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Most in U.S. Say Consuming Alcohol, Marijuana Morally OK

by [Jeffrey M. Jones](#)

Story Highlights

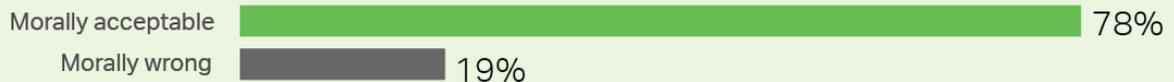
- 78% say drinking alcohol is morally acceptable
- 65% say smoking marijuana is morally acceptable
- Religiosity is a major factor in determining attitudes

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Large majorities of Americans believe that using substances like alcohol and marijuana are morally permissible. Specifically, 78% say drinking alcohol is morally acceptable and 65% say smoking marijuana is.

Americans' Views of the Morality of Drinking Alcohol and Smoking Marijuana

Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong.

DRINKING ALCOHOL



SMOKING MARIJUANA



GALLUP, MAY 1-10, 2018

Attitudes about the morality of alcohol and marijuana items were measured for the first time in Gallup's annual Values and Beliefs survey, conducted May 1-10. The survey asked Americans to indicate whether they believe each of 22 different behaviors and practices are morally acceptable or morally wrong.

Alcohol and marijuana rank near the top of the list of practices Americans consider morally acceptable. Only birth control, at 91%, gets a higher percentage sanctioning it than drinking alcohol does. Smoking marijuana trails birth control, drinking alcohol and divorce (76%), but is on par with widely accepted acts including gambling, sex between an unmarried man and woman, gay or lesbian relations, stem cell research, and having a baby outside of marriage.

Americans are least likely to regard married men and women having an affair, cloning humans, polygamy and suicide as morally OK. Their opinions are most closely divided on morality of abortion -- 43% believe it is morally acceptable and 48% believe it is not.

Drinking Alcohol, Smoking Marijuana Among Practices Americans Find Most Morally Acceptable

Next, I'm going to read you a list of issues. Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong.

	Morally acceptable	Morally wrong
	%	%
Birth control	91	6
Drinking alcohol ^	78	19
Divorce	76	20
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	69	28
Gambling	69	28
Gay or lesbian relations	67	30
Medical research using stem cells obtained from human embryos	66	29
Smoking marijuana ^	65	31
Having a baby outside of marriage	65	32
The death penalty	62	33

May 1-10, 2018; ^ Asked of a half sample

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	Morally acceptable	Morally wrong
	%	%
Buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur	60	37
Medical testing on animals	54	43
Doctor assisted suicide	54	42
Abortion	43	48
Pornography	43	55
Sex between teenagers	42	54
Cloning animals	40	57
Suicide	20	75
Polygamy, when a married person has more than one spouse at the same time	19	78
Cloning humans	16	81
Married men and women having an affair	10	88

May 1-10, 2018; ^ Asked of a half sample

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Gallup's trends on many of these items date back to 2001. On most, Americans have adopted more permissive views over time. Presumably, this also applies to the new item on smoking marijuana, given the surge over the past two decades in the percentage who say that smoking the drug should be legal. In fact, the 64% who last fall said marijuana should be legal nearly matches the 65% who say smoking it is morally acceptable.



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Religiosity Is Key Determinant in Views of Drinking, Smoking Marijuana

Majorities of key subgroups of Americans regard both drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana as morally acceptable, but highly religious Americans, as measured by the frequency with which they attend church, are less likely to do so. Whereas 88% of those who seldom or never attend religious services find drinking alcohol to be morally acceptable, 60% of those who attend weekly hold that view. And while three-quarters of non-attenders say smoking marijuana is OK, less than half of regular churchgoers, 41%, agree.

Other subgroup differences, including those by gender, age, race and political ideology, appear to reflect differences in church attendance among those groups. For example, nonwhites, women, older Americans and conservatives are more likely to attend church but less likely to say smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol are OK.

Religiosity a Key Factor in Views of Morality of Drinking Alcohol, Smoking Marijuana

	Drinking Alcohol		Smoking Marijuana	
	% Acceptable	% Wrong	% Acceptable	% Wrong
U.S. adults	78	19	65	31
Gender				
Men	84	15	70	26
Women	73	23	59	36
Age				
18 to 34 years	81	18	77	21
35 to 54 years	78	17	61	36
55+ years	77	21	58	37
Race				
White	82	15	68	29
Nonwhite	67	29	59	35
College graduate				
Yes	87	9	72	24
No	73	25	61	34
How often attend church				

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	Drinking Alcohol		Smoking Marijuana	
	% Acceptable	% Wrong	% Acceptable	% Wrong
Every week	60	37	41	59
Monthly	71	22	63	31
Seldom/Never	88	11	75	20
Ideology				
Liberal	84	11	81	19
Moderate	77	20	75	21
Conservative	75	25	47	49

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In nearly every key subgroup, a greater percentage say drinking alcohol is morally acceptable than says the same about smoking marijuana. Young adults, ideological liberals and moderates are notable exceptions, as these three groups are about equally likely to find the two practices morally acceptable. In contrast to liberals and moderates, ideological conservatives are far more likely to view drinking alcohol (75%) than smoking marijuana (47%) as acceptable moral behavior.

Bottom Line

Most Americans do not object on moral grounds to people drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana. Of the two, they are more likely to see drinking alcohol as an acceptable behavior, perhaps because it is legal in all states while smoking marijuana is not. Some states have recently legalized marijuana and many others are considering doing so, perhaps removing some of the stigma associated with the drug. But with roughly two-thirds of the public saying marijuana use is morally acceptable, it seems there will not be sufficient opposition to thwart attempts to make it legal.

SURVEY METHODS

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted May 1-10, 2018, with a random sample of 1,024 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

The results for the drinking alcohol item are based on a random sample of 542 adults and the results for the smoking marijuana item are based on a random sample of 482 adults. For results based on these samples, the margin of sampling error is ± 5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting.

Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods.

[View survey methodology, complete question responses and trends.](#)

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