

# California Latino Attitudes Toward Drug Possession and Deportation

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**Latino**  **Decisions**

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## **Executive Summary: Criminal Justice Issues**

The disproportionate effects of the “war on drugs” on low-income communities of color are well documented. According to a [2009 study by the Sentencing Project](#), two-thirds of people incarcerated for drug offenses in state prisons are African American or Latino, which is out of proportion to the degree that these groups use and sell drugs. Less is known about how the war on drugs has impacted immigrant communities, in particular those who are undocumented immigrants and are detained and charged with using and possessing marijuana or other drugs. A [2012-2013 study by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse \(TRAC\)](#) at Syracuse University finds that simple marijuana possession was the fourth most common criminal offense leading to deportation. Other studies, such as those by the [Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice](#), also note that undocumented immigrants are more likely to be deported for simple possession of marijuana than for more serious crimes. After analyzing the data on detentions and deportations by the Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE), the authors of these reports conclude that there is a serious misallocation of resources and a compromise to public safety since more serious crimes are not being targeted. The consequences for immigrant communities and their families are equally serious as families are broken-up and economic means are severed through deportations.

Most would agree that immigrants who pose a serious threat to public safety or national security should be detained and/or removed. However, do Americans support immigrant detentions and deportations for traffic violations or possession of marijuana, which are two of the most common reasons for deportation? The absence of opinion polls on this and related questions is indicative of the absence of a national debate on this issue. In an effort to gauge Latino attitudes toward this issue, Presente.org and Latino Decisions conducted a survey with 400 Latino registered voters in California from March 30 to April 5, 2014. Respondents were interviewed in English or Spanish, at their discretion, by fully bilingual interviewers.

To assess Latino attitudes toward deportations for marijuana possession, respondents were asked the following question: “Do you agree or disagree that immigrants convicted of possessing small amounts of marijuana for personal use should be deported and never allowed to return to the United States?”

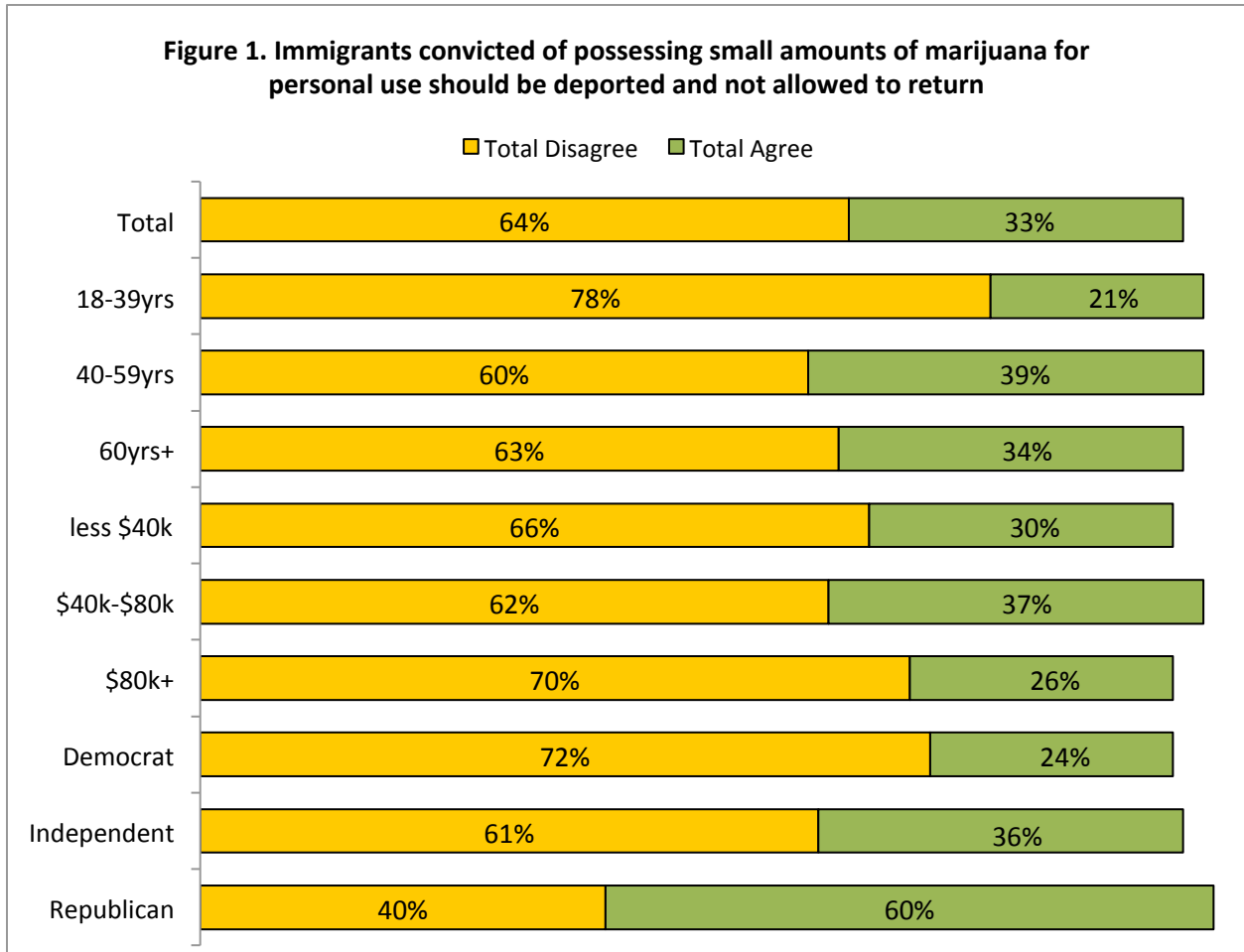
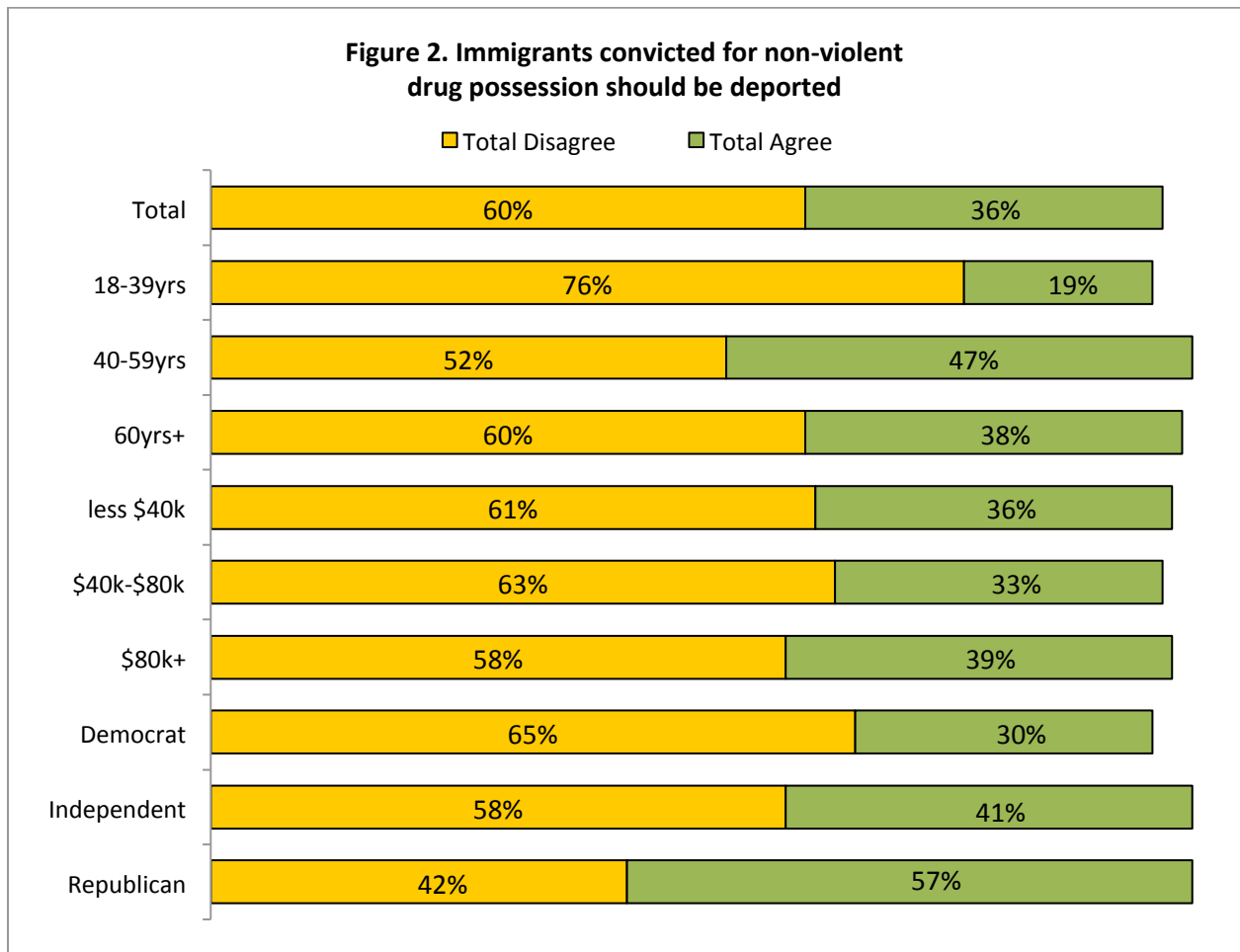


Figure 1 shows that over two-thirds (64%) of Latinos somewhat to strongly disagree, that immigrants convicted of possessing small amounts of marijuana for personal use should be deported and never allowed to return to the United States. We find that with the exception of Republicans, a broad segment of the Latino electorate do not believe simple marijuana drug possession should be grounds for deportation. Opposition for deportations was strongest among 18-39 year olds (78%), Democrats (72%), and persons in households making over \$80,000 per year (70%).

In a follow-up question, Latinos were asked whether immigrants convicted for non-violent drug possession should be deported. In this question, the word marijuana is removed from the statement. When asked broadly about drug possession, support drops by a few points. Six-in-ten (60%) Latinos strongly to somewhat disagree that immigrants should be deported for non-violent drug possession (Table 2). The varying levels of opposition across segments of the electorate mirror those found in Table 1. The groups most opposed to deportation are 18-30 year olds (76%), Democrats (65%), and persons with household incomes over \$80,000 (63%). Once again, Republicans display higher levels of agreement on this question (57% total agree versus 42% total disagree).



The war on drugs has negatively impacted immigrant communities. Minor drug-related offenses are some of the most common reasons undocumented immigrants are detained and deported. The absence of polls showing knowledge and/or support or opposition for

this strategy suggests that the American public may be unaware that most deportations involve persons who do not pose a threat to public safety or national security.

Presente.org and Latino Decisions conducted a survey with 400 Latino registered voters in California to measure Latino attitudes toward immigrant deportations for minor-drug related offenses. The results show strong opposition to deportations for small possession of marijuana and other drugs. Opposition was strong across all segments of the Latino electorate, with the exception of self-identified Republicans. The study by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University concluded that, "American immigration enforcement policy is irrationally applied in that it targets, holds, detains, and departs undocumented immigrants without regard for their dangerousness." A rational strategy would target persons who pose the greatest threat or risk to society. The results of our survey clearly demonstrate that the Latino electorate in California does not consider marijuana or other drug possession grounds for deportation.