

Marijuana decriminalization inevitable because “the public wants it”

☒ We recently considered skyrocketing stock prices related to the possible decriminalizing of marijuana for recreational use. In short, we see investors taking it on faith decrim will happen, without considering the risk of international treaties preventing that from happening. A good investor perceives that risk and adjusts for it. ***A bad investor doesn't even ask the question.***

Since the article was published I've had communications from representatives of 5 of the licenced producers, and others with individuals involved with applicants hoping to get a licence. What they all had in common was an astonishment that I'd even mention the risk of marijuana never being decriminalized. Each one of them takes it as gospel truth that decriminalization will happen, and that it will happen soon, because “the public wants it”.

That's a good point, one with which it's hard to argue. Few politicians can stand in the way of an idea whose time has come. So the question is, has that time come?

In 2013, for the first time, over 50% of Americans polled answered yes to the question, “Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal, or not?”. (Gallup).

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In October, 2016, in a telephone survey of 1,017 adults across the country, Gallup asked the same question and over 60% of the respondents answered yes. More Democrats than Republicans support decriminalization. 77% of respondents between 18 and 33 years old support it. Even 45% of people 55 years and over

support it. Clearly, there is voter tolerance for legalizing the use of marijuana, and yet, it's still illegal.

If so many people are not against decriminalizing marijuana's use, and let's assume for a moment that no one cares about the *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs*, why hasn't decrim happened yet?

I see two answers for this.

The first comes from the lack of broad personal engagement on this issue. Note the question in the poll above. It was "Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal, or not". That's a soft external question. What if the question was, "If the use of marijuana was not illegal, would you use it?" That's a more personal answer going to actual activities, not just broad theory.

It's the same as trying to figure out the percentage of the population that's gay by asking if you support gay marriage. The question and the answer have very little to do with each other.

Reactive acceptance of others doing something doesn't mean you will do it too, or that you will proactively agitate for that thing to be made legal.

There are marijuana advocacy groups who make reasoned arguments for decriminalization, but consider there are many advocacy groups making good arguments for many different causes. Not all of those causes will generate enough attention to be addressed.

Politicians heard the popular urgency for medical marijuana, and in response patients were given access. For the decriminalization of marijuana, politicians are hearing complacency, not an urgent demand. To move decrim up their agenda, they need to hear that urgency, not only from the marijuana industry who needs decrim to happen to save its

business plans, and not from the small advocacy groups, but from the larger electorate, even those who may not be users.

The second reason derives from the work of Micah White, PhD. He is one of the creators of the Occupy Movement and is a lifelong activist. I'm partway through his book *The End of Protest* in which he argues that traditional forms of protest are no longer effective. They've become social gatherings at which people take selfies showing themselves holding a sign, congratulate themselves on a job well done, and then go home without actually achieving anything. If you've ever attended a 4/20 rally, you see the truth in this.

He also speaks of the negative impact of "clicktivism", the lazy person's way to take part in a movement. "Click this button and show you care about the children!" "Share if you want to save the owls!" "Post this banner and make a difference!" While it gives the clicker a brief feeling of empowerment, nothing really changes, nothing is achieved, The novelty wears off, the click is forgotten, and the underlying movement fails to move. It's the digital equivalent of the sign-holding selfie.

The implementation side of the argument, where theory is made into reality, is missing.

The Economist implicitly said the same thing in its Feb 13, 2016 edition. It's easy to talk about decriminalization; it's very hard to be practical about it. Serious decisions must be made, and these will reflect the underlying social philosophies of the politicians. Who bears the ultimate tax burden? Will Big Tobacco be allowed in? Will BigPharma be allowed to grow, distribute or sell marijuana? Will it be distributed through a new dedicated government system or piggy-backed onto existing supply chains? Will there be age limits on its use? What are the consequences for black market activity, like with bootlegging liquor?

As *The Economist* writes, "Getting these decisions right will ultimately determine whether legalisation succeeds or fails."

For decrim to be a success, then, three things are needed:

1. there must be a feasible government plan to deal with the *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs*
2. more people have to let their elected representatives know they care about this issue
3. the government must have a clear thorough plan for the management of the marijuana supply chain, and that plan must reflect society's values.