

CANNABIS: What are the 21st century global trends regarding its regulation?

Tatiana Torres, MSc in Global Politics,
Department of Government, LSE

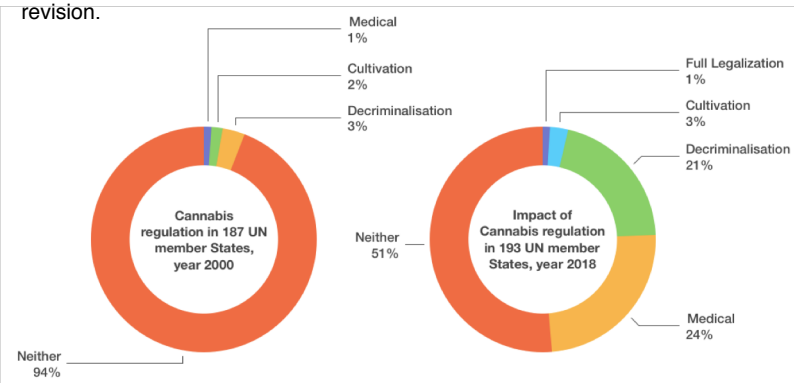
Context

The war on drugs has failed. After almost 40 years of implementing a strategy that has not given progressive results, the 21st century begins with a number of measures to change the strategy. Cannabis has become in the psychoactive plant to start social experiments as we have never seen before. It just seems that the world is moving towards a different direction now.

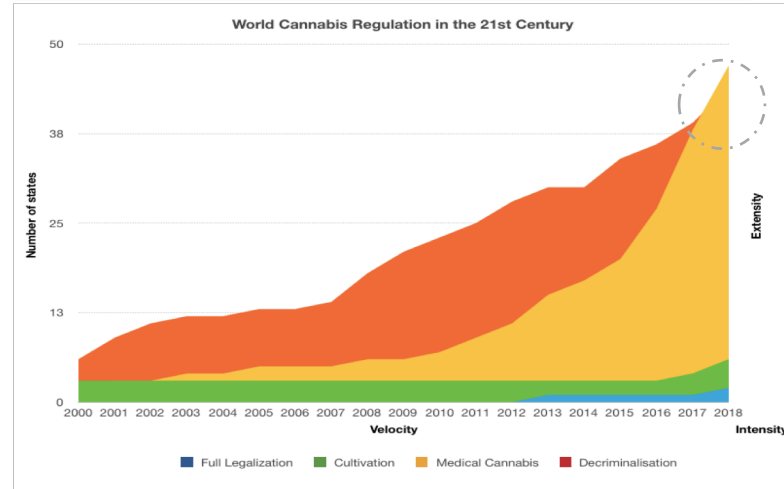
A look at the global trends on cannabis regulation will help us foresee the direction the world is moving towards. It seems like new political and international changes are soon to take place.

Methodology

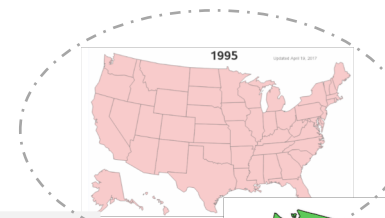
To identify the global trends of cannabis regulation during the 21st century, it was necessary to create a database from 2000 to 2018. Four categories were taken into account: full legalization, cultivation, medical cannabis and decriminalization (from 2 grams on). Calculations were made on the bases of the author's research and data collected from diverse sources such as Igarapé Institute (2019), UNODC (2018), OAS (2018), The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2018), the TNI Drugs & Democracy Programme (2019), the International Drug Policy Consortium (2019), Marijuana Doctors (2019), governmental online resources as well as national and international news media, (e.g. BBC, the Independent among others). The numbers shown are, therefore, approximative and may be subject of further revision.



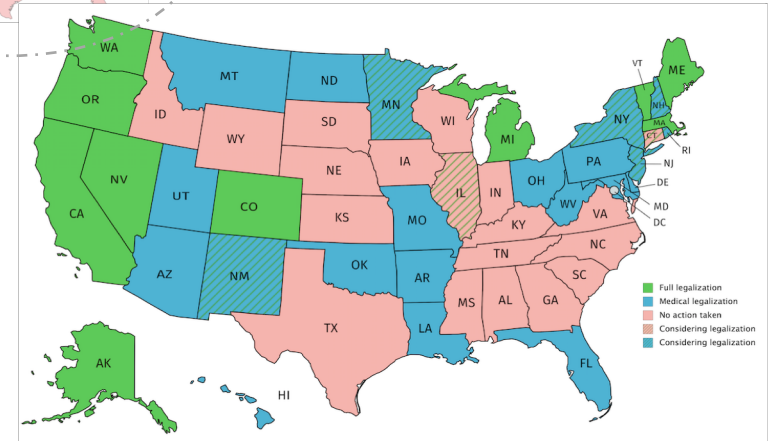
Findings



- 47/193 UN states have legalised medical cannabis, 44/193 UN states have decriminalised its possession and consumption, and 2/193 UN states have fully legalised it.
- New Zealand, Antigua and Barbuda, Norway, and Luxembourg are already undergoing a process of full legalization. These are expected to have positive outcomes by 2020.
- The **velocity** by which states are reconsidering public policies and amendments to existing laws is increasing sharply – particularly since 2013.
- Only in 2018, 10 states legalised medical cannabis, 2 African countries legalised its cultivation, 3 more decriminalised its use, and 1 G7 member state fully legalised cannabis. The latter is expected to have global influence.
- At least **52** policy decisions in terms of decriminalisation, recreational, medical or cultivation of cannabis were made during the 21st century.
- In 2017, the number of states legalising medical cannabis became greater than the number of states decriminalising its use.
- 51%** of world states still have strong policies against any type of cannabis in their territories.
- 100%** of states that have moved towards cannabis regulation are democratic regimes.



Will the USA influence a new world order?



- The quest for cannabis legalization is changing American political parties' agenda.
- Canada has already legalized cannabis and Mexico is undergoing a legal study towards this direction. If Mexico legalizes cannabis, it will soon start to fly and navigate over American territory.
- Local changes are indicative of imminent cannabis legalization in the following 10 years.
- Legalization of cannabis in the USA will trigger the legalization of more states, increasing the balance towards a new regime on drugs.

Conclusions

Perceptions in the 21st century have changed drastically, as a consequence:

- The world is moving toward a new global regime: cannabis regulation.
- Liberal democracies are much more keener on this path.
- These trends have not shown signs of retrogression.
- A new challenge is on the horizon: the governance of addictive substances open to the public.
- The USA is soon to face a new position that may trigger consecutive changes.
- It is very likely that by the year 2025 medical cannabis will be widely accepted across the world.

Are we on the verge of a new global (dis)order? Join the conversation!