

NOVEMBER 21, 2019

Medical Marijuana Policies among Florida's Local Municipalities

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In the past five years, Florida has seen a number of substantial changes in state-level policy surrounding the use and accessibility of medical marijuana. In November of 2016, Floridians voted in favor of Amendment 2, which allowed for an extensive increase in access to medical marijuana throughout the state. The amendment, which was supported by over 70% of voters – expanded on legislation passed in 2014, which permitted the limited use of medical marijuana for a small subset of severe illnesses. Amendment 2 expanded the list of "treatable" conditions while also softening restrictions on the nature of products available to patients.

In light of this policy change, the state's municipal governments have been required to establish local policies related to the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries within their jurisdictions. In particular, local governments have been granted the discretion to either allow or prohibit these establishments. Many jurisdictions have already made these determinations, while others have opted for temporary moratoriums pending further deliberation.

We recently examined the adoption and prohibition of medical marijuana dispensaries by municipal governments throughout the state of Florida in an effort to better understand these decisions as well as any patterns that might be emerging in medical marijuana policy throughout the state¹. The data showed several surprising conclusions, most notably some unexpected geographical and political relationships. For instance:

- **Regional Differences:** There have been some notable differences in geographical patterns of adoption throughout the state.
 - The rate of adoption has been highest in Northwestern Florida (the Panhandle), where over 55% of responding municipalities report having allowed medical marijuana dispensaries.
 - Rates of adoption have been lowest in the Southeastern and Southwestern regions of the state, with the latter experiencing a particularly high rate of moratorium decisions.
- **Political Differences:** The findings also suggest an erosion of traditional ideological differences over the legalization of medical marijuana. Those areas which voted more heavily in favor of Donald Trump in 2016 were more likely to allow medical marijuana dispensaries. (The average vote for Trump in adopting municipalities was 55.5%, compared with an average of 51.7% in non-adopting municipalities).

Regional Differences

One particular concern that we considered in this analysis was potential patterns of policy adoption across the state's diverse geographical regions. While conventional wisdom might have suggested a lower rate of adoption in traditionally conservative regions of the state, we found the opposite to be true. *Table 1* below shows medical marijuana policies among the responding jurisdictions, broken down by region of the state. As the data show, rates of adoption have been highest in Northwestern Florida, where more than half of the responding jurisdictions (55.3%) have allowed medical marijuana dispensaries and only a quarter (26.3%) have prohibited them. In both Central and Northeast Florida, 40% or more of the responding jurisdictions have

¹ This analysis was conducted using a combination of data from the *U.S. Census Bureau*, the Florida Department of State: *Division of Elections, Politico*, and the *Florida League of Cities* annual *City Stats* survey. The sample was limited to those municipalities that provided an answer to the *City Stats* survey question: *How is your city dealing with medical marijuana dispensaries?* Three response options were provided with this query, including *allow*, *prohibit*, and *moratorium*. A total of 412 responses were received to the *City Stats* survey, but 110 municipalities did not provide a response to this question, and so they have been excluded from this analysis. Complete data were also not available for 10 additional respondents, leaving a total sample size of 292 for the purposes of this study.

allowed medical marijuana dispensaries. Though it should be noted that a large number of municipalities (45.7%) have also opted to prohibit dispensaries in Northeastern Florida.

Table 1.

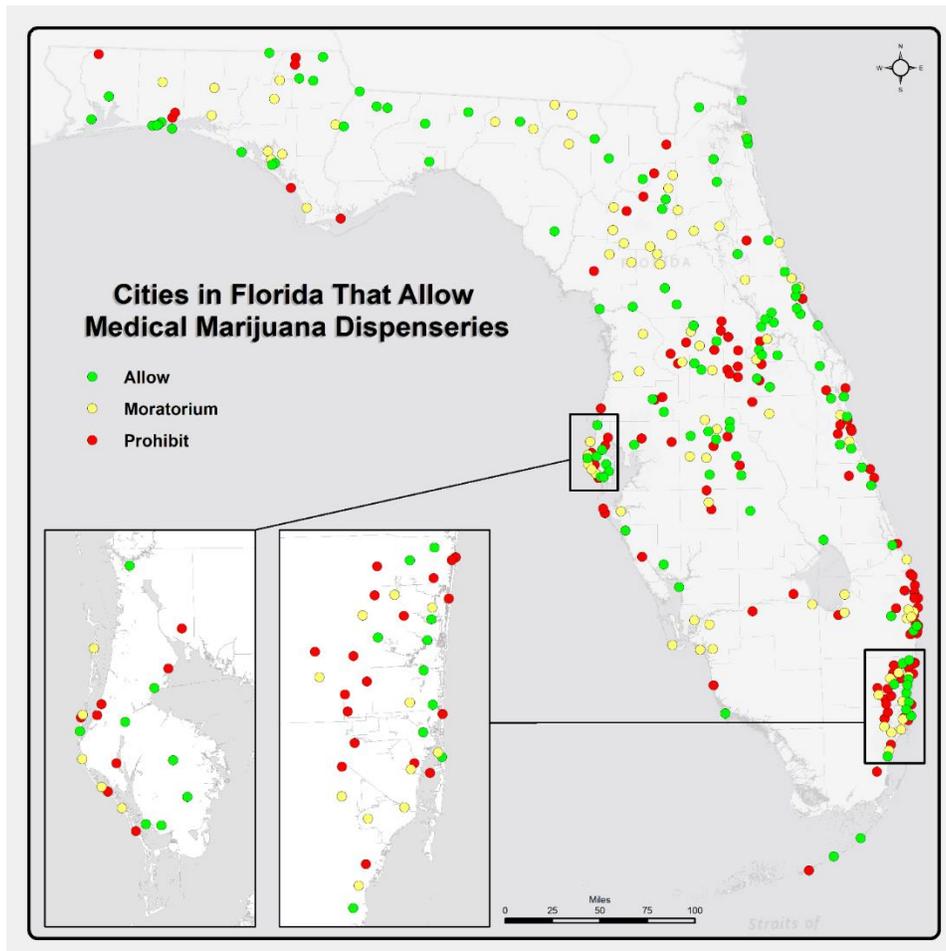
Medical Marijuana Policies by Region (in Percentages)

	Central	Northeast	Northwest	Southeast	Southwest
Allow	41.1	40.0	55.3	21.7	23.8
Prohibit	23.3	45.7	26.3	24.6	38.1
Moratorium	35.7	14.3	18.4	53.6	38.1

Source: Florida League of Cities, City Stats Survey 2018

* $\chi^2 = 29.587, p \geq 0.001, \varphi = 0.318, p \geq 0.001$

In contrast, both Southeast and Southwest Florida have seen significantly lower rates of adoption, with less than a quarter of the responding jurisdictions allowing medical marijuana as of the time of the 2018 *City Stats* survey. It should be noted that the data set includes a larger than average number of non-respondents among municipalities in Southeastern Florida. That said, the available data do strongly suggest that municipalities in Southeastern and Southwestern Florida have been less likely to allow medical marijuana dispensaries thus far, and by a notable margin. A chi-square test (χ^2) showed this to be a statistically significant relationship. *Figure 1* below provides a visual depiction of these policy decisions throughout the state.



Political Differences

While closely correlated with region, we were also interested in examining whether the adoption of medical marijuana dispensaries varied significantly based on the political composition and behavior of the communities in question. In order to examine this, we collected data on party identification and voting behavior². Due to limitations in data availability, we were required to use county-level data as a proxy for political affiliation and behavior in the municipalities. Statistical tests (independent sample t-tests) were used to examine the relationship between these political variables and the adoption/prohibition of medical marijuana dispensaries. In particular, the results presented in *Table 2* below show a statistically significant relationship between policy adoption and the percent of Trump voters in the county.

Table 2.

t- tests for Control Variables (Reported as Averages) and Policy Adoption

	Allow	Prohibit/Moratorium
Percent Trump Voters †	55.49	51.72
Percent Democrat	36.25	37.21

† $p \leq 0.05$

In this case, those municipalities which have opted to "allow" medical marijuana dispensaries were slightly more likely to have supported Donald Trump in the 2016 election. The average vote for Trump in adopting municipalities was 55.5%, compared with an average of 51.7% in non-adopting municipalities.

Conclusion

While our analysis focused on additional considerations, these data stood out in particular, as they seem to suggest an erosion of political and regional differences on the issue of medical marijuana legalization. More traditionally conservative areas of the state appear to not only be accepting of medical marijuana adoption, but according to these data appear to be "leading the way" in a state that anticipates having more than half a million certified medical marijuana patients by the year 2020.

² Data for these variables were collected from two separate sources. Party registration data were collected from the Florida Department of State: *Division of Elections*. The 2016 voting data was collected from Politico's election results data.