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## The Accidental Motivator: Florida's Medicinal Marijuana Ballot Initiative's Impact on the Youth Vote

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The Accidental Motivator:  
Florida's Medicinal Marijuana Ballot  
Initiative's Impact on the Youth Vote

by

Robert Winsler

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of the Arts Mass Communication  
with a concentration in Strategic Communication Management  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine single-issue voting in the youth population, specifically involving the upcoming medical marijuana ballot initiative to be voted on in Florida November, 2014. Single-issue voting is becoming a more prevalent trend in American politics. The young voter demographic has historically showed the lowest percentage of voter turnout thus giving it the highest potential to influence the outcome of an election if more voters showed up to the polls. This study sought to understand if a single issue such as medical marijuana could be that motivation to go vote. Data was gathered through conducting focus groups of students 18 to 24 years old. The content was analyzed and quotes were collected then compared against two existing mass communication theories. The qualitative nature of the work allowed the study to produce a picture of the essence of how some young voters think when an election is approaching. This information will be vital as the field of study begins to grow quantitatively as well.

Though no definitive result was determined, young voters may be motivated to vote by a single issue but it is doubtful that issue will not be medical marijuana. This study aids an understanding of how a young voter is perceived as well as what issues were most important to those who participated. Organizations tasked with targeting this population could use these results to help cater a more effective message and reach a demographic that has so far been nearly unattainable.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### *Statement of Purpose*

This study sought to unveil if the medicinal marijuana ballot initiative will be a single-issue motivator for the youth to vote in the upcoming 2014 midterm election. The study was conducted within the bounded system of Florida public university undergraduates ages 18 to 24. The issue at hand is not whether the students support or oppose the initiative, but rather this study sought to provide a qualitative insight into the motivations of voting. The youth vote, throughout history, has largely impacted the outcome of candidate elections. However, this influential voting demographic has not been extensively analyzed in terms of supporting ballot initiatives. As candidates do not embody the entirety of an individual's views, more of the voting public is turning to single-issue voting (Saad, 2012).

This style of voting could be exacerbated by the current political climate. Once every twelve years in Florida, barring extenuating circumstances, there is an election with no presidential and no senatorial candidate. The absence of these two high profile races leaves a void to be filled by lesser offices or issues on the ballot. This study discovered how young adults feel about a certain issue sweeping across a divided nation.



## *Introduction*

The decision to legalize marijuana for medicinal use will be in the hands of Florida voters this November. The ballot initiative, Amendment 2, needs 60 percent of the vote to pass. Because amendments require greater than a simple majority, a large number of voters will need to show in support if it is to pass as well as a smaller group can be more influential in voting it down. Every voting demographic will be crucial to the outcome of the election. One voting block that, throughout history, has struggled to get to the polls is the youth population. Young people have an underrepresented voice in American politics that, when exercised, can decide the outcome of elections.

Traditionally, people show up to the polls to vote for candidates. There is movement, however, in recent years that has shown a subtle shift in the way people vote. Instead of supporting a single candidate, voters have been shown to be more passionate about certain individual issues. This has led to an increasing population of single-issue voters. So far, this trend has been limited to the issue of abortion. Other issues, such as medical marijuana, could arise as being equally as impactful on a person's decision to vote. The field of study has not caught up with the budding trend.

This study seeks to add to the few existing studies about the behavior of single-issue voting focusing specifically on the youth population in the upcoming Amendment 2 election. Focus groups were conducted with 18 to 24-year-old registered Florida voters. They were asked questions developed from the framework of two theories. The first was Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the second was the theory of reasoned action. Both theories look at behavior intention though through slightly different lenses. Maslow laid the foundation to see if the act of voting could be a response to fulfilling any one of his five categorized needs. The theory of reasoned

action looked more into behavioral outcome as a product of a previously held attitude on a topic. This led to the formation of three research questions.

RQ1: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, will medicinal marijuana be a single-issue that primarily motivates voting?

RQ2: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, do preconceived beliefs about marijuana use affect the decision to vote?

RQ3: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, does the act of voting fulfill a need?

Each question addressed either one of the theories or the basis of the study. This study is important because it adds to a limited pool of existing literature both on the topic of single-issue voting and of medicinal marijuana. It also focused on the age group that is in most need of increasing voter turnout. The purpose was not to determine how a young person will vote when he or she arrives to the precinct nor is it a quantitative look at how the youth views the reason to vote or what they think of marijuana use medically or recreationally. It does contribute to academia in that it captures the essence of the youth mind straight from the source. Participants discussed the reason to vote and how important medicinal marijuana is to them. Political operatives and consultants of all kind will be able to use this study to better target their messages based on the responses from a difficult to target demographic.

Before the responses were analyzed, however, an in-depth look at the medical marijuana issue in Florida as well as a review of the academic literature must be accomplished to put the study into context. The next chapter discusses both the history of the amendment effort and the future of where further study will be needed to help develop this budding field of work. Chapter 3 establishes the methods of data collection as well as procedures of the focus groups. It also

provides a closer evaluation of the research questions and an explanation of how the previously tested theories in the literature help ground the wording for this study's research questions.

Chapter 4 explores the data collection phase. This is the first chapter with quotes from the respondents though it is not the analysis portion. Chapter 5 is split into three parts. The first is a discussion-based analysis of the focus groups. This section is joined by future research that can expand the field and limitations on this study that may be able to be avoided if the study is replicated. First, however, is a look at the literature.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### *Introduction*

This chapter begins with a brief history of the amendment as well as an overview of prior election statistics to demonstrate the power of the youth voting demographic. Media outlets, organizational websites, and previous cycle results all come together to compile the first half of the literature review. The second section in the chapter shifts to a review of academic journals. This section presents Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the theory of reasoned action. Dozens of previously published, peer-reviewed studies help lay the infrastructure for the study's research questions. The combination of both the journalistic history of the issue as well as the literature that is not tied specifically to this one amendment reinforces the significance of the results of the data. Much can still be learned from this otherwise ignored voting population and observed from the action of single-issue voting.

#### *Context of the Issue*

Medicinal marijuana is currently legal in 20 states and the District of Columbia (medicinalmarijuana.procon.org, 2014). Sixteen states, including Florida, have pending legislation to legalize the use of medicinal marijuana (medicinalmarijuana.procon.org, 2014). Two states have authorized the sale of marijuana though only one state, Colorado, currently has implemented the sale of the drug for recreation (Carden, 2014).

On July 10, 2013, the organization United For Care received approval from Florida's State Department to begin a petition effort to put medicinal marijuana on the 2014 election cycle ballot (Anderson, 2013). Florida required nearly 700,000 signatures from registered Florida voters by February 1 to qualify for the ballot (Anderson, 2013).

Ben Pollara, a Coral Gables consultant and campaign manager of the effort, approached attorney John Morgan about becoming the face the movement (Orlando Sentinel, 2013). Morgan estimated United For Care would need to raise between three and four million dollars to achieve the ballot initiative deadline and an additional eighteen million to successfully pass it in November (Orlando Sentinel, 2013).

United For Care's strategy is to target the youth and minority demographic (Cotterell, 2014). The organization paid supporters to collect petitions on college campuses as well as register the young students to vote (Orlando Sentinel, 2013).

While not strictly a political party issue, the initiative is heavily supported by Democratic voters (Cotterell, 2014). A special election for a congressional house seat in Pinellas County vacated by the passing of Congressman Bill Young was won by Republican David Jolly in March (Roberts, 2014). The Democratic loss reaffirmed fears that low turnout would decide the outcome of the 2014 election (Mishak, 2014). Because of this as of April 2014, United For Care had spent nearly ten million dollars on the registration effort with an emphasis on absentee voting education (Mishak, 2014). Pollara explained the strategy to the Associated Press, "We want to be able to have our stereotypical, lazy pothead voters to be able to vote from their couch" (Mishak, 2014). On January 27, 2014, the initiative cleared the Florida Supreme Court in a 4-3 decision officially establishing the issue on the November ballot (Caputo & Klas, 2014).

Support for medicinal marijuana is growing rapidly in Florida. Starting in the low 70s, the percentage of Florida voters that support Amendment 2, as it has become named, topped 80 percent in May (Sweeny, 2014; Harwell, 2014). However, the support from the public and organizations like United for Care are about to face a well-funded opposition.

Sarah Bascom, spokeswoman of the Vote No on Amendment 2 campaign, is poised to face off with Pollara's efforts (Dunkelberger, 2014). The message of the campaign includes a strategy to expose loopholes in language to paint a picture that teenagers with headaches will be able to obtain marijuana from their doctor without parental consent (Dunkelberger, 2014). Four of these loopholes are outlined on the front page of the campaign's website. The pill-mill loophole, the drug dealer loophole, the pot-for-anyone-that-wants-them loophole, and the pot for teenagers loophole are all sections of the ballot initiative text that the website highlights as potentially harmful to the state should the amendment pass (voteno2.org, 2014). The goal, as presented in an eight minute video on the campaign's website, is to make medicinal marijuana synonymous with legalizing recreational marijuana with no restrictions on age, parental consent, qualifications of a distributor, or location of distributor.

Fact check watchdog Politifact selected the teenager loophole assertion that was posted on Vote No on 2 partner group's Don't Let Florida Go to Pot website (Dunkelberger, 2014). Politifact rated this claim half true. The language does exclude minors but 18 and 19-year-old patients could obtain marijuana certification without parental consent (Politifact, 2014).

Don't Let Florida Go to Pot has over 40 coalition partners listed on its website. The vast majority of these members are drug free councils of various Florida counties (dontletfloridagotopot.com, 2014). The website is one of many acting as the grassroots communication hubs for the Vote No on 2 campaign. One of these coalition partners is the

Broward County Medical Society led by president Stephanie Haridopolos (Schorsch, 2014). Haridopolos has commented about the loopholes on behalf of Vote No on 2, “as a medical practitioner, I know I will not recommend pot to my patients for any purpose, nor do I know of any credible, responsible medical doctor that will” (Schorsch, 2014).

While the two competing campaigns vie for the attention of the undecided voter, a different group of activists also have taken an interest into the issue. State-level politicians have recognized the ballot initiative may have an impact on the turnout in their districts and have begun catering a campaign message accordingly. The most vocal of whom is Jeff Clemens.

For three years and elected terms spanning both the Florida house and senate, current state senator Clemens has purposed legislation annually that would prepare the political infrastructure, such as the regulation of cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, and prescription laws for the sale of medicinal marijuana (Sweeney, 2014). Because the bill has never left committee, the proposition was not treated with much attention. Even Pollara dismissed the proposal as fantasy legislation that does not have any shot of survival in either chamber of the Legislature (Sweeney, 2014).

The finer details of regulation are important to how the ballot initiative will be perceived in the public. For example, one of the loopholes that Vote No on 2 identifies is the lack of oversight in where a dispensary can be placed. Several studies published to the campaign’s website make reference to the shops run by “pot docs” could be placed next to schools, churches, and neighborhoods (voteno2.org, 2014). Under the current text of the amendment, this is true though likely would not be a reality in practice. The text also gives the power to regulate location to both the Legislature with an option for them to pass it along to the Governor under the state health department (Sweeney, 2014).

Details such as location may seem trivial but they have already attracted investors to different parts of Florida. The resulting preparation work investors are creating has a significant impact on the Florida economy stemming from the possibility of the initiative passing. Entrepreneurs filed more than 80 business license names that had a marijuana context since May of 2013 (Harwell, 2014). The company Cannabis-Rx has invested heavily in real estate, purchasing a former boat manufacturing plant in May 2014 with hopes of turning it into the nation's largest cultivation park (Harwell, 2014).

What is seen as the cash crop of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may not be the gold rush agricultural and business leaders are hoping for if the ballot initiative passes. Where government regulation clashes with business development and certain agricultural realities become recognized, the support or opposition for the initiative could change.

The clear example of the changing attitudes occurred after the Florida legislature passed a law approving a low-THC strain of medicinal marijuana known as Charlotte's Web that medical tests suggest helps prevent seizures in children (Powers, 2014). This became the trial run for many entrepreneurs to enter the market but two unforeseen circumstances severely limited the competition.

The first is that many central Florida family farms, thought to be rushing to the new opportunity, passed on chances to apply for licenses to grow because the process of cultivating strains of marijuana is more of a laboratory process perfected by illegal dealers than an agricultural process of food production (Powers, 2014). Simply put, they would not know how to grow it. Entrepreneurs from outside of Florida may also cause roadblocks to engagement if the initiative passes, especially if the Legislature retains regulation power or if Governor Rick Scott is reelected. The Republicans have already showed a strategy of limiting outside influence by



attaching a late amendment to the Charlotte's Web bill restricting the ability to apply for growing licenses to only businesses that have had a presence in Florida for longer than 30 years (Powers, 2014). The amendment to the bill also requires the farmer has at least an inventory of 400,000 plants, a stipulation that would shut out some family farms who would like to try to enter the market (Klas, 2014). This means of the hundreds of potential companies and farmers that are currently operating in Florida, only 21 will qualify to apply for just five permits (Klas, 2014). These stipulations could scare away further outside funding in support of passing the ballot initiative.

Approaching the issue with a broad lens and narrowing the focus best displays the trends of voter turnout and the impact a single demographic can have on an election. Nationally, there is no historical statistical evidence to suggest that having a marijuana related amendment on the ballot improves youth turnout. An analysis of the Current Population Survey (CPS) results of 14 elections regarding marijuana dating from 1998-2012 revealed there is no rise in turnout in the 18-29 year old demographic yet there is a fractional under-vote (Enten, 2014). This 0.1 percent total under-vote is erased when further analysis showed an exact 0.1 percent greater turnout in midterms such as the upcoming 2014 elections (Enten, 2014).

Florida, however, is unlike most midterm elections this year. For the first time in a dozen years, no president or senate candidate will appear on the ballot. The absence of these high profile races best known for exciting the political party bases will present a challenge for Democrats more likely to support the ballot initiative. As history has shown voter turnout for the party plummets greater than Republican support during midterm elections, largely due to youth and single women voters staying home (Balz, 2014).

| YEAR | STATE         | PRIOR<br>SIMILAR<br>ELECTION | THIS ELECTION | DIFFERENCE |
|------|---------------|------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1998 | Oregon        | 12.5%                        | 12.3%         | -0.3 ppt   |
| 2000 | Alaska        | 15.2                         | 16.4          | 1.2        |
| 2000 | California    | 16.4                         | 15.6          | -0.8       |
| 2002 | Arizona       | 7.4                          | 7.4           | 0.1        |
| 2002 | Nevada        | 9.2                          | 10.2          | 1.0        |
| 2002 | Ohio          | 11.5                         | 9.8           | -1.7       |
| 2004 | Alaska        | 12.5                         | 12.8          | 0.3        |
| 2006 | Colorado      | 10.2                         | 9.2           | -1.0       |
| 2006 | Nevada        | 16.4                         | 19.4          | 3.0        |
| 2008 | Massachusetts | 16.4                         | 12.5          | -3.9       |
| 2010 | California    | 11.3                         | 13.6          | 2.3        |
| 2012 | Colorado      | 17.2                         | 17.4          | 0.2        |
| 2012 | Oregon        | 15.9                         | 14.9          | -0.9       |
| 2012 | Washington    | 16.7                         | 14.0          | -2.7       |

**Figure 1:** Youth turnout in states with prior marijuana ballot initiatives

One factor nationally former Obama campaign manager David Plouffe speculated would keep Democrat turnout on pace with their Republican counterparts was the fear of losing the control of the Senate, which is not an issue within a Florida voter's control (Balz, 2014).

Narrowing the focus geographically, from national to state level, the last time Florida had neither a senatorial nor presidential candidate on the ballot was the 2002 midterm election. Ten constitutional amendments were on that ballot averaging 4,663,830 votes total per each amendment (FL Dept. of State, 2014). The ballot initiative that received the highest number of votes (4,933,127) also dealt with smoking but was to decide the indoor tobacco-smoking ban

which subsequently passed (FL Dept. of State, 2014). That average was down nearly one million votes from the previous presidential election year in 2000 that had only one amendment on the ballot that received over five and a half million votes (FL Dept. of State, 2014).

**Florida Department of State  
Division of Elections  
November 7, 2000 General Election**

*Official Results*

**Constitutional Amendment**

[Florida Transportation Initiative for statewide high speed monorail, fixed guideway or magnetic levitation system.](#)

|                | <b>YES for Approval</b> | <b>NO for Rejection</b> |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Total</b>   | 2,900,253               | 2,607,495               |
| <b>% Votes</b> | 52.7%                   | 47.3%                   |

**Figure 2:** Florida total turnout for the only 2000 constitutional amendment

In 2012, an average of just over five million voters cast ballot for each of the seven constitution amendments. Medicinal marijuana will be one of three amendments on the 2014 ballot (FL Div. of Elections, 2014). Should the trend hold true from the previous similar election cycle, approximately 2,450,000 votes (roughly 60 percent of one million shy of 2012 turnout) will be needed to successfully pass the amendment or 1,645,000 will be needed to block it. With the standards established, it becomes easier to see how youth voter turnout of the past will affect the coming election cycle of the future.

Youth voting is on the rise in Florida. Voters under 30 skyrocketed through the 2000s, approximately tripling between the 2000 and 2008 primary elections (Pew, 2008). The trend slowed significantly but still showed an increase over the next four years. The under 30 vote increased one percent between 2008 and 2012 (Camila, 2012).

A Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) analysis of the 2012 presidential election concluded the youth vote to be the deciding factor in

the President’s reelection. Florida was one of four states, joined by Ohio, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, that had an overwhelming youth impact for the President. In Florida specifically, Obama won 66 percent of the 18 to 29 vote to Romney’s 32 percent (CIRCLE, 2013). It was the largest gap of the four swing states. Had the former Massachusetts governor been able to pull to a 50-50% tie in all four states, he would have easily been elected (CIRCLE, 2013).



**Figure 3:** Turnout by age for Florida in the 2012 presidential race

Further analysis of the data shows 8,401,203 total votes cast in the 2012 presidential election in Florida (CNN, 2012). The target youth, 18-29 years old, comprised 16 percent of those votes for 1,344,193 total ballots (CNN, 2012). Of that sample, 66 percent voted with the democratic ticket, who would also be most likely to support Amendment 2, bringing the total count to 887,167 votes in favor if the coming election turnout were to stay consistent. That is over 36 percent of the projected number of votes needed to pass the amendment. To put it other ways, one in every three voters to influence statewide policy could be under the age of 30, which would increase the ballot box presence by over double of when deciding the president.

|  | <u>Agree</u> | <u>Disagree</u> | <u>No opinion</u> |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>For most people, the use of marijuana is physically harmful</b><br>January 3-5, 2014                  | 43%          | 56%             | 1%                |
| <b>For most people, the use of marijuana is psychologically or mentally harmful</b><br>January 3-5, 2014 | 44%          | 54%             | 2%                |
| <b>For most people, marijuana is physically addictive</b><br>January 3-5, 2014                           | 50%          | 48%             | 2%                |
| <b>For most people, the use of marijuana leads to the use of other drugs</b><br>January 3-5, 2014        | 47%          | 50%             | 2%                |

**Figure 4:** CNN poll about the perceived effects of marijuana use

Subsequently if the Romney supporters from 2012 were to show up against the initiative in the same numbers then 430,142 voters would cast ballots. This represents over a quarter of projected votes needed to block the measure. While this level of voter turnout is unlikely in a midterm election, it does show the immense impact the voting block can have on the outcome (Balz, 2014). Whether the youth turns out to the polls again either for or against the initiative will ultimately determine its fate.

Statistics can be backed with theory and, with the proper framework in place, a clearer prediction picture can be drawn for November. With the history of the voting established, the next step is to create a theoretical framework through which responses can be analyzed. This utilizes peer-reviewed scholarly works to ground abstract ideas in decades of tested communication theory.

## *Theoretical Foundation*

### *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

The youth demographic, however influential, has consistently failed to show up to the polls on Election Day (Glasford, 2008). Age has been found to be a significant indicator of voting behavior, with just 33 percent of voters aged 18 to 24 casting a ballot in the 1996 and 2000 elections, compared with a 55 percent turnout in the next age category 25 to 55 and 72 percent of the aging 56 and older demographic (Glasford, 2008).

The American electorate has seen measurable shifts in voting patterns over the years. The competing philosophies show voters will either call for a large activist government or a smaller conservative government (Ferguson, Kellstedt, & Linn, 2013). Most recently, the expansion of the healthcare system in the 1960s gave rise to the era of Reagan economics two decades later (Ferguson et al., 2013). A similar trend, though on a microcosmic time scale, occurred from the 2008 election to the 2010 midterms (Ferguson et al., 2013). One explanation for these massive shifts in public opinion about the issues is the government's role in the voters' everyday lives fulfilling an economic need (Ferguson et al., 2013). This need, and others, can be examined through Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Durr, 1993).

Two factors have comprised this economic need throughout history. Unemployment and inflation correspond to which political party the public supports (Durr, 1993). Unemployment is a current problem for recent college graduates. Though the national unemployment rate has dropped to a five-year low of below seven percent, the recent college graduate rate has climbed to above 12 percent (Nawaguna, 2014). This statistic suggests that the average college voter, to fill an economic need, would want to vote and do so to limit government (Ferguson et al., 2013).

Robert Durr had a different view of voting habits. He found that when a population felt tough times, an expansion of taxes would be supported to generate revenue for government assistance programs (Durr, 1993). One of the topics of the current study is that tax revenue will be a main focus of the youth's view of the ballot initiative.

In order to best understand Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a definition of need must first be established. A need represents a lacking in an individual that's fulfillment will provide a greater well-being to that person (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Maslow discussed low-order needs called deficiency needs (Noltemeyer, Bush, Patton, & Bergen, 2012). Of these deficiency needs, two in particular can be categorized as safety needs and social needs (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). Safety needs could have a broad range of reasons why a youth voter may be passionate either way about the ballot initiative. If the voter perceives marijuana to have healing effects, then he or she may be likely to vote for his or her health later in life. Concurrently, if the young voter believes that marijuana, a Schedule 1 drug, according to the Drug Enforcement Agency that is defined "as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse," is harmful to society then he or she may also be motivated by this single issue to cast a ballot in the interest of safety (Justice.gov, 2014).

Maslow ranked these needs in an order of importance to a person's development and action. At the top of the pyramid lies self-actualization. In order to achieve this highest need, clear and unambiguous definitions of each levels must be defined first (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Each level is labeled with an abstract concept followed by more concrete examples of what that concept is. These examples are grouped together because they are mutually related to one another (Taormina & Goa, 2013). The needs as determined by Maslow are as follows.

Physiological needs do not directly apply to this study but they are considered the most basic needs including such environmental factors such as oxygen, food, and shelter (Medcalf, Hoffman, & Boatwright, 2012). An individual who achieves all basic needs progresses into safety needs, the second strongest according to Maslow (Medcalf et al., 2012). These needs have some application to voting that will be explored later.

The third step is love, affection, and belonging when the pressures of isolation cause individuals to act in a way that fulfills social interaction (Medcalf et al., 2012). In terms of voting, this is closely intertwined with the esteem need second highest on the pyramid. This involves education, achievement, and personal advancement (Medcalf et al., 2012). If all other needs are obtained, Maslow believed that a person is ready to achieve the highest need called self-actualization (Medcalf, et al., 2012). This will be fulfilled through the action of voting as explored later.

Another aspect to explore on Maslow's hierarchy of needs would be the social side of voting. Peers heavily influence the youth vote (Glasford, 2008). The need to vote because it is what is socially expected is closely intertwined with the safety concern as well. There is quantitative data that posits the higher level of social need that is fulfilled, the higher level the safety need will be to the individual (Acton & Malthum, 2000). The final stage, when all other needs are satisfied, is known as self-actualization (Burhan, Mohamad, Kurniawan, Halim & Sidek, 2014). When self-actualization occurs, an individual will act in a way that pursues a personal achievement (Burnhan et al., 2014). This personal achievement, as seen later in the responses, included a contribution to society through voting. This meant the young adults going to the polls to vote because their friends were doing the same were most likely to cast a ballot for the one of two health beliefs outlined above.



Self-actualization is a fragile concept that can be easily influenced by one defining factor. Maslow believed this was the hindrances society places in front of an individual that keeps him or her from achieving self-actualization (Medcalf et al., 2012).

### *Theory of Reasoned Action*

Maslow's needs pyramid is insufficient by itself in determining motivation of action. Instead, it must be supplemented with another theory. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) is designed to determine behaviors through serving as a framework of how psychological pre-determinants are studied (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Noonan, Yan & Kulbok, 2014). The theory has been a well-researched concept when applied to the prediction of behavior (Glasford, 2008). This can be predicted by specifically looking at an individual's behavioral intention, which is determined by attitude and the perception of the subjective norm (Maloney, Lapinski, & Neuberger, 2013). To put in the context of this study, TRA can be used to determine if a young adult was inclined to vote in the first place because he or she felt this way because it is the societal expectation or if there was another motivation, in this case, the expansion or restriction of access to medicinal marijuana. Knowledge about the likelihood of the consequence a behavior such as voting might have directly relates to TRA (Meyer, 2009). Those that are motivated to vote on the opposition may hold preconceived beliefs that the drug will spread to those who may seek to abuse it recreationally whereas those who favor the passing might sincerely believe in the medicinal value.

Past research has suggested great success when applying TRA to not just voter turnout efforts but also to how voters will be inclined to vote when they arrive at the polls (Glasford, 2008; Maloney et al., 2013). Adding this element of predictive action is argued by some researchers to transcend the boundaries of TRA and create a new model known as the theory of

planned behavior (Netemeyer, Burton, & Johnston, 1991). The basis of TRA, though, rests in three related concepts. Attitudes influence beliefs, which in turn lead to predicted outcomes (Noonan et al., 2014). The theory can have many practical applications in the field of quantitative research such as isolating key variables like attitudes, behavioral beliefs, subjective norms, normative beliefs, and intentions (Noonan et al., 2014). However, since it also seeks to predict action on the foundation of attitude, the theory broadens to have a strong qualitative use. By determining the essence of how someone feels about a certain behavior or ideal, then intent can be predicted with some elevated degree of certainty.

A specific amount of time within the individual has to perform a predictive action is a key component of the theory of planned behavior (Oullette & Wood, 1998). Absentee ballot, early voting, and the hours the polls are open on Election Day serve as the combined timetables during which the participants studied. This study will split focus groups into students who have voted before and students who have yet to vote ever.

This is important because habitual behavior can determine the outcome of future actions (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). A person who has voted before understands the low-involvement level in the decision and thus is more likely to repeat the act. Conscious intentions, at least in the general public, drive this reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). However, the research that attempts to apply TRA to the youth voting demographic, which Glasford (2008) defines as 24 and younger, is limited. A study conducted in similar economic times did find that the three most important factors to this demographic stemmed from the information-motivation-behavioral skills model (Ajzen, Timco, & White, 1982). The study found that the better informed the youth was about the candidate, the higher rate of voter behavior, or turnout, could be expected (Ajzen

et al., 1982). The same could likely apply to a single issue such as the medicinal marijuana ballot initiative.

Martin Fishbein, who developed the TRA in 1967, applied the theory specifically to the effectiveness of anti-marijuana advertisements on the youth. The first implication of each advertisement is that the abundance of the drug appearing in the ad is directly correlated to easiness of accessibility (Kang, Cappella, & Fishbein, 2009). The study determined that the lower the barriers to obtaining the drug were perceived to be by the youth, then the higher the likelihood an individual would support its use (Kang et al., 2009). Many other studies have corroborated this finding (Yzer, Cappella, Fishbein, Hornik, & Ahern, 2003; Stephenson & Palmgreen, 2001; Palmgreen, Donohew, Lorch, Rogus, Helm, & Grant, 1991).

This adds another dimension to what may motivate a voting behavior. If the youth is inclined to want to use marijuana recreationally and feels the legalization of the drug medicinally improves the possibility of that outcome then previous research suggests an individual would be motivated to act. Subsequently if the individual feels that marijuana is a harmful drug that's legalization medicinally would proliferate its use, then they would be equally as likely to voice their opinion on Election Day.

Recently, a study was published about the behaviors of water pipe, or hookah as it is sometimes referred, smoking of tobacco in college-aged populations. The behavior is not currently an illegal behavior for those students of age but the study is strikingly similar to the current study in utilizing TRA to determine behavior. Some of the behavior factors discovered through an initial questionnaire are relevant. For example, those who currently used other tobacco products had a significantly higher baseline for approval of water pipe smoking than those who had never used with a slight edge in favor of approval among those who had used

previously but were not currently using tobacco products (Noonan et al., 2014). The same could hold true for beliefs about the harm in marijuana among current and past users though more study would need to be done.

The study also concluded that all the variables of TRA had some impact on the predictability of future use. Subjective norm and attitude were the two largest predictors of behavior (Noonan et al., 2014). While this qualitative study will not perform the measurable regression analysis of a quantitative study, it will seek to find consistency in these variables represented in participants' responses.

Other studies have corroborated that TRA has many applications including religious and political uses such as determining how often someone will attend church or for whom someone may be inclined to vote (Schwab, Harton & Cullum, 2012). Over the last few years, however, there has been a considerable rise in TRA as a determinant of one's likelihood to recycle products such as soda cans (Schwab et al., 2012). The Schwab study in particular focused on the issue through the theoretical framework of TRA as applied to undergraduate 18 to 24 year olds. Unlike the prior study in which students were likely to smoke water pipe tobacco regardless of societal pressures based on the independent variable of attitude, social norms played a large role in predicting the outcome of behavior (Schwab et al., 2012). The more a student was pressured within the confines of a university residents hall to view recycling as the expected action in society, the more likely the student was to recycle despite attitudes toward the action of recycling (Schwab et al., 2012).

The focus groups conducted in this study will reveal some elements of TRA that have both been published and criticized by other academics. Like all theories, gaps still remain in the literature as the world changes and new policies arise. The medical marijuana debate was

nonexistent in the 1970s as TRA was developed and well behind Maslow's decades before that. The purpose of this study is to take these theories from the time they were created and apply them to the next event in the American democratic process. Both theories are instrumental in analyzing the results.

This study contributed to the literature through focusing on the motivations of voting in a key demographic and the trend of single-issue voting as opposed to supporting individual candidates. The research questions identified three target areas for further study framed by the existing literature. The first involved TRA and if attitude toward medical marijuana would drive behavioral intent to vote. The second, also TRA based, focused more on determining if education and beliefs were a foundation to attitude about drug use. Lastly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs was employed to study the effect the act of voting had on the youth. These three worked together to provide a deeper insight into the minds of young voters.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### *Statement of Purpose*

This study sought to unveil if the medicinal marijuana ballot initiative will be a single-issue motivator for the youth to vote in the upcoming 2014 midterm election. The study was conducted within the bounded system of a Florida public university undergrads ages 18 to 24. The issue at hand was not whether the students support or oppose the initiative but rather to provide a qualitative insight into the motivations of voting. The youth vote, throughout history, has largely impacted the outcome of candidate elections. However, this influential voting demographic has not been extensively analyzed in terms of supporting ballot initiatives.

Therefore, this study seeks to inform the following research questions:

RQ1: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, will medicinal marijuana be a single-issue that primarily motivates voting?

RQ2: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, do preconceived beliefs about marijuana use affect the decision to vote?

RQ3: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, does the act of voting fulfill a need?

This chapter included a look at the data collection process through the various steps. It began with an overall description of the planning process followed by a protocol to which the researcher adhered while conducting the focus groups. Inside this protocol was an explanation of

the pre-interview steps as well as the procedures for how the interview was conducted and also addressed the wrap-up for when the sessions were completed. This chapter then moved to describe the instrumentation process focusing primarily on the research questions individually. Each question was addressed in terms of purpose and origin of literature that justified why it should have stood as a research question and what it had to offer to the merits of this study.

After the research questions began the demographics questionnaire. This seven question sheet was distributed to each participant before the discussion began. There was a brief explanation of why every question was chosen and guidelines for how future studies can alter the questionnaire to produce unique results. The three sections of the semi-structured questions followed the demographics sheet. Each of these sections addressed a different aspect of the research questions yet were left open-ended enough to allow the participants to not exclude any part of the discussion. Attempts were made to avoid using leading questions to preserve the integrity of the responses. The final section was the data collection. This included a table to the demographic information collected as well as a brief explanation of the process of obtaining it.

#### *Preparation Overview*

Two groups were assembled for the purpose of this study. All participants were between 18 and 24 years old and be registered full-time students for the Fall 2014 semester. Identifications were checked to ensure no participant was younger than 18 years old. The second group was comprised of registered voters who have not participated in an election because of youth or personal choice. The first group consisted of students who have voted in prior elections.

The reason for the division was having voted before would change an individual's attitude toward the practice. As this is a study to determine the motivation for voting, the attitude was a vital variable to consider.

### *Pre-Session Steps*

Informational flyers as well as connections to undergraduates through past courses taught at the university and courses taught by other professors recruited the students to participate. Pizza, provided by the researcher, also served as an incentive.

Participants signed in and the names were kept with the researcher for records but not published. A classroom, boardroom style, was the setting. A do not disturb sign was placed on the door and any windows were covered to preserve anonymity.

Groups were recorded using both audio and video devices. The purpose of the video was to match faces with voices so the proper demographic information is attributed to the right person in a way that may be difficult to distinguish with solely an audio recording has to offer.

To obtain this demographic information, the researcher distributed a questionnaire that each participant completed. An example can be found in a later section. Once everyone signed a consent form and completed the questionnaire, the sessions began.

The first step was for the researcher to introduce himself. An overview of the study outlining the purpose for the focus group was clearly stated. Then the participants introduced themselves along with the researcher facilitating an icebreaker of including the most recently watched movie and a quick opinion of how it was. This was one of many steps that will be taken to enhance all the participants' comfort level throughout the group while working to reduce potential harm. Once everyone in the room had a chance to speak, the recorders were turned on and the formal questioning started.

### *Interviewer Procedures*

The researcher kept several strategies in mind when facilitating a successful session. Silence was as important to the interviewer as the questions and ample time given for each



respondent to speak, having utilized a few seconds of silence to give each a chance to elaborate before moving on to the next question.

Remarks made after a participant responds were kept objective. The researcher used “thank you” and other neutral interjections which avoided leading a participant in a direction or discouraging others from contributing. Probing a certain line of thought was not considered a bad technique. Probing was necessary to help an individual form a complete thought and care was taken to not have the line of questioning become leading.

Along the same strategy, the researcher was vigilant for a spiral of silence that could occur. Leaders can emerge in certain groups and discourage others from contributing. No participant established his or herself as an opinion leader. If that participant had started to do so, they were not directed questions by the researcher until many other voices had been heard. This was vital to preserving the integrity of everyone’s opinions.

#### *Post-Session Steps*

After the group was completed in an efficient manner, the researcher once again assured the anonymity and thanked the participants for their time. The researcher transcribed the recording substituting the participants’ names with unidentifying demographic details. Transcripts in their entirety are published with the thesis but sections were quoted upon analysis to convey the essence of how the medicinal marijuana ballot initiative impacts a students’ choice to vote.

#### *Instrumentation*

RQ1: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, will medicinal marijuana be a single-issue that primarily motivates voting?

This question was the primary focus of the study. It asked directly if Amendment 2 is an influential enough issue to create single-issue voters who show up to the polls in November. Since this is the critical question of the study, the researcher has written the final two sections of questions to pertain to this question after the focus groups have had a chance to answer other questions and build trust with the facilitator. The questions, for example the final one asked, were not literature based but were designed to be answered with no uncertain terms for the sake of discovery in the study. The reasoning for the questions, however, did have a basis in previous work. The Gallup poll cited in the first section of the literature review chapter indicated a shift in how people vote from candidate to single-issue support. This question also added insight to if and a reason why that may be happening in the youth demographic. For that reason, this question was what makes this study fundamentally unique compared to existing literature. Responses from both the variables discussed in the political involvement and decision to vote sections provided an invaluable look into the coveted young voter population.

RQ2: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, do preconceived beliefs about marijuana use affect the decision to vote?

The preconceived belief variable was an important component of the study for two sub-categorical reasons under the same theory. The theory of reasoned action's basis lies in attitude toward a behavior as a predictor of outcome. The two following sub-categories under TRA are prior held beliefs on marijuana and societal expectations of marijuana. Because of this, the belief one holds toward marijuana consequences of use, either good or bad, played a pivotal role in attitude prior to voting. Section one of the focus group questions pertained to this research question. The Noonan water pipe tobacco was a good example of why this question was needed. The study suggested the majority of young people who used water pipe tobacco did so because

of privately held beliefs regardless of what societal norms impact the decision to follow through on the behavior. Likewise, the Schwab study showed the influence societal expectations had when students in dorms not prone to have a positive attitude toward recycling still performed the behavior because it was perceived to be expected of them by their peers. The questions written in section one considered both of these prior studies closely and sought to obtain objective responses about the youth's belief in marijuana use both medicinally and otherwise. Responses were analyzed from this section to see if they are consistent with either of the two sub-categories within the theory of reasoned action. If they are, the responses could potentially help either support or opposition groups cater a message to influence the attitude of the voter toward Amendment 2 before he or she goes to the polls.

RQ3: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, does the act of voting fulfill a need?

This was the only question of the three that does not directly relate to medical marijuana but instead focused solely on the act of voting. Derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this question was discussed in the final section of the focus group. The umbrella question to first address the theory was asking if any need was fulfilled by voting. The probing that continues following the question narrowed that into one of Maslow's five needs categories. For example, a respondent that said he or she voted or planned to vote because of friends would fall into the social level whereas an individual who voted or plans to vote because of the pride in participating in the democratic process would be closer to self-actualization in the top of Maslow's pyramid. Discovering why people feel the need to vote was absolutely vital in composing a message to convince them to vote a certain way. A voter who goes to the polls to express a voice in the safety needs category is going to react much differently than a voter who

goes to fulfill social needs. There are several organizations such as Rock the Vote and Generation Opportunity that are geared directly to the youth demographic yet the field of study applying Maslow's needs to youth voting is nearly non-existent and has been all but ignored since the 1980s. Even in the 1980s, studies were produced looking at economic need, which falls lower on the pyramid, as the Durr and Ferguson studies showed. Though the early 2010 decade is similar in unemployment to the early 1980s, the issues are changing and that could increase the capacity Maslow's theory has on influencing and individual, particularly a young person, to vote.

### *Demographic Questionnaire*

The seven question demographic questionnaire was completed by each participant prior to starting the focus group. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a greater description to each respondent instead of simply referring to each by a number. The demographic questionnaire played a key role in the future studies section of the study. The questions can be altered in further groups to see if the variable effect of how many elections an individual has voted in may impact one's likelihood to vote more so than how long someone has been a registered voter. The demographic questionnaire in this study did not serve the primary purpose of analyzing variables involved, such as if a 19-year-old is less likely to vote than a 24-year-old, but instead served as way to demonstrate balance and diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender among other variables.

1. How old are you?
2. What grade level are you?
3. M / F ?

4. Ethnicity?
5. Florida native? If not, when did you move to the state?
6. How long have you been a registered voter?
7. With which political party are you registered?

*Preconceived Beliefs*

1. What are your thoughts on marijuana use?

Probe as necessary

- Does marijuana have an effect on an individual's health? If so, in what way?
- Can you describe the impact passing a medicinal marijuana ballot initiative would have on people's access to recreational use?
- What potential side effects, good and bad, do you predict will happen if the initiative passes?
- Can you describe your feelings toward the Drug Enforcement Agency categorizing marijuana as a Schedule 1 drug?

*Political Involvement*

2. Can you describe how politically involved you consider yourself?

Probe as necessary

- Would you ever go/have you ever gone to vote solely to support one candidate only?

- Would you ever go/have you ever voted for a candidate because he or she supported a single issue important to you?
  - Is there an issue that impacts you enough that would motivate you to vote beyond how a candidate could motivate you?
  - Is the medicinal marijuana ballot initiative an issue that will be the primary reason you vote in the upcoming election?
3. Do you believe you or a family member would have access to medicinal marijuana if it passed? If so, how do you feel your family would react to its use?
  4. Can you describe any changes to Florida economics you believe the initiative's passing would have?

*Decision to Vote*

5. Can you describe the reason you vote?

Probe as necessary

- Can you describe the role, if any, your friends play in your decision to vote?
  - Can you describe societal expectations you perceive regarding voting?
6. Would you cast your vote either way because of health reasons associated with marijuana? If so, what are these reasons?
  7. Can you describe any need you feel voting fulfills for you?

*Data Collection*

Two focus groups were conducted consisting of fourteen total participants. The breakdown of participants by demographics can be found Table 1.

| <b>Table 1</b><br>Demographics of Participants |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Two Focus Groups                               | Group that has voted                    | Group that has not voted                |
| Grade Level                                    | 1 junior, 7 seniors                     | 2 sophomores, 1 junior, 3 seniors       |
| Male or Female                                 | 1 male, 7 female                        | 6 male                                  |
| Age  | Two 20, three 21, two 22, one 24        | Two 20, one 21, three 22                |
| Ethnicity                                      | 1 Hispanic, 1 black, 6 white            | 1 black, 5 white                        |
| Political Party                                | 2 Republican, 3 democrat, 3 independent | 1 Independent, 2 democrat, 3 republican |
| Table 1  |   |   |

Care was taken to get an even split of gender, ethnicity, and political party registration. One limitation of the study was, however, the time allotted for each group. Both sessions ended just short of a half an hour but, to better understand the full motivation of the youth voter, a more in-depth focus group would have been required. This could have been accomplished through a more developed questionnaire as well as trial focus groups prior to the data collection to build the facilitator's experience.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Results**

#### *Introduction*

The information gathered from the groups provided a wealth of information related to the purpose of the study. The concepts of medical marijuana and youth voting were explored in-depth both within the framework of the research questions as well as several other discoveries uncovered throughout the course of the group discussion. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, will medicinal marijuana be a single-issue that primarily motivates voting?

RQ2: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, do preconceived beliefs about marijuana use affect the decision to vote?

RQ3: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, does the act of voting fulfill a need?

#### *Research Question Analysis*

The findings from the groups did have consistencies with both Maslow's needs and the theory of reasoned action but also deviated from the theoretical framework and presented new viewpoints. Neither group had a single participant say that medicinal marijuana is an important enough issue to solely motivate him or her to vote this November. When asked what issues, if any, would be influential enough to motivate the participant to go to the polls solely to vote on, the results were as follows:



1. Gay rights – “I think it’s more human rights,” said a 24-year-old male
2. Gun control – “I don’t like guns. I come from a place where it went from if you got in a fight at a bar you would get punched in the head and then five years later someone would be waiting in the parking lot to shoot you,” said a 22-year-old male. “I support gun rights 100 percent but it all matters who the person is,” said a 22-year-old female.
3. Education – “Personally I support teachers and their union just because my mom has been faced with having her pay be based on how was students do in class and I think that’s totally unfair because the student is affected by numerous outside factors,” said a 20-year-old black female. “[I would vote for] something to do with schools, but property tax or something, I don’t really care about now,” said a 21-year-old white male.
4. Military spending – “Definitely military, especially something to do with budget cuts. I would go oppose that,” said a 22-year-old male.
5. Death penalty – “[I would go vote for] abolishing the death penalty,” said a 21-year-old female.

Other mentions of topics more important than medical marijuana included state school tuition price, legal age to drink alcohol, and healthcare.

RQ1: Will medicinal marijuana be a single-issue that primarily motivates students 18 to 24 years old to vote?

The data collected suggested that the answer to the first research question of if marijuana will be a single-issue motivator to drive students 18 to 24 years old to the polls was not a strong indicator of motivation to vote.

“There are too many other important issues. I wouldn’t go support a candidate just because he was for medicinal marijuana because I don’t think it’s that important,” said a 21-year-old white female Republican.

“I think that there are so much more important things going on than medical marijuana, it’s the reason to get this done now so we don’t have it as a distraction from the important things,” said a white 24-year-old male Democrat. Neither of these bi-partisan responses discounted the idea of single-issue voting but rather excluded medical marijuana of ever being that issue. This was important to note for the theory of reasoned action which stated that attitude drives behavior. The attitude from members of both parties indicated that individuals have prioritized the issues most important to him or her before going to vote. This also has implications with Maslow’s needs. Depending on how an individual ranks these issues was reflected in what needs he or she is trying to fulfill. As previously mentioned, marriage equality was the top issue among the youth participants. This was an example of a belonging need as the institution of more marriages enriches friends, family, and communities. Another topic discussed passionately was gun control. Though two sides of the issue were debated, they both fall under the category of the safety need in a way of providing a more secure place to live. One respondent rejected the idea that these needs are determined by age.

“I don’t think it has anything to do with being young. If you smoke pot, you’re going to go vote for it but that’s any age. But supporting it and thinking that’s going to get you youth, that’s stupid,” said a 20-year-old black female Democrat.

RQ2: Do preconceived beliefs about marijuana use affect the decision to vote for students between 18 and 24 years old?

Though this question was not as openly addressed as the other two, the data also suggested a trend that the answer to this question was no though with the limited sample size, a larger study will need to be conducted to draw more decisive conclusions. From the data gathered though, new information was not found to have an effect on the decision to vote. These preconceived beliefs showed that marijuana has medicinal properties with potential dangers ranging from lung damage to hallucinogenic suicide. The health effects were only one part of answering this research question however.

The second part had to deal with access to the drug should it be legalized medically. If there is a low barrier to access then it could be presumed that the health effects would be more important to users. It did not appear that either health effects or access had any influence over a participant's willingness to vote.

“[More information on marijuana] wouldn't be enough to sway my decision to vote. I think I would just be more informed when I vote. We all have our own opinions on it either for or against and just being educated isn't going to matter about voting. It wouldn't do it for me anyways,” said a 21-year-old female.

“As a candidate it doesn't mean things like marijuana use or things like that, I don't back them solely for that, I think it just means they have common sense,” said a 24-year-old male. These two responses signified a higher level on Maslow's pyramid. They showed a recognition of the information available and demonstrated an ability to critically analyze what they considered fact, fiction, important, and trivial. This self-esteem level of thought processing when voting to fulfill a need created a wrinkle in the action of voting. Just as in the issue-based voting where individuals prioritized what was most important to them, so too did the respondents rank

what a candidate supports by the impact it will have on them. There were a few dissenters who felt it had the potential to motivate the youth population.

“It’s being used as a weapon. They’re saying, ‘I’m for this. Now young people come vote for me because I support this issue.’ So I think it does pull voters but not as many as politicians think,” said a 21-year-old female.

“It’ll pull in voters but they won’t be educated ones. Who cares about pot when there are so many more issues?” said a different 21-year-old female. Because marijuana was said by all 14 participants to never be a single-issue motivator to vote, the preconceived beliefs each individual had appeared to have no impact on the decision to vote.

RQ3: Is the act of voting fulfilling a need for students between 18 and 24 years old?

The data suggested that this is research question was confirmed. Many of Maslow’s needs that were discussed, and will be evaluated closer in the discussion section, However, almost every respondent in some way expressed a need that was fulfilled by voting. Some could not express exactly what that need is.

“I think I voted when I was 18. I didn’t know enough to vote but I just voted anyway,” said a 20-year-old female Independent. For others, the need was clearer.

“I mean, it makes you feel like you’re doing something right. It makes you feel like what you’re doing does count,” said a 22-year-old male Republican. These respondents exhibited different feelings toward voting that both fall under the TRA umbrella. The first girl voted because it was a social norm. She felt society expected her to vote so, despite being ill-informed on the issues, she knew she had reached the age where the behavior of voting was a personal necessary contribution to society. The second respondent described his attitude toward the

behavior. He felt empowered by performing the action and thus his attitude toward that feeling led to his behavior intention, and ultimately, his behavior as TRA predicts.

A third category also arose. One participant expressed that voting does fill a need but that he felt there was a moral responsibility to withhold this vote if it did not directly affect the voter.

“So I think if the need is there, then yeah, it’s important to vote. But if it’s, yeah, Billy-Bob wants this done, then there’s no point because if you don’t know enough about Billy-Bob then you shouldn’t care. Don’t sway it,” said a 21-year-old male Democrat.

In conclusion, the data strongly supported the idea that medicinal marijuana will not be the determining factor in a young person’s decision to vote but that there are certain issues that could be important enough to evoke such a behavior.

#### *Other Discoveries*

Several discoveries were made outside the initial research questions. The first was how the youth perceives marijuana’s effect on the body.

“I don’t think it’s any worse than alcohol,” said a 21-year-old white female Republican. “It’s not necessarily bad or good. I can see it causing car accidents and stuff or a DUI.” The comparison to alcohol was a common one.

“People talk about alcohol caused car accidents and stuff. People kill themselves because they think they are so high they will die anyway. They are tripping so hard they kill themselves,” said a 20-year-old black female. There was a wide range in speculation as to the possible behaviors marijuana could induce though most were open about prior drug use both marijuana and otherwise.

“I don’t smoke pot but I’ll do acid,” said a 21-year-old white female Independent. Still, the effects were seen as having possible fatal hallucinogenic properties.

“I read that someone in Denver ate a marijuana-laced cookie then went so out of his mind that he jumped from a window,” said a 21-year-old white female.

The possible medical benefits of smoking was also spread over a wide range of degrees.

“I think it is going to be as common as taking some Tylenol,” said a 22-year-old white male Independent. “Instead you’ll just smoke a bowl.”

“It can cure cancer, help with Alzheimer’s, but that’s just some of the extremes. It can really help with sports injuries in a way that prescription pain meds can’t,” said a 21-year-old white male Democrat. The context in which the participants responded to the potential health benefits never reached a personal level. This has many implications when analyzed with the literature. With no direct perceived personal benefit apparent, the participants could have not been motivated to vote solely in support of Amendment 2 because its passing would not fulfill a need on Maslow’s pyramid. The theory of reasoned action also helped explain the nature of the responses. If the attitude toward using marijuana for medical purposes was that it helps the most with diseases that typically do not affect the young, such as Alzheimer’s, then a young person’s behavioral intent will not be in overwhelming support to vote it through. This does not suggest that young people do not support the amendment but rather that the support is not the main motivation to perform the action of voting.

Access was another unanimously agreed upon aspect of Amendment 2. Everyone in the groups felt that, if made medically legal, marijuana would be easily obtained by people of any age over 18.

“I think that you could go in and say your toe hurts and you would get it,” said a 20-year-old female.

“You have people all the time who fake illness or injuries or will say they are worse than they are to get prescription pain pills,” said a 22-year-old white male. “So obviously this is going to hold true for marijuana.”

Both groups also concluded that Amendment 2 would be the first step in full legalization.

“I also think it will be a good thing because if it gets passed for medical use then the trend will probably say it will be passed for recreational use as in Colorado,” said a 22-year-old male.

“I sort of have a problem with the medical marijuana. If it’s going to be illegal, make it illegal. But it’s going to be legal, just make it legal across the board,” said a 20-year-old black female.

Whether the participant supported or opposed medical and full legalization of marijuana, each did have the preconceived belief that it would have a positive effect tax revenue though there were a few suspicious respondents in each group as to if that would translate into a positive impact on the state economy.

“I think it would benefit the economy as long as they taxed it properly and if they made sure it went to the proper resources and if they had an actual plan of what they were going to do with it,” said a 21-year-old white female Democrat not yet quoted in this section. She was joined by a different demographic in a separate group.

“The taxes, if used properly, will be great,” said a 22-year-old male Republican from a different group.

An increase in tax revenue was not the only way each group saw a potential improvement to the economy. These responses directly related to Durr’s studies on youth voting to fulfill an economic need. Concerns like how tax money would be spent by the government fall scattered

down Maslow's pyramid. Mixing self-esteem, safety, and physiological needs, the responses depicted a mastery of understanding there would be potential benefit yet a high level of concern for the consequences this benefit of added tax revenue could have. Upperclassmen students like the ones quoted above comprehended that the work world is a competitive place for soon-to-be college graduates and thus reserving their vote for a way that they feel best fulfills their economic needs as Durr described. Both were also skeptical of the way the government has handled drug enforcement over the decades.

"I think it's a hangover from the war on drugs when all that started, whereas if your kids smoke marijuana, they are going to do every other drug. I'm pretty sure that's been falsified," said the only male participant from the first group. Another male participant from the second group elaborated on the mindset.

"There's also all the money that you wouldn't be spending on the war on drugs, on incarceration, and everything like that," said a 22-year-old white male Republican. A different participant of the exact same demographic information expounded on the idea taking the health of the inmate into consideration.

"It's nonviolent and they're in there for a long time. Sometimes you have the tendency to throw them in with the violent and things can go the wrong way," he said.

With a good foundation of preconceived beliefs of the effects of marijuana and the consequences, both positive and negative as well as intended and unintended, of Amendment 2 passing, the next step is to compare further responses based off the research questions and the theoretical framework.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Discussion**

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of the study was to better understand single-issue voting patterns among young voters, specifically when that issue is Florida's upcoming vote on the decision to legalize medical marijuana. This budding field of political and academic study deserved a close look at both the quantitative side without sacrificing the merits of a qualitative review. Three research questions arose from an extensive look at the literature.

RQ1: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, will medicinal marijuana be a single-issue that primarily motivates voting?

RQ2: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, do preconceived beliefs about marijuana use affect the decision to vote?

RQ3: For students between the ages of 18 and 24, does the act of voting fulfill a need?

#### *Discussion*

The theories chosen did provide insight into the responses and, in some cases, predicted how a participant would react when asked a certain question. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs for example, several needs on the pyramid were fulfilled by the act of voting. The lowest level seen in responses is safety needs, the second to lowest on the pyramid.

"It gives people a sense of control. You control who is in office so you control the legislation," said a 21-year-old female. She was expressing that through using her vote, she was

taking charge of the environment around her and building a safer, more controlled place for her to live. The basic needs are what people need to fulfill first before they can progress onto more complicated levels of thinking. Because people are in their most vulnerable state when fulfilling these needs, for example, the first level of the pyramid when a person would just be trying to find food, water, and shelter, the messaging used to reach them would be different than if they were higher on the pyramid. This is reflected in the types of ads that run. Though people generally feel that negative political advertising has more of an effect on others than on themselves, studies have shown there is a portion of people who do vote based on fear from information delivered in these attack ads (Wei & Lo, 2007). This information would be significant to both sides of the medicinal marijuana issue, especially when combining perceived health effects of the drug with the safety needs on Maslow's pyramid. An organization in support of the amendment would need to cater a message of the benefits to alleviate these concerns while an organization in opposition could use language from this study to target the safety fears of a voter any age.

The most popular reason for voting was the next step on the pyramid, however, in the belonging need. This could be seen incorporating both friends and family.

"I went out to vote because me and my friends would go to bars and it was just fun to watch two of my friends argue their sides because one was die-hard Republican and the other was die-hard Democrat so their arguments inspired me to go out in vote," said a 21-year-old white female.

"It's easier to go vote in groups and people are like, I don't want to go for this [the action of voting], I want to go with them [friends]," said a 21-year-old white male. "Just getting up and going to vote, you usually kind of do that as an event."

“The majority of people our age need someone to go with them,” said a 20-year-old black male.

“It [voting] wasn’t my friends for me, it was my family,” said a 20-year-old black female. Social behavior that included friends and family was another level on Maslow’s pyramid. This was also the only step that showed the pressures of belonging could be too overwhelming and discourage the action.

“I had a lot of friends that were all different so when they argued back I think it just confused me more because I wouldn’t know. It just confused me more,” said a 22-year-old Hispanic female.

The next and final step before self-actualization is the self-esteem level. This can best be defined as the recognition of achievement in the act of voting.

“It gives people a sense of purpose,” said a 21-year-old female.

The final level, self-actualization, is defined as the true fulfillment received when acting on a behavior that fills a need. This action is truly personal and rectifies a deficiency to improve an individual well-being.

“I don’t care what other people think. I vote mostly because I saw the impact it was having and how my vote can swing things one way or swing things another way,” said a 21-year-old female.

The theory of reasoned action at its core believes that attitude toward behavior will be the best predictor of behavioral outcome. This can be broken in two subcategories specifically, an individual’s attitude toward a behavior and an expected societal norm’s influence of an individual’s attitude toward a behavior. Both were clearly presented in responses. First is the

individual's attitude toward voting. A respondent in the second group makes it known that he is not voting because it is a social behavior.

"I've gone to every primary by myself. I don't want to go with anyone else to be questioned or even people like want to talk you into doing something you don't want to do so I always go by myself," said the 22-year-old male.

"I think it's definitely like a selfish act," said a different 22-year-old male. "It's sad to say but the things that people vote on they do so because they directly affect you."

"I don't have enough money to contribute to a campaign to have a voice so the only way that I have one is a vote," said a 24-year-old male.

While not in the majority opinion, societal norms did have a noticeable influence on some participants' decision to vote.

"I think you should be expected to vote. It's your country. What decisions are made is your say. One vote does make a difference," said a 21-year-old male. "I just think it should be expected that we go vote because it's going to affect us. "

"I voted right at 18. It's the whole basis of this country. You can't complain about what's going on if you don't cast your vote. People fought really hard to have the right to vote. Especially women, they couldn't vote for the longest time. You can't brush it off like it's nothing when it's something. It's important," said a 21-year-old female. Some studies have suggested that voter turnout is a good representative of social norms because of the inherent belief that good citizens should vote (Coleman, 2013). If this is true, as the responses and the studies show, then effective communication strategies could be derived without ever having to mention an issue. The message instead could be relying on the principles of TRA to change an individual's attitude toward the action of voting by making it American. Political research has shown that attitudes

can spread through a local population through relying on conformity (Coleman, 2013). These social norms could be exploited in messaging in many ways. A population, like the youth, who is not prone to vote but may be likely to support an issue such as medical marijuana could be coerced into going to the polls if the message was vote because it is what is expected of you rather than vote in support of this issue. As the responses have demonstrated, no participant identified Amendment 2 as being a single-issue motivator to get the youth to vote but several responses indicated they would support the measure if they showed up to the polls. Proponents of the ballot initiative could try an alternative message to leverage the social norm of voting because it's the right thing to do to get these otherwise non-voters to the polls. However, both sides of the social norm opinion were expressed.

“No societal expectations [to vote],” said a different 21-year-old female. This quote could present a problem to political consultants looking to drive up the youth vote. According to TRA, participants who felt this way would need an outside influencer to change their attitude toward the social norm which would in turn affect behavioral intention and eventually lead to a change in behavioral action (Maloney et al., 2013). All of the respondents that answered questions related to TRA had voted in previous elections and may have been predisposed to do so again because there was no barrier to the unknown in the action. Using the TRA and Maslow's pyramid though, laid the groundwork for responses that fell in-line with what has been theorized for decades of predictive behavior.

### *Limitations*

The study was conducted with respondents from only one university in the diverse state of Florida. A greater picture of youth would have been to conduct focus groups in different counties with different cultures. The student size was reduced even further to those taking

summer courses which severely limited the sample that could have been selected had the groups been conducted during one of the main semesters.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, no hard data or conclusions could be drawn from the collection. The work can only provide an insight into what the young voter mind is thinking but do very little to find correlations between attitude and behavior or measure which of Maslow's needs when most fulfilled predicts a voting outcome.

The final limitations were the experience of the primary researcher and the timetable on which the study had to be completed. These were his first conducted groups and with more practice produces better results suggesting a more experienced facilitator may have steered the discussions differently. Also, because of an accelerated timetable, participants did not know what they were going to be discussing until just minutes before the sessions began. This could have led to some incomplete thoughts or uninformed opinions.

#### *Further Study*

As the academic world rushes to investigate the marijuana topic sweeping the nation, several future studies will need to be performed to best understand this issue. The first would be a quantitative look at the influence of medical marijuana on a young person's likelihood of voting. Another field of study would be the shift in candidate voting to single-issue voting. Only one respondent in either group said he had voted solely because of an issue and not to support any candidate.

However, with the changing political culture, it is possible this trend will become the mainstream. More studies will need to be conducted if the ballot initiative passes or if it fails. Both will have to look into the next step of full legalization and determine if that has a greater or lesser impact on a young person's decision to vote. This same study could be redone with

different theoretical framework that would lead to different questions and could produce a different result.

Several other experiments still await this growing field of academia. Many studies should be published in the near future.

### *Conclusions*

Though the sample size is too limited to conclude any finding with certainty, the research did suggest many consistently held beliefs and attitudes toward voting and marijuana use. The first is that medical marijuana alone will not be a single-issue motivator for 18 to 24 year olds. The second finding is that, regardless of prior voting history, a young voter would consider some issues influential enough to go vote solely to express a view on the topic.

Mixed results were found on two main topics. The first was the effect of marijuana on the body. The group that had voted before approached possible effects with a higher sense of caution than the group that had not voted. The first group recalled tales of deaths related to the effect of marijuana on the psyche as well as stunted growth caused by recreational use at a young age. The second group did not share those concerns.

Also a concept that received a diverse response was the reason for voting. The group that had voted before was much higher on the Maslow's pyramid toward self-actualization. Several participants voted because the act led to change or because it fulfilled a sense of duty to country in the group that had voted whereas the group that had never voted before expressed that it was mostly a by-product of it not being a social action. The previous voters exhibited a much more individual initiative than the non-voters who planned to go with friends in November.

The final consensus between the two groups was that medical marijuana was being used as bait for young people to go vote. The responses varied on if the trick would work, with the

groups unanimously expressing politicians perceived young people to be in support of the measure, but both groups declined to think the political strategy was effective on themselves or others their age.



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## APPENDIX A

### Transcriptions

PR: Primary Researcher

R1: Senior, 21-year-old white female Independent

R2: Senior, 22-year-old Hispanic female Independent

R3: Senior, 22-year-old white female Republican

R4: Junior, 20-year-old white female Independent

R5: Senior, 21-year-old white female Republican

R6: Senior, 21-year-old white female Democrat

R7: Junior, 20-year-old black female Democrat

R8: Senior 24-year-old white male Democrat

PR: What are your thoughts on marijuana use, not just medicinally but in general?

R7: It happens.

R4: I don't think it's a big deal. I don't think it really hurts anybody.

R5: I don't think it's worse than alcohol.

R1: It doesn't bother me. A lot of people do it.

PR: Not worse than alcohol is to imply that it has an effect on an individual's health in general.

How do you see it affecting them?

R5: It's not necessarily bad or good. I can see it causing car accidents and stuff or a DUI from alcohol.

R2: I don't think it has ever had a negative effect health wise. Maybe just procrastination but I don't think it has ever caused any deaths or anything from overdose.

R7: I actually heard that it has caused deaths but not as much as alcoholism. I feel like all of this exists on a gradient. It's not something that I do now anymore.

R8: Where did you hear that marijuana causes deaths? Like indirectly do you get high and crash a car?

R7: No.

R4: I read one marijuana overdose was reported and that was two months ago.

PR: Where was your source that you read this?

R5: I read that someone in Denver ate a marijuana-laced cookie and then went so out of his mind that he jumped from a window.

R8: Yeah but that's not the actual death caused by marijuana.

PR: Let's hear from the ends of the table.

R7: People talk about alcohol caused car accidents and stuff. People kill themselves because they think they are so high they will die anyway. They are tripping so hard they kill themselves.

R8: That may be true but it's not a direct effect of the marijuana itself. Like you drink alcohol a lot then eventually you're going to die because your liver will fail.

R7: It does affect your brain and your nervous system.

R4: I think for some people it's honestly better for them like my roommates smoke all the time and thank God she does because she has a lot of anxiety and I like her better when she smokes.

PR: I would like to bring it back down to this point again and if you drink a lot you will impact your liver, do you see any possibility where if you smoke a lot it would have an impact on your lungs?

R8: The only thing I read is there is a study now that says it has an effect on your cognitive function if you smoke it a lot when your brain is developing so teenagers and young 20s if you smoke it a lot where it could actually have a physical effect on your body.

R6: I wouldn't say that it doesn't have an effect on your body because the combustion in your lungs like you said, it's going to hurt your lungs. I don't think it's going to cause people to jump out of windows. That's not marijuana directly affecting someone but I definitely think it does have a direct effect if you're talking about the combustion in someone's lungs if you're smoking it.

R8: You can't smoke anything and have it be healthy for you.

R2: The lung damage is the only effect that I can see because cognitively it doesn't hurt you long term. It does but not permanently.

PR: That's a good segway. If this ballot initiative passes, what potential side effects of access to the drug do you see especially among people your age?

R7: I don't think that people should go to jail for it in the first place. The consequences are so exaggerated. It's not as big of a deal as people make it out to be.

R3: People's lives get ruined once you go to jail for smoking.

PR: The Drug Enforcement Agency categorizes marijuana as a Schedule 1 narcotic which is why it is so criminalized in the eyes of the law. Could you describe your feelings toward the DEA's description of the drug in such a way.

R1: I think it's ridiculous.

R5: I feel it's over the top.

R4: It's not like it's cocaine or something.

R7: You have to look at the demographics of who uses it.



R2: A ton of teens use it.

R7: Yeah but not only that, you talk about cocaine verses crack. When you go to jail for a long time, even though it's the same substance, you have a rock, you got that rock and you're done. There are people who can afford to not purchase the rock so they're not going to go to jail if they get caught for as much of a sentence as if you don't have the powder. It's the same thing that goes into marijuana. A lot of those young, low demographics get marijuana and so it's punished more.

R8: I think it's a hangover from the War on Drugs when all that started whereas if your kids smoke marijuana, they are going to do every other drug. And I'm pretty sure that's been falsified.

R2: It is.

R1: I don't smoke pot but I'll do acid.

PR: Let's shy away from the marijuana aspect and get more into the political aspect of it and first describe yourself how politically active you feel you are?

R8: I feel like I keep up with the news pretty well but I have a bit of a cynical attitude toward what you can get done. I haven't aligned myself with any organization that is trying to do something. And I probably should, that's more laziness on my part than anything.

R4: Same boat.

R2: Same.

R3: Same.

PR: Would you be more likely to go support a candidate's campaign or an issue-based organization that's not necessarily supporting one party, not necessarily supporting one candidate but instead is backing any person who is in line with the organization's views on a single issue?

R7: Issue-based.

R5: Issues.

R6: Yeah, issues.

R8: But as a candidate it doesn't mean things like marijuana use or things like that, I don't back them solely for that, I think it just means they have common sense.

PR: Is there any issue that comes off the top of your head that you would go to one of these organizations and start volunteering for because you feel that passionately about it?

R7: Personally I support teachers and their union just because my mom has been faced with having her pay be based on how was students do in class and I think that's totally unfair because the student is affected by numerous outside factors so that's something if it is going to affect my family then I would go take action.

PR: Maybe not at the level of volunteering but is there any issue you could see going to the polls to support or oppose solely that issue and not going to support a candidate?

R7: Gay rights.

R8: Gay rights. I think it's more human rights.

R1: Abolishing the death penalty.

R8: Gun rights.

PR: Can you elaborate on gun rights?

R8: I don't like guns. I come from a place where it went from if you got in a fight at a bar you would get punched in the head and then five years later someone would be waiting outside the same bar to shoot you.

R2: I'm not a fan of guns. I see a lot of kids from my high school that I used to go to school with and all the pictures on their Instagram is guns and they point the gun at the camera and talk about

going to shoot someone and something crazy. I just don't, I just don't know. I think it's a touchy topic.

R3: I support gun rights 100% but it all matters who the person is.

R4: It's not going to stop. I don't think people should no be able to have guns but there needs to be something.

R8: Comprehensive gun control.

R4: Well, I don't mean take the guns away.

R3: There are good people with guns too.

PR: Let's circle back around we have marriage equality, capitol punishment, and guns and guns is a great example of what we're trying to do here because this study is not trying to find out how someone your age will vote for the initiative. My goal isn't to figure out if this side of the table is going to support it and this side of the table is going to oppose it. My goal is to figure out if this side of the table is going to support it then how important is it to you to support as if it will drive you to the polls. Going a little more into the medicinal side of the initiative, do you believe you or your family members would have access to medical marijuana?

Table: yes.

PR: Do you believe someone your age would have access to it and elaborate on what you think?

R4: Definitely. I think that you could go in and say your toe hurts and you would get it.

PR: Other thoughts? Can you describe the perceived impact on Florida economics?

R5: Yeah, definitely. It's going to have a great impact. Let's get it rolling.

R8: As long as they go about spending the money where it should be specifically and strategically allocated for certain programs. California didn't have any idea where the money was going to go whereas Colorado let it all pretty much go to education.

R2: I was actually just in Colorado and I think it's pretty great with everybody that has it. You can go to the neighborhood store and get a blueberry gram. I don't smoke but everyone there was very nice and pleasant to be around. There was an issue at the hotel and the lady was cool, calm, and collected. I think it would benefit the economy for sure.

PR: How about some people we haven't heard from so much?

R6: I think it would benefit the economy as long as they taxed it properly and if they made sure it went to the proper resources and if they had an actual plan of what they were going to do with it.

R1: I feel the exact same way. The only thing is to make sure that the government spent it in the right places instead of letting the money disappear and go somewhere else.

R4: Like what the IRS is doing.

R3: I don't know. I've heard mixed things in Colorado. Some people say they are spending it right, others say they aren't. I haven't followed it enough to know so I don't really have an opinion. It just passed in January? It's still pretty new. How would anyone know what effect it is having?

R8: That's the recreational marijuana too. We're still talking medical.

R7: I sort of have a problem with the medical marijuana. If it's going to be illegal, make it illegal. But it's going to be legal, just make it legal across the board just because when you make it legal medically what you're going to do is institutionalize the drug which means companies are going to sell it. When you think about how it is now, you have a lot of impoverished people selling it and that's their only way to get money and so you take a lot of their profit and yea, it's illegal, but it just makes a bigger gap in poverty.

R5: I saw something on the news though and they were talking about medical marijuana has become legal there is a class for people to learn how to grow it.

R8: I come from Michigan and before I left they passed the medical marijuana bill and there what you can do is if you qualify you can go to a company or you can get a caregiver and that person goes to get a license and he or she is taught how to grow it and they can for a certain amount of people.

R7: I have a question though. Will you have to pay for this license? Because if you've been convicted and you can't get a job then you won't be able to get that license and that is going to affect your livelihood and how you survive.

R4: Get your little sister to get it for you.

PR: One more group of questions, it's more toward the motivation of voting. Can you describe the reasons why you vote?

R7: I could. It was a big deal in my family. It was the first time me and my dad were voting because I was born in Haiti and I was a citizen a few years before he was. It was a big thing for all of us in my family for us to vote.

PR: Other thoughts?

R8: The first election I could vote, I didn't. I was in a very democratic area and there was no way Obama was going to lose so just laziness. More recently here in Florida I did go but I don't have enough money to contribute to a campaign to have a voice so the only way that I have one is a vote.

PR: This side of the table at all?

R1: I went out to vote because me and my friends would go to bars and it was just fun to watch two of my friends argue their sides because one was die-hard Republican and the other was die-hard Democrat so their arguments inspired me to go out in vote.

R4: I think I voted when I was 18. I didn't know enough to vote but I just voted anyway.

R5: I voted right at 18. It's the whole basis of this country. You can't complain about what's going on if you don't cast your vote. People fought really hard to have the right to vote. Especially women, they couldn't vote for the longest time. You can't brush it off like it's nothing when it's something. It's important.

PR: We've heard a little more about what could influence you but what role if any do your friends play in your personal decision to vote.

R3, R4: None.

R5: My friend is a huge democrat. She just interned at the White House and she just does everything and is great. She definitely influenced my vote just seeing her passion.

R8: Friends influence your decision to vote much more so than who you vote for. If you surround yourself with a politically active group of friends then your vote means something. You feel left behind if you don't do it. Whereas if you have a bunch of friends that don't care then you're probably not going to care.

R2: I had a lot of friends that were all different so when they argued back I think it just confused me more because I wouldn't know. It just confused me more.

R7: It wasn't my friends for me, it was my family. You pay a few hundred dollars to be a citizen so you just don't not do it because it costs you. You do it because now you can.

PR: Now with the pressures or expectations of your actions of voting, do you see any societal expectations of voting? Let's go to some people we haven't heard from quite as much.

R6: I don't care what other people think. I vote mostly because I saw the impact it was having and how my vote can swing things one way or swing things another way and it was more of a family expectation.

R5: No societal expectations.

PR: Final two questions. We'll close it back on medical marijuana. If presented with new information that would affect your opinion of the benefits or the risks, would that be enough to get you to vote one way or another?

R6: It wouldn't be enough to sway my decision to vote. I think I would just be more informed when I vote. We all have our own opinions on it either for or against and just being educated isn't going to matter about voting. It wouldn't do it for me anyways.

R5: I wouldn't do it for me. There are too many other important issues. I wouldn't go support a candidate just because he was for medicinal marijuana because I don't think it's that important.

R2: I think the candidates think that will be the big issue but it won't help them that much. There are more important topics.

R3: There is so much more going on than medical marijuana.

R8: I think that there are so much more important things going on than medical marijuana, it's the reason to get this done now so we don't have it as a distraction from the important things.

R6: It's being used as a weapon. They're saying, 'I'm for this. Now young people come vote for me because I support this issue.' So I think it does pull voters but not as many as politicians think.

R1: It'll pull in voters but they won't be educated ones. Who cares about pot when there are so many more issues.

R7: I don't think it has anything to do with being young. If you smoke pot, you're going to go vote for it but that's any age. But supporting it and thinking that's going to get you youth, that's stupid.

R4: Saying we're going to target this person, that's from the beginning of politics.

R7: But the gun thing. Don't guess that young people will care about guns just because they are young.

PR: Final question and we'll wrap up. I'm going to define need as a lack that if fulfilled improves your personal well-being, can you describe any need that the act of voting fulfills for you?

R8: Having my voice heard.

R1: It gives people a sense of purpose.

R6: It gives people a sense of control. You control who is in office so you control the legislation.

PR: Is there anything that we didn't touch on in any of these subjects that you feel you would like heard?

Table: no.

Focus Group 2

PR: Principle researcher

R1: Senior 22 year old white male Republican

R2: Senior 22 year old white male Republican

R3: Junior 21 year old white male Democrat

R4: Sophomore 20 year old white male Republican

R5: Senior 22 year old white male Independent

R6: Sophomore 20 year old black male Democrat

PR: What effects do you see marijuana having on an individual?

R3: It can cure cancer, help with Alzheimer's, but that's just some of the extremes. It can really help with sports injuries in a way that prescription pain meds can't.



R6: Also, when it comes to stuff working along with it, it could affect your career and ruin your future because it is viewed as so illegal right now.

PR: Could you describe the impact of passing medical marijuana would have on the ability of people your age to have access to?

R1: As in terms of easier to get? Sure. You have people all the time who fake illness or injuries or will say they are worse than they are to get prescription pain pills so obviously this is going to hold true for marijuana.

R5: I think it is going to be as common as taking some Tylenol. Instead you'll just smoke a bowl.

R2: I know a lot of people that don't smoke weed, not because they don't think it's good, but because it's illegal.

R5: I can definitely see how it would be abused though.

R6: Well right now if you wanted to get weed, whoever you're going to call for it isn't going to ask for a prescription so if it ever did become legal it would be much more regulated.

PR: So what potential side effects do you see if it does become more prevalent?

R2: It'll be taxed for sure. Then it'll have a huge impact on the health care community right away because you'll have insurance so you won't have to pay out of pocket like you would have to do with a dealer. That's just one example.

R3: I think it will be a boost. You'll have growers in state when it comes to that. I mean, there's a lot on the business scale and that standpoint that will be affected.

R5: I also think it will be a good thing because if it gets passed for medical use then the trend will probably say it will be passed for recreational use as in Colorado. You remove a realm of illegality. Look at prohibition. It caused a problem. So does going to seek out a drug dealer. If it's not illegal then you don't have to do that. I think a lot of that is the culture.

R1: Making it illegal obviously doesn't stop people from using it. Didn't we just pass some form of marijuana for legal use recently? I think it helped with helped with epilepsy?

PR: Yeah, Charlotte's Web. It's low in THC content but it is shown to help reduce childhood seizures. The Drug Enforcement Agency, the DEA, categorizes marijuana right now as a Schedule 1 drug. Do you feel it should be categorized as the highest form of narcotic?

Table: No.

R1: That's ridiculous.

R2: It's very political. The addictive properties of it are much less than even painkillers. The benefits and cost of fighting it are so extreme. The money that's wasted on it at the federal and local level to keep it off the streets is ridiculous because it's a lot easier to get the business growing instead of spending to reduce it.

R3: You're putting more people in prison which is also a waste for something that is for recreation use or for medical reasons.

R6: Do you want us to focus more on the medical aspects or in general?

PR: In general. We're actually about to switch topics here from marijuana to voting. So how politically involved would you say you are?

R4: Not involved at all.

R2: I worked for a state senator out in Pasco County.

R3: With friends, I've done door to door but I wouldn't say I am active.

R1: Personally, I'm fairly informed. I'm a Republican but I keep track with all the parties just because you can't shut out all viewpoints that are fair or even better. Also when you talk about a local level, I'm from Orlando so it doesn't matter much to me what is going on at Tampa since I'm not from here.

PR: Have you ever gone to the polls to support an issue and not a candidate.

R4: No.

R5: No.

R1: Once.

PR: Which issue?

R1: I went with some friends. We weren't going to vote for candidates, it was for an issue. Gosh, this was right when I turned 18, I can't remember what it was now.

PR: Is there any issue you could see you would go support solely because that issue is important to you?

R2: Probably healthcare or something to do with the military.

R3: Something to do with schools. But property tax or something, I don't really care about that now.

R1: Definitely military. Especially something to do with budget cuts I would go oppose that. Or anything having to do with changing the alcohol age. Also anything with weed and changing the cost of college.

PR: Reincorporating back medical marijuana, what impact would that have on Florida economy do you see if it does pass?

R6: I think it would be very positive. In Colorado, they've seen an increase pretty dramatically in tax revenue. Even after it was supposed to drop off after people were initially excited about it, it's stayed pretty steady.

R1: Currently only 78 out of 220 growers have been approved in Washington because there's a process and you have to get a license and everything like that which means there's going to be a cost. The taxes, if used properly, will be great. Obviously you can go and get it from someone

trying to sell it under the table illegally but you have the safety of buying something that is regulated so you know exactly what is being put in it so you know you won't be charged as well.

For a crime I mean.

R4: There's also all the money that you wouldn't be spending on the war on drugs, on incarceration, on everything like that.

R2: Yeah, incarceration is huge. Thirty-three thousand dollars a year for an inmate.

R4: That's cheap I think. I think it's like a hundred thousand.

R2: No, it's less but that's just your standard inmate. It's nonviolent and they're in there for a long time. Sometimes you have the tendency to throw them in with the violent and things can go the wrong way.

PR: Just a few more and I'll be done. Going back to the action of voting, can you describe the reason why you vote?

R6: On this issue?

PR: Just in general.

R5: It affects me.

R6: Yeah, I would say the relevancy of it.

R3: It's the only way a democracy is going to work is if people voice your opinion.

R2: I think it's definitely like a selfish act. It's sad to say but the things that people vote on they do so because they directly affect you.

PR: Do your friends play any role in your decision to vote?

R1: No.

R2: No.

R3: Yeah, I would say. Just getting up and going to vote, you usually kind of do that as an event.

R5: You don't mean like they sway which way you vote?

PR: Right, no. Just in your decision to go.

R3: Absolutely.

R5: Like two years ago I wouldn't have gone to go unless my friends were going.

R1: With the exception of that one issue I can't remember, I've gone to every primary by myself.

I don't want to go with anyone else to be questioned or even people like want to talk you into doing something you don't want to do so I always go by myself.

R6: I think something more like that. But the majority of people our age need someone to go with them.

PR: Do you see it being a societal expectation at all that you have to vote because it's what you're supposed to do?

R3: I think it should be. I think you should be expected to vote. It's your country. What decisions are made is your say. One vote does make a difference. So, you should be expected to vote but at the same time, it's easier to go vote in groups and people are like, I don't want to go for this, I want to go with them.

R5: I don't think that's necessarily true about everyone our age.

R3: Oh, I'm not saying it holds true for everyone. I just think it should be expected that we go vote because it's going to affect us.

PR: Defining need as a deficiency that when it's fulfilled improves your well-being, do you see any need that the action of voting fulfills?

R2: In general?

PR: Yeah.

R2: I mean, it makes you feel like you're doing something right. It makes you feel like what you're doing does count.

R6: I wouldn't say I have a need to vote on every single issue, every single ballot there is. If it doesn't directly affect you then what is the point of voting for no reason?

R3: So I think if the need is there, then yeah, it's important to vote. But if it's, yeah, Billy-Bob wants this done, then there's no point because if you don't know enough about Billy-Bob then you shouldn't care. Don't sway it.

PR: If there's anything you feel was missed, please add it now.

Table: No. Thank you.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **IRB-Approved Consent Form**



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

June 19, 2014

Robert Winsler  
Mass Communication  
Tampa, FL 33606

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00017622

Title: The Accidental Motivator: Florida's Medicinal Marijuana Ballot Initiative's Impact on the Youth Vote

**Study Approval Period: 6/19/2014 to 6/19/2015**

Dear Mr. Winsler:

On 6/19/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**

**Protocol Document(s):**

[Winsler Focus Group Protocol](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**

[Consent Form Clean.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board