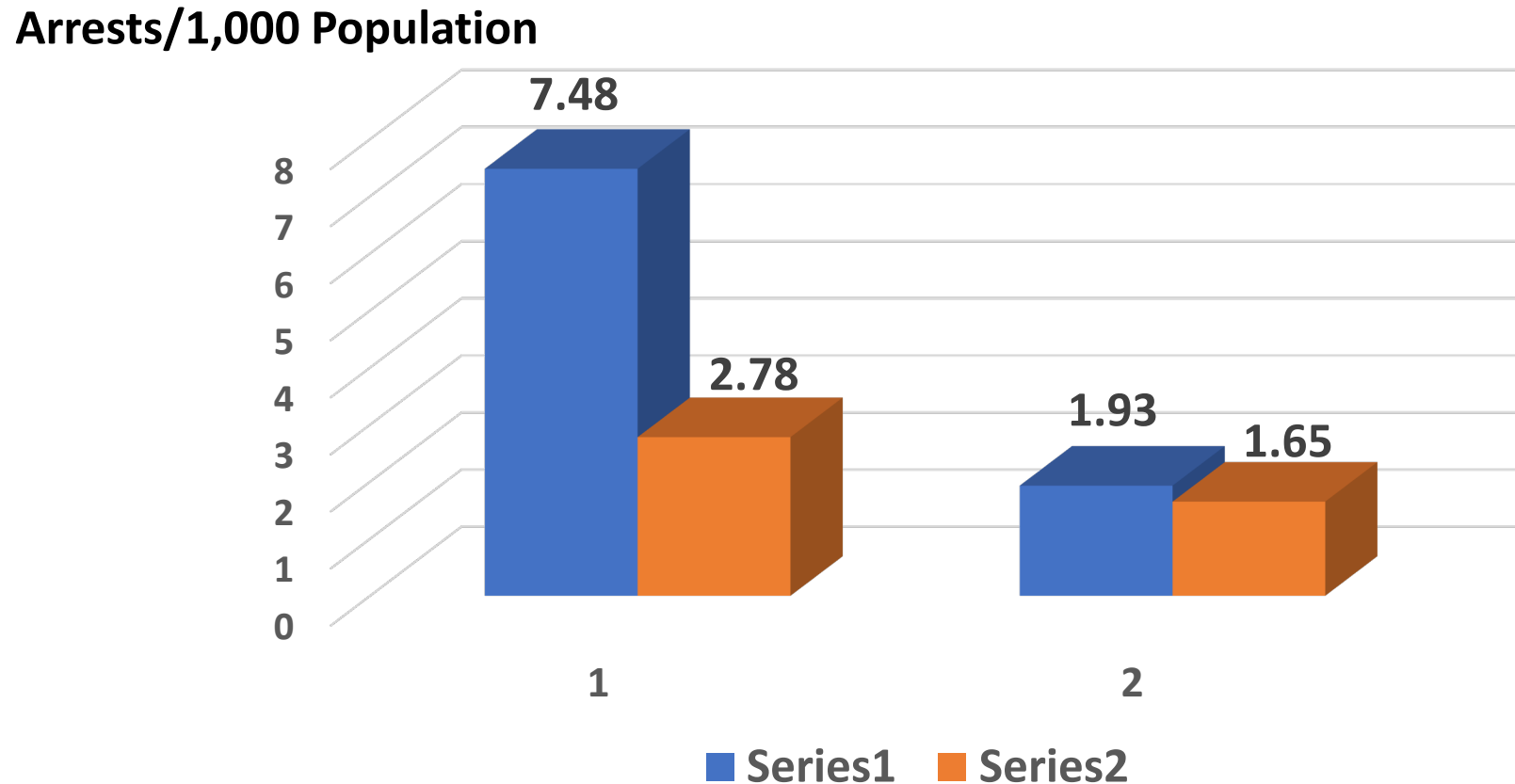
- Background:
 - Both cannabis decriminalization and recreational cannabis legalization are advocated as ways to reduce cannabis possession arrest rates.
 - Many states adopted decriminalization long before adopting legalization.
 - Cannabis possession arrest rates among Blacks have been considerably higher than Whites.
- Research questions:
 1. Did the two types of laws indeed reduce cannabis possession arrest rates?
 2. Would legalization bring additional benefits if a state already decriminalized cannabis?
 3. Did the two types of laws also reduce racial disparity in cannabis possession arrest rates?

Approach

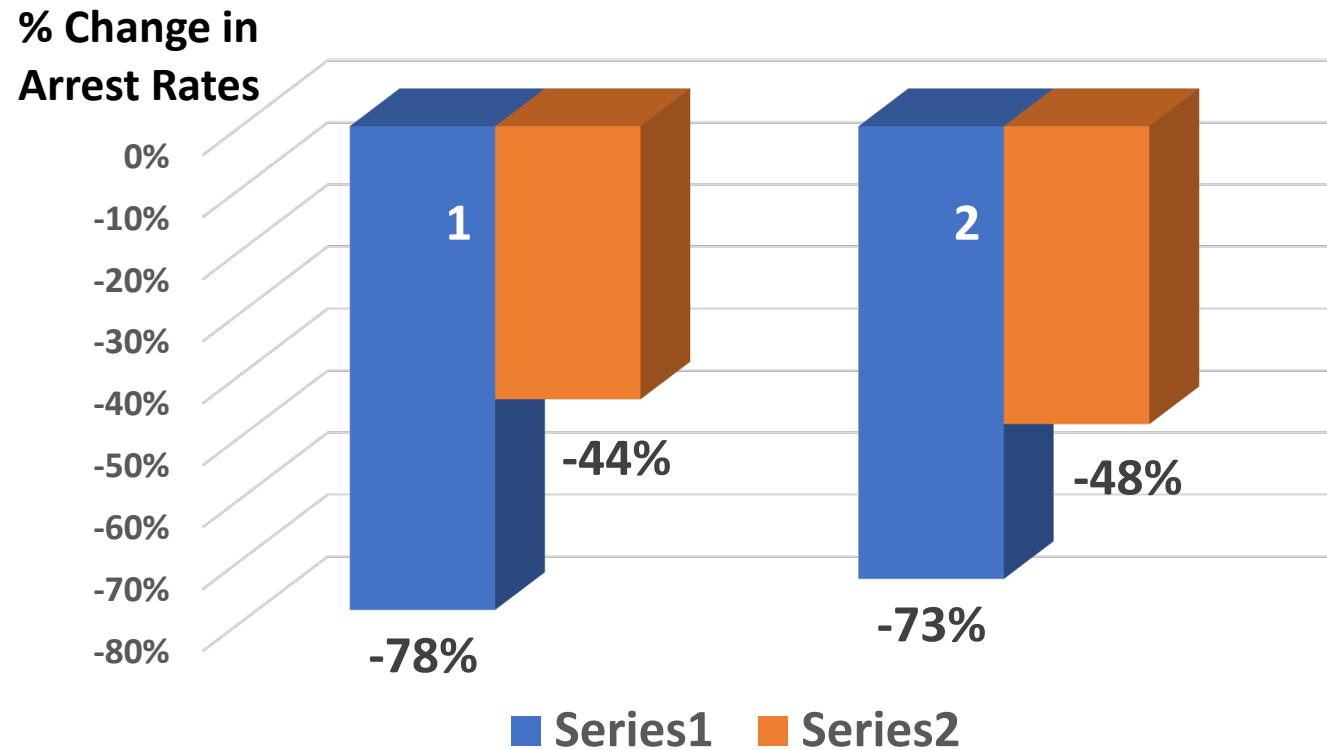
- Study design:
 - Pre-post difference in a state
 - Between-state difference
- Data sources
 - FBI Uniform Crime Reports
 - Years 2000-2019
 - Outcome: cannabis possession arrest rates per 1,000 population per year
 - Age subgroups: adults vs. youths
 - Racial subgroups: Blacks vs. Whites



Cannabis Possession Arrest Rates 2000-2008: Disparity by Age Group and Race



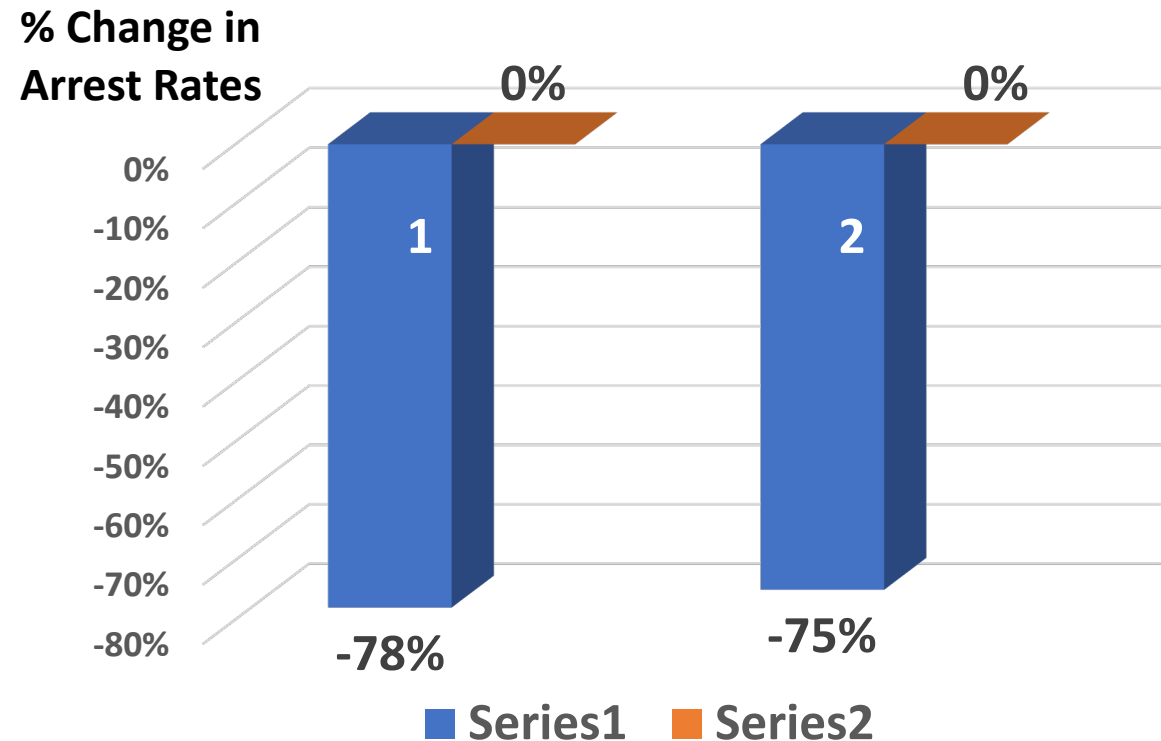
Results: Impacts of Cannabis Decriminalization



- Cannabis possession arrest rates **declined** among:
 - Adults: Black adults (by 78%), White adults (by 73%); racial disparity between adult Blacks and Whites also declined (by 17%)
 - Youths: Black youths (by 44%), White youths (by 48%). **No decline** in racial disparity among youths

Results: Impacts of Recreational Cannabis Legalization

- in states **without** cannabis decriminalization

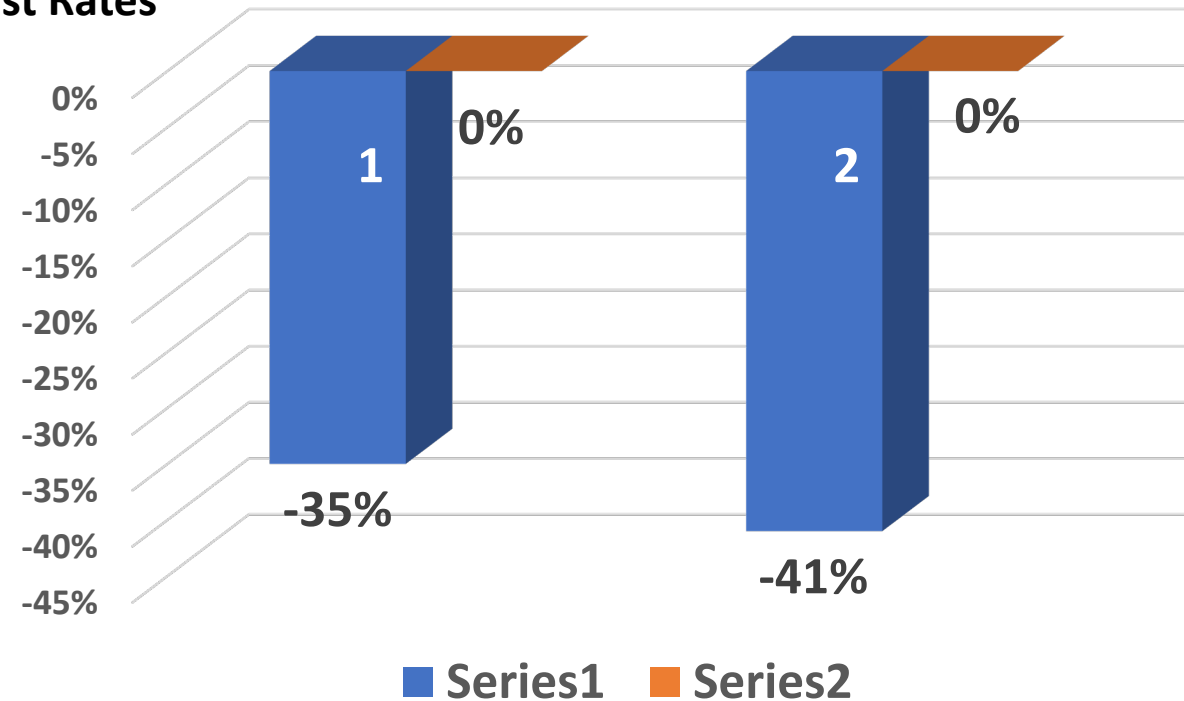


- Arrest rates:
 - Adults: **declined** among Black adults (by 78%), White adults (by 75%). **No decline** in racial disparity among adults
 - Youths: **no decline** (not statistically significant)

Results: Impacts of Recreational Cannabis Legalization

- in states **with** cannabis decriminalization

% Change in
Arrest Rates



- Arrest rates:
 - Adults: **declined** among Black adults (by 35%), White adults (by 41%). **No decline** in racial disparity among adults
 - Youths: **no decline** (not statistically significant)

Policy Implications

- Cannabis decriminalization:
 - Considerably reduced arrest rates among both adults and youths;
 - Reduced racial disparity in arrest rates between Blacks and Whites among adults but not youths.
- Recreational cannabis legalization:
 - Considerably reduced arrest rates among adults;
 - The reduction was much greater in states without cannabis decriminalization than states with cannabis decriminalization already in place;
 - Did not impact youths;
 - Did not impact racial disparity.

Recommendations for Cannabis Policy

- If the sole consideration is to reduce cannabis possession arrest rates:
 - Both decriminalization and legalization can achieve the goal among adults;
 - Even after cannabis was decriminalized already, legalization can still further reduce arrest rates;
 - But, decriminalization has additional benefits: also reduce arrest rates among youths and reduce racial disparity between Blacks and Whites.
- A holistic view should be adopted with consideration of all costs and benefits:
 - Crimes
 - Public health
 - Economy
 - Society
- California: consider other strategies to reduce arrest rates among youths and reduce racial disparity.