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### **Local Perceptions of Cannabis and Cannabis Laws in Morocco: Unpacking Past Laws, Moroccans' Perceptions, and Exploring Organizational Efforts**

Shadae Tingman

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# PERCEPTIONS OF CANNABIS AND CANNABIS LAWS

Local Perceptions of Cannabis and Cannabis Laws in Morocco:

*Unpacking Past Laws, Moroccans' Perceptions, and Exploring Organizational Efforts*

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### **Abstract**

In Morocco, cannabis production and consumption are illegal, both medicinally and recreationally. The cultivation of the plant is among the top five in the world. This research will explore many aspects of cannabis in Morocco. There is much literature that exists surrounding the agricultural, economic, and political implications of cannabis, but this research will focus on social perceptions of cannabis and cannabis laws of local Moroccans. This research will explore past government attempts to legalize marijuana and why they did not pass. It will also explore the work of local youth organizations (that focus on cannabis) to understand what they are doing to help get the legalization of marijuana passed and learn why they hope to pass such legislation. Lastly, I interview local Moroccans to understand their perceptions of cannabis and laws regarding cannabis. What are the social implications of cannabis laws for Moroccans? Although cannabis farmers do rely on its production to survive, I expect for most local people to not support the legislation of cannabis because Morocco is a Muslim country. Their laws are based on the Quran.

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I want to thank my advisor, Rachid Touhtou, for helping me with this project. He was always in communication with me and responded to my many questions at any time of the day. He also made sure to send me relevant articles whenever he came across them, which was extremely helpful and appreciated.

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## Introduction

In Morocco, cannabis production and consumption are illegal, both medicinally and recreationally. The cultivation of the plant is among the top five in the world. Before coming to Morocco, I did not know how popular cannabis would be here due to the Islamic nature of the program. Morocco consistently ranks among the top five cannabis producers in the world. At least three times a week, except for the village stay, I am offered hashish by local dealers. Cannabis is so prevalent in Morocco that it will be a classic Moroccan characteristic that I think of when reflecting on my semester here. After meeting with some youth who expressed for me their desire to help legalize cannabis, I became interested in understanding exactly how everyday Moroccans are affected by current cannabis legislation. Many people believe that they should have the freedoms to produce and consume cannabis without facing punishment from the Islamic government. However, I have also met many people who are against the legalization of any act considered haram.

There is much literature that exists surrounding the agricultural, economic, and political implications of cannabis, but this research will focus on social perceptions of cannabis and cannabis laws of local Moroccans. This research will explore past government attempts to legalize marijuana and why they did not pass. It will also explore the work of local youth organizations (that focus on cannabis) to understand what they are doing to help get the legalization of marijuana passed and learn why they hope to pass such legislation. Lastly, I interview local Moroccans to understand their perceptions of cannabis and laws regarding cannabis. What are the social implications of cannabis laws for Moroccans? Although cannabis farmers do rely on its production to survive, I expect for most local people do not support the

legislation of cannabis because Morocco is a Muslim country. Their laws are based on the Quran.

My positionality causes me to have many of my thoughts and opinions regarding cannabis in Morocco and its illegality. In the United States, marijuana is illegal in most states but is allowed medicinally in many. Every year, more and more states pass the legalization of cannabis, so I come from a country where marijuana is not such a taboo topic. I've had to readjust my lens when beginning this topic as not to include any of my own bias.

Keywords: Regional Studies: Middle East, Ethnobotany, Law, Cannabis

## **Literature Review**

### **History of the Presence of Cannabis in Morocco**

Morocco consistently ranks among the top five producers of cannabis in the world, with the presence of the substance dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, in the form of fiber hemp from Greece. (Seshata, 2018). However, cannabis pollen did not become abundant until the 11<sup>th</sup> century and is believed to have been formally introduced to Morocco through one of the Arab conquests between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century (Seshata, 2018). Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cannabis was grown for local trade and use throughout Morocco. Moroccans mostly consumed it by adding it into sweet treats (majouns) and eating it or smoking it via long pipes (sebsi), in the form of kif (Alchimia, 2017). Kif is a mixture of dried, ground herbs, mostly tobacco, and cannabis. Some sources believe that hashish was introduced to Morocco after Westerners coming from Asia and the Middle East taught farmers how to sieve cannabis plants. Hashish is the concentrated resin of the cannabis plant. Morocco is currently the top hashish producer in the world. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Rif region of Northern Morocco, particularly in the villages of Ketama in the province of Al Hoceima and Bab Berred in the province of Chefchaouen, became an informal market for the sale of cannabis, producing for the sole purpose of selling.

### **Past Governmental Control**

Cannabis did not become legislated until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under Sultan Moulay Hassan I (1873-1894) rule (Pierre-Arnaud, 2008). He allowed for the production of cannabis to only take place in five villages for local consumption within the Rif region. Due to the importance of cannabis to the Rif, Moulay Hassan I allowed for production to continue to maintain peace within the region (Pierre-Arnaud, 2008). This allowance pushed the Rif region to continue to live

up to its reputation as a large producer and trader of cannabis, extending into the present day. Between 1863 and 1898, there had been many revolts, particularly in the Rif region, against English, French, and Spanish rule. Eventually, the Franco-Spanish Protectorate was signed in 1912, giving Spain de facto control over northern and southern Morocco, while France held their protecting power over the rest of Morocco, per the sultan (Treaty Between France and Spain Regarding Morocco, 1913). Spain continued Rif production of cannabis while French prohibited production throughout their protectorate.

In 1920, Mohammed bin Abdelkrim el Khattabi, a Muslim leader (Emir) of the Rif, unified the Berber Rif tribes to oppose Spanish rule and succeeded in 1921, establishing the Rif Republic in 1923 (El Qadéry, 2006). In the few years of Abdelkrim's reign over the Rif Republic, he banned the cultivation and use of cannabis, deeming it haram (forbidden under Islamic law). Abdelkrim was the only leader to be able to ban cannabis production and consumption in the Rif completely. However, this only lasted for a few years, as the Spanish regained control in 1926 and reestablished the cannabis production zone, even extending it to Fez (Pierre-Arnaud, 2008). Meanwhile, France officially outlawed cannabis in 1925, at the Geneva Conference and Sultan Mohammed V signed a Royal decree (Dahir) in 1932. France only allowed for cannabis to be produced for Régie des tabacs, a French tobacco company at the time, obviously a form of monopoly.

In 1954, cannabis production was banned through the entire French zone. Of course, Morocco gained independence in 1956 and extended the prohibition of cannabis through the whole country, including Spanish zones. The Rif region strongly disapproved and opposed, causing Mohammed V to submit and tolerate cultivation.

### **How cannabis legislation affects farmers**

This research will focus on the effects of cannabis legislation on local Moroccans. I will not have much data collected from cannabis farmers, so it is essential to understand their perceptions of cannabis laws. Laura David (2017) researched the Rif region where she interviewed farmers about their opinions about cannabis legislation, in regards to it getting legalized or not. Her goal was to understand the social and economic implications of cannabis legislation on the farmers. Farmers do not want the illegality of cannabis to continue. Their working conditions are inhumane, and cops can come in at any moment, take everything the family has, and leave them with nothing. Cannabis growers are threatened, forced to take bribes, and blackmailed by cops and government officials, and they yearn for it to end. Legalizing cannabis would relieve those with bails and warrants of their crimes, and "cleanse the industry of their human rights violations" (David, 2017). However, farmers understand the reality of growing cannabis in an Islamic country and do not foresee cannabis ever being legal. Instead, they wish that the cannabis industry could be eliminated and that they could enter into a legal, thriving industry.

In terms of the economic implications of cannabis, approximately 760,000 Moroccans rely on cannabis production to survive. Some observers even approximate 1,000,000 families need the need cannabis cultivation to survive (Blickman, 2017). Not only would getting rid of cannabis production cause the GDP to drop severely (David, 2017), legalizing it would significantly boost the economy. A representative from the Ministry of Health mentioned, "Legalizing [cannabis] production and consumption will contribute to the Moroccan GDP by more than 4.5 percentage points per year" (Krauska, 2016). Not only will legalizing cannabis

help farmers feel more secure socially and financially, but the Moroccan government can also gain a lot from legalization as well.

### **More recent legislation**

Cannabis continues to be outlawed through the entire country. The country is a massive source for the plant. Several hundred tons reach European markets every year. The most recent legislative action in regards to cannabis came in 2016. In 2013, two bills were brought to Parliament, asking to legalize the production of cannabis in Morocco's Northern regions (reasons listed above) for therapeutic purposes (Larbi, 2015). For background context, Parliament consists of three major political parties: the PJD (the central Islamist party), the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), and the Istiqlal or Independence Party (nationalists) (David, 2017). The PJD (founded in 1967), "pledges its allegiance to the monarchy" (Telegraph, 2011) and works to preserve Morocco as an Islamic state. Because of this, they oppose any form of cannabis, as it is considered haram (forbidden) in Islam. The PAM (founded in 2008) worked closely for the King and was established to offer a different, less conservative perspective from the PJD (David, 2017). Their messages and missions include human rights, empowering women, and fighting terrorism (International Relations, 2016). Lastly, the Istiqlal party (IP) has played a dominant role since the first post-independence Moroccan government, as a conservative, monarchist party (David, 2017).

The PAM and IP both supported the legislation for legalizing cannabis production in the North. Forty-eight thousand growers currently have arrest warrants, and another 80,000 who are released from prison on bail fear the moment that they will eventually return. Hamid Chabat, the secretary general of the IP, called for the amnesty of growers, pointing out the corruption that

exists with money launderers who can enjoy reprieve (Blickman, 2017). Khadija Rouissi of the PAM also mentioned, "if we legalize the cultivation of cannabis, the trade will become more transparent and organized," (Larbi, 2013). However, PJD immediately opposed the bill. In 2016, they released a statement, expressing their, "categorical refusal of any questionable approaches that aim to decriminalize the cultivation and consumption of cannabis because of the proven danger to the health of citizens and social cohesion" (Larbi, 2016). Given that the PJD is the majority party, Parliament could not agree whether to legalize cannabis production and still have not determined where to go with the discussion.

### **Effects of cannabis**

It is essential to understand the risks and benefits of cannabis for this research. Though it is most likely illegal in Morocco because of its forbiddance in Islam, Parliament members have expressed the health dangers of cannabis. According to the CDC (2017), studies have been done, showing that cannabis can help treat nausea and vomiting from cancer chemotherapy as well as treating neuropathic pain. However, there is limited evidence to show that cannabis helps with most types of chronic pain. Smoking marijuana could lead to increased risk of stroke and heart disease, but scientists have not been able to figure out if that is due to the actual cannabis, or the pollutants of the smoke. Smoking marijuana has been proven to harm lung tissues and cause scarring and damage to small blood vessels. It can also lead to a higher risk of bronchitis, cough, and phlegm production. Lastly, heavy users could have some short-term problems with memory, attention, and learning. Marijuana carries more negative effects on developing brains, which could be long-term or permanent. A common misconception is that marijuana is a gateway drug, but this has not been proven. Most people who use marijuana do not go on to use, "harder" drugs. A collection of reviews also found that cannabis could help with alcohol and opioid

addictions, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and social anxiety, multiple sclerosis, and epilepsy (Railton, 2018). In all, there are many risks and benefits to using cannabis, and the science backs it. However, it's clear that more research is necessary to determine and understand the health implications of cannabis usefully.

### **Attitudes towards cannabis**

Given that this research will analyze social perceptions of cannabis and cannabis laws, it is necessary to understand past, similar research that will be used as the basis for this research. Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation (2015) sought to uncover the attitudes and perceptions of young adults regarding marijuana. They also wanted to analyze the differences between the perceptions of young adults in New York versus Colorado, where marijuana is legal and not legal for recreational use, respectively. They used a survey to collect data, for just under a month, where they questioned college-students about their thoughts, opinions, and use of marijuana and other substances. They found that many young adults underestimate the dangers of marijuana, and believe that it is safe because it is less dangerous than other drugs and it is legal in many states. Many (42.2%) believed that they could not overdose on marijuana and that it is not addictive (36.5%). Both are possible. Most of these people supported the legislation of marijuana, but researchers attributed that to misinformation.

## **Methodology**

### **Exploring Past Legislative Attempts**

Much of this paper is based on substantial, yet limited research. I reviewed many sources to understand the history of the presence of cannabis in Morocco, as well as past and recent legislation regarding cannabis. Most of these sources included news articles, getting information from people who have learned and studies the topic, and past independent study projects.

### **Organizational Work**

I researched a Moroccan youth organization, based in Rabat that campaigns to raise awareness of the benefits of marijuana. I was then able to meet with a member who leads meetings with this organization to further discuss their initiatives. During this meeting, I received blog posts regarding cannabis as well as information to why the work that they do is essential. I also attended a meeting where I got to hear the thoughts and opinions of other local Moroccans regarding cannabis and cannabis laws.

### **Local Perceptions of Cannabis**

I used an anonymous survey to collect data regarding local (those who have lived in Morocco for at least ten years and are currently living here) perceptions of cannabis and cannabis laws in Morocco (Appendix A). The questions were loosely-based off of a previously conducted survey by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation (2015). The survey was conducted online, is the better option for myself. As an American student studying in an Islamic country, I felt uncomfortable walking up to people in person to ask about such a taboo topic. An online form was a more safe and comfortable platform for myself and participants. My participants would

also not feel pressured to answer in particular ways if they took the survey in the comfort of their own space and time.

The survey began with introducing my topic and asked for consent. Participants had to option to skip over any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. If participants answered that they did not live in Morocco for at least ten years, or that they were under 18 years old, the survey automatically ended. I chose ten years because I wanted participants who have been affected by Moroccan cannabis and legislation for an extended period of time. The ten years cut-off gave participants who were not born in Morocco the chance to share their perceptions as well.

Data was collected from April 15<sup>th</sup> through April 30<sup>th</sup>. The survey was shared throughout many online platforms, including social media groups for Moroccan organizations and universities. I then asked adults that I knew personally to share my survey among their colleagues and friends to collect data from an older demographic of respondents as well. The survey was offered in English, French, and Arabic.

### **Limitations**

There are many apparent limitations to this project. For one, I had just under a month to complete research. This is not nearly enough time to interview a statically, diverse number of people and organizations. I also wanted to speak with government officials and addiction clinics, but the clinics were closed on the days I went. Another problem as the language barrier. I could not communicate with the clinic because all of their signs were in Arabic. In addition, I used an online resource for my Arabic translation of my survey. I am sure that this translation was inferior, so if anyone attempted to take my survey in Arabic, they would probably not be able to understand. Additionally, because my survey was distributed via online platforms, there is a

strong possibility that an older demographic would not have had the chance to participate. Lastly, regarding language, I used online resources to translate French and Arabic responses to English.

Though I was able to get an exceptional understanding of the responses of participants, there is a chance for some points to have gotten lost in translation. Lefever, Dal & Matthiasdottir (2007) points out a few valid limitations to using online surveys for data collection. The first is the risk of fraudulent responses and people not responding truthfully. Another limitation is the nonrandom nature of my sample. With my online survey, data collection was based on volunteer sampling rather than on probability sampling. People who saw my survey had the option to take it or not. There were not any incentives for them. Lastly, technical issues could arise at any moment for survey respondents, causing inaccurate results, or lack thereof. Nevertheless, there are still many benefits to online survey methods. In addition to the previously mentioned benefits, using an online survey increased my potential to access a larger, more geographically distributed population sample. Additionally, it was more time and cost efficient for me.

## **Results & Analysis**

### **Organizational Work**

I spoke with a member of a local youth organization in Rabat, read a few blog postings by them, as well as attending a meeting regarding cannabis in Morocco. The meeting was conducted in Darija (the Moroccan dialect of Arabic), so I asked the member whom I spoke with to tell me about what was discussed. For anonymity reasons, I will refer to him as Ahmed. Ahmed told me that his organization, NABTA, works to raise awareness about the benefits of cannabis. Legalization is the end goal, but they understand that many steps need to be taken beforehand. Cannabis can be used to make clothes, paper, cotton, and even heal people. Other uses mentioned during the meeting included: oil for the skin and hair, treatment for anorexia and loss of appetite, alleviation of the adverse side effects of cancer treatments, dopamine production, and can help fight Parkinson's and Epilepsy.

The organization is still relatively new, as this was their second meeting. Another goal they hope to accomplish is to push local, regional, and national administrators to decriminalize or alleviate the punishment for using cannabis. They believe that too many youths are spending time in jail for the crime of using cannabis when the government turns a blind eye to small and big cannabis farmers. Another youth-related issue they mentioned was safety. If cannabis was more regulated, youth would have more information about what they are smoking and would have more control over knowing precisely what they are smoking and how much of it.

For now, however, the organization hopes to be able to begin pushing petitions and spreading the word about their goals. They are going to continue to have more meetings that will continue to be open to the public. They want to make sure that in the end, non-profit

organizations will have the right to produce cannabis and that consumers are not criminalized. Consumers should have the freedom to choose between a variety of cannabis.

**Local Perceptions of Cannabis and Cannabis Law**

Forty-eight participants responded to my survey, but only 45 responses were useable. The other three responses were from participants who were not born and had not lived in Morocco for at least ten years. Thirty-six participants were Muslim, while seven identified as Atheist/Agnostic. 2 preferred not to share their religion. Twenty-eight participants identified as female and 17 identified as male. Thirty-five participants were between the ages of 18-24. There were six participants between the ages of 25-36 and 4 participants between the ages between 35-44. Respondents ranged across all yearly income brackets listed in the survey.

**Perceptions of Cannabis**

**Cannabis use.** Participants were asked if they ever tried cannabis in their lives. Figure 3 shows the breakdown by gender, religion, and age.

Figure 3

| Category | Breakdown            | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|----------|----------------------|---------|--------|
| Overall  |                      | 34.15   | 65.85  |
| Gender   | Female               | 32      | 68     |
|          | Male                 | 37.5    | 62.5   |
| Religion | Muslim               | 24.24   | 75.76  |
|          | Atheist/Agnostic     | 71.43   | 28.57  |
|          | Prefer not to answer | 100     | 0      |
| Age      | 18-24                | 32.26   | 67.74  |
|          | 25-34                | 50      | 50     |
|          | 35-44                | 25      | 75     |

Most people had never tried cannabis, but those who identify as Atheist and Agnostic were more likely to try cannabis. Most respondents tried cannabis throughout their teenage years

for the first time. 35.71% of cannabis users only tried it once or twice during their lifetime, 21.43% use it a few times a year, 14.29% use it a few times a month, 7.14% use it a few times a week, and 21.43% of participants use marijuana daily.

**Road to other drugs.** There was a mistake within the survey, so whenever respondents said that they had never tried cannabis, the survey skipped ahead of the question asking about their use of other drugs, including alcohol. So, I have data collected from respondents who admitted to having used cannabis in their lifetimes. Figure 4 shows the rate in which those who have used cannabis have tried other drugs. Muslims were more likely not to try other drugs when compared to Atheists/Agnostics.

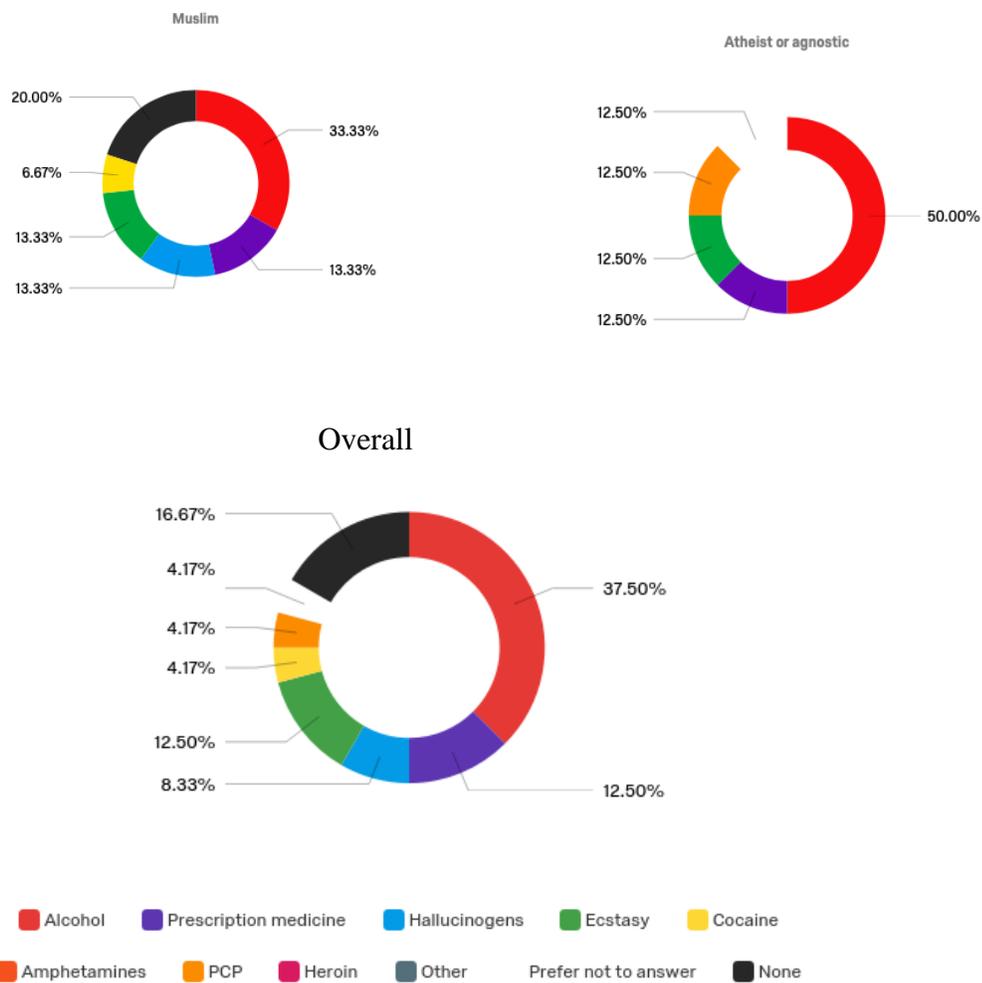
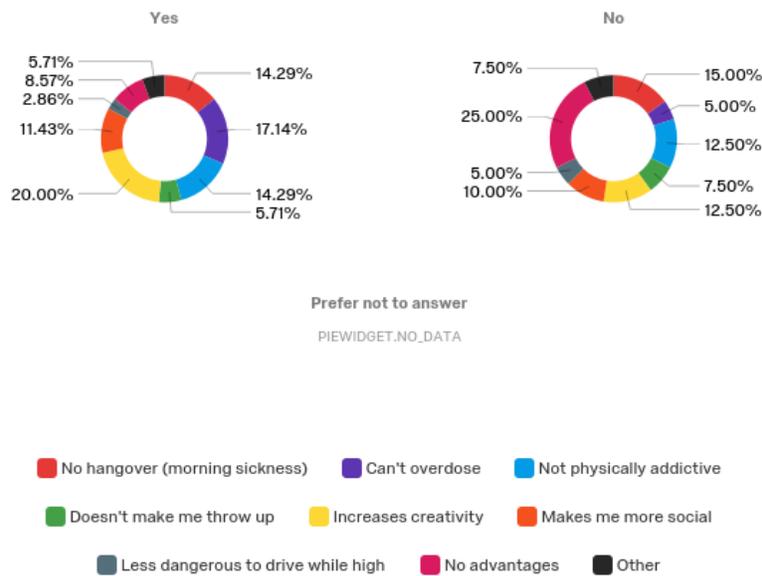


Figure 4

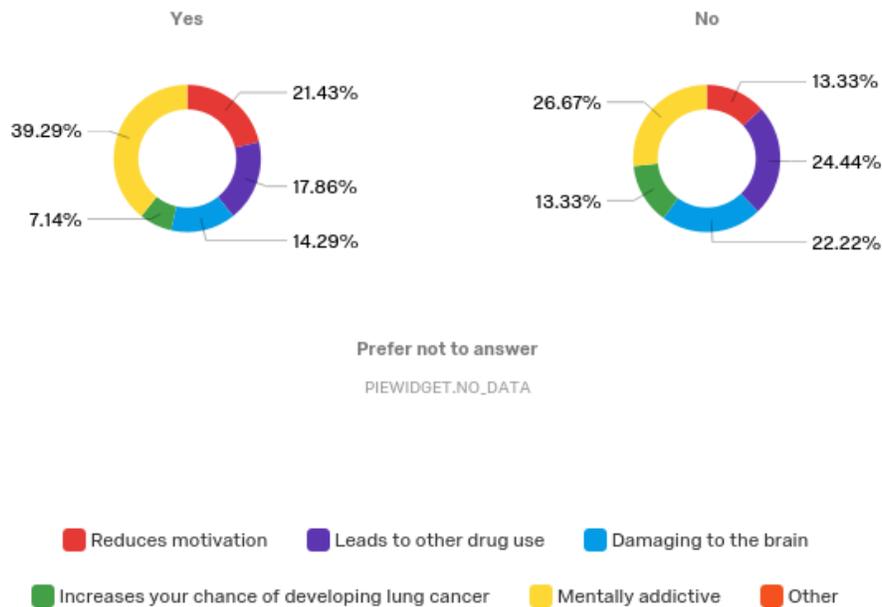
**Advantages.** Overall, most people found no advantages to smoking cannabis. However, the percentages change drastically, after taking into account those who use cannabis versus those who have never used cannabis (figure 5). Those who smoke cannabis believe that it makes them more creative, it isn't physically addictive, and it does not cause hangovers. Those who do not smoke mostly believe that there are no advantages to using cannabis. In figures 5 and 6, "yes" are those respondents who have used cannabis and "no" are those who have never tried it.

Figure 5



**Disadvantages.** Both groups of people mostly agree with the disadvantages of cannabis (figure 6). Except, those who smoke are more concerned with the mental addictiveness and reduced motivation that cannabis causes, while non-cannabis users are more concerned with damage to the brain and increased likelihood of developing lung cancer.

Figure 6



**Addictiveness and damages to the brain.** Most people believe that cannabis is addictive, and damaging to the brain. 66.7% of respondents believe that cannabis is damaging to the brain while 23.08% are unsure. The other 10.26% do not believe that it is damaging to the brain. 66.67% also believe that cannabis is addictive; however, I did not specify whether I meant physically or mentally addicting. This may have skewed results a bit. 12.82% do not believe that cannabis is addictive and 20.51% are unsure. The results change a bit when I factor in whether people have ever tried cannabis or not. Figure 7 shows the breakdown of people who responded “yes” or “no” to having used cannabis, as well as their religion, and how they responded to whether they believed cannabis addicting. Figure 8 shows a similar breakdown; however in response to whether participants believed cannabis was damaging to the brain.

Figure 7

| Category | Breakdown            | Yes (%) | No (%) | Maybe (%) |
|----------|----------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| Religion | Muslim               | 67.74   | 9.68   | 22.58     |
|          | Atheist/Agnostic     | 57.14   | 28.57  | 14.29     |
|          | Prefer not to answer | 100     | 0      | 0         |

|              |                      |       |       |       |
|--------------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Cannabis Use | Have tried cannabis  | 64.29 | 21.43 | 14.29 |
|              | Never tried cannabis | 68    | 8     | 24    |

Figure 8

| Category     | Breakdown            | Yes (%) | No (%) | Maybe (%) |
|--------------|----------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| Religion     | Muslim               | 70.97   | 6.45   | 22.55     |
|              | Atheist/Agnostic     | 57.14   | 28.57  | 14.29     |
|              | Prefer not to answer | 0       | 0      | 100       |
| Cannabis Use | Have tried cannabis  | 42.66   | 14.29  | 42.66     |
|              | Never tried cannabis | 80      | 8      | 12        |

Though the majority of people do believe that cannabis is both addictive and damaging to the brain, more cannabis users believe that cannabis is not addicting when compared to cannabis users. More Atheists/Agnostics also believe that cannabis is not addicting when compared to Muslims. For damages to the brain, more cannabis users are unsure if cannabis causes damage. More believe that it does not matter when compared to those who have never used cannabis. Similarly, more Atheists/Agnostics believe that cannabis is not damaging to the brain when compared to Muslims.

**Perceptions of Cannabis Laws**

**Should marijuana be legal?** The first important question when trying to understand how people felt about cannabis laws is to ask if they believed that cannabis should be legalized for medical and recreational use. Figure 1 shows the percentage breakdown of whether participants believe that marijuana should be legal for medical use. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of whether participants believe that cannabis should be legal for recreational use.

Figure 1

| Category     | Breakdown            | Yes (%) | No (%) | Maybe (%) |
|--------------|----------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| Overall      |                      | 62.5    | 10     | 27.5      |
| Gender       | Female               | 50      | 12.5   | 37.5      |
|              | Male                 | 81.25   | 6.25   | 12.5      |
| Religion     | Muslim               | 59.38   | 12.5   | 28.13     |
|              | Atheist/Agnostic     | 85.71   | 0      | 14.29     |
|              | Prefer not to answer | 0       | 0      | 100       |
| Age          | 18-24                | 56.67   | 13.33  | 30        |
|              | 25-34                | 66.67   | 0      | 33.33     |
|              | 35-44                | 100     | 0      | 0         |
| Cannabis use | Have tried cannabis  | 64.29   | 7.14   | 28.57     |
|              | Never tried cannabis | 61.54   | 11.54  | 26.92     |

Figure 2

| Category     | Breakdown            | Yes (%) | No (%) | Maybe (%) |
|--------------|----------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| Overall      |                      | 28.21   | 38.46  | 33.33     |
| Gender       | Female               | 17.39   | 52.17  | 30.43     |
|              | Male                 | 43.75   | 18.75  | 37.5      |
| Religion     | Muslim               | 16.13   | 45.16  | 38.71     |
|              | Atheist/Agnostic     | 85.71   | 0      | 14.29     |
|              | Prefer not to answer | 0       | 100    | 0         |
| Age          | 18-24                | 24.12   | 41.38  | 34.48     |
|              | 25-34                | 33.33   | 50     | 16.67     |
|              | 35-44                | 50      | 0      | 50        |
| Cannabis use | Have tried cannabis  | 42.86   | 21.43  | 35.71     |
|              | Never tried cannabis | 20      | 48     | 32        |

Most people agree that marijuana should be legal for medical purposes. When asked to elaborate, most participants who responded "yes" responded with something along the lines of science has backed up the medical uses of marijuana. They agreed that marijuana could provide

relief that traditional medicine could not. One respondent mentioned that healthcare in Morocco is in dire need of repairing, and any resource to help patients should be allowed. Another respondent suggested that with legalization, and like any other drug, the side effects need to be clearly stated for patients. Participants who responded with, "maybe" all agreed that if the cases are dire, then marijuana should be used to cure patients. No one chose to elaborate on why they chose no. Religion did not seem to have a huge effect on respondents answers, except those who were Muslim were more inclined to select "no" or "maybe."

Most people are against or unsure if marijuana should be legal for recreational use. Most participants who selected "yes," said that marijuana is already legal in many other places, so it must not be dangerous. They believe that legalization would help the drug to become more regulated and that the tax revenues could be used to improve healthcare and education. Those who selected "maybe" are mostly concerned with people becoming addicted to the drug. Some said that the risks need to be more deeply researched and that users need to be more informed. Religion seems to have a huge effect on the recreational use of marijuana. Most Atheists/Agnostics voted "yes," while most Muslims voted "no." Those who chose to elaborate deemed marijuana, "haram" (forbidden under Islamic law).

**Will cannabis ever be legal?** 7.69% of participants believe that cannabis will eventually become legal. 38.46% say no, while the majority (53.85%) are unsure. Those who responded "yes" and chose to elaborate believe that the government will only legalize cannabis for revenue. Those who elaborated on "no" all agree that a Muslim king will never allow for cannabis to be legal. They also believe that it will destroy the businesses of cannabis farmers. Some respondents who chose "maybe," genuinely are not sure. Some others only agree for medical treatment.

**Will legalizing cannabis make it more socially acceptable?** 45.95% of participants believe that legalizing cannabis will make it more socially acceptable. 35.14% believe that it will not make it more acceptable while 18.92% are unsure. Figure 9 displays the breakdown by religion and the people who responded “yes” or “no” to having used cannabis.

| Category     | Breakdown            | Yes (%) | No (%) | Maybe (%) |
|--------------|----------------------|---------|--------|-----------|
| Religion     | Muslim               | 41.38   | 37.93  | 20.69     |
|              | Atheist/Agnostic     | 71.43   | 14.29  | 12.39     |
|              | Prefer not to answer | 0       | 100    | 0         |
| Cannabis Use | Have tried cannabis  | 26.15   | 23.08  | 30.77     |
|              | Never tried cannabis | 45.83   | 41.67  | 12.5      |

In follow-up questions regarding the topic of cannabis legalization, I asked participants to share their thoughts with me and asked to follow-up via phone or in person if they felt comfortable. In this follow-up, I wanted to know a little more about participants' thoughts and opinion on cannabis and its potentiality of legalization. I asked that they not share names with me. Here are a few quotes from respondents.

1. "Morocco is a Muslim country, and in Islam anything that alters the body or brain function is haram. Therefore cannabis is illegal."
2. "It is better for it not to be legal because one cannot deny its negative effects on physical and mental health; hence, making it legal will just make things worse among young people!"
3. "I don't care actually. It's not legal because of 'wili hchuma'"
4. "If it is legal, then the country will benefit from taxes, and it will boost the formal economy. However, drug barons will never let it get legalized because they will lose profit."
5. "The reason behind cannabis being illegal is due to its dangerous side effects to our body and mental state. I would personally want it to be legal but with a prescription from a certified doctor. In terms of medicine, I believe that cannabis is a good healing and pain killer for chronic diseases."
6. "I think it's because of its mental effect and the fact that it leads to other drugs and deadly addiction and also can destroy the brain's performance. Honestly, I want to see the

potential of cannabis exploited more positively. Maybe it is possible to amplify the positive impact of cannabis and reduce the after effects."

7. "Cannabis is illegal for the fact that it is an unregulated business and that the government does not make any profit out of it. The legalization of cannabis would be beneficial for the state and to a certain extent the people as well. Cannabis is useful for people to unwind themselves and relax."
8. "I don't want cannabis to be legal."
9. "I think awareness should be raised about the allowed and the banned. Most Moroccans are socialized in a way that they more often than not feel like doing the disallowed thing. The number of users may decrease then."
10. "It is illegal because it's dangerous I guess! Moreover, even though I have heard that it is good for health, and people know that too, they still use it for bad objectives only."
11. "Cannabis is illegal because Morocco abides by EU recommendations."
12. "It's illegal simply because it's considered as a drug. Yes, I want to be legal."
13. "I think it's illegal because of international influence. Otherwise, it is tolerated here in Morocco socially speaking especially in the case of male consumption. I have no opinion on whether it should be legalized or not"
14. "Because of Islam. How can the commander of believers allow such things to happen officially? It needs to be done in the dark. Legalizing it means more secularization... more economic justice. Now the state doesn't benefit from revenues. Only the political elite does."
15. "Cannabis should only be consumed in moderation to avoid its harmful effects, but from time to time; we need to relax from everyday problems, I think that Moroccans will agree to the acceptance of cannabis and break this taboo."
16. "I do want it to be legal, and I think when regulated it can reduce the many side effects that are mostly because unless you get it from the source, it's mixed with strange agents (henna, tar, other drugs). I can only speculate, but there's more than what seems in the legislation. It's not just due to our country being behind or backwards thinking as usual."
17. "I believe it is illegal because it is considered a drug. However, drugs are not supposed to be in the hands of everyone and anyone. There are some uses where drugs are needed but only under the supervision of an expert. Otherwise, it could be very harmful."

### Analysis & Discussion

The people of Morocco are not in denial about the reality of cannabis legislation. They understand that the idea of cannabis ever being legal is still a taboo topic and the reality of it happening is extremely far away. The NABTA Collective is going to continue to hold public meetings and continue to spread awareness and information about cannabis because they feel that this is the priority.

The results of the survey were a bit surprising to me. Most people supported the legalization of medical cannabis, which I did not believe would happen. I initially assumed that religion would cause people to not support medical marijuana legalization because of its haram nature. However, everyone, including Muslims, Atheists, and Agnostics all support medical cannabis.

Participants' opinions regarding recreational cannabis supported my initial hypothesis. Most people did not agree that cannabis should be legal for recreational use. However, religion played a significant role here. All Atheists/Agnostics did not select no for this response. They all agree that cannabis should be legal for recreation, or at least chose maybe. However, most Muslims selected no for this response. Only 7.65% of participants believe that cannabis will eventually become legal, again showing that Moroccans are fully aware of the slim chance that cannabis will ever become legal.

I did not include income breakdown into the results because they did not have significance in how respondents answers. Additionally, income brackets are very ambiguous, and many people do not know their family's yearly income. I also could not find information about how Morocco defines economic class, so each participant was able to decide for themselves. Results would not have been consistent had I included economic class.

All in all, those who have tried cannabis and continue to use cannabis are most likely to support the legalization of cannabis. Cannabis users are also more likely to be Atheists/Agnostic. Muslims stand firmly by their religion, of course, and will not like to see cannabis be legalized and used for recreational use. Cannabis is considered haram, and hchuma. Not only this, they are concerned about the health risks that come with using cannabis for recreational purposes.

These results should be taken with a grain of salt. I did not have a large sample size, my survey was only open for 15 days, and there were some technical errors. However, I would say that these results are a great starting point for understanding how local Moroccans perceive cannabis and cannabis laws. Some organizations are working hard to spread awareness about the benefits of cannabis, intending to get it legalized down the road eventually. It is essential to understand why this issue is important to them and every other Moroccan.

Further research could include running this survey again but with a larger sample size and for an extended time period. I wanted to sample from the population of everyone in Morocco, which is about 37.74 million people. For a 95% confidence level with  $\pm 3$  margin of error, I would have needed a sample size of at least 1067 people. I only had 48 responses to my survey. With a larger sample size, a more in-depth analysis could be completed. Additionally, more correlations could be made, with more confidence. Lastly, further research could include an exploration of how Morocco should and could move forward with the topic of cannabis legalization. Is there a future where cannabis will be legal in Morocco?

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## **Appendix**

Online Survey presented to participants

**Cannabis Perceptions/perceptions du cannabis/القنب تصورات**

*Title of the Study: Local Perceptions of Cannabis and Cannabis laws in Morocco*

*Researcher Name: Shadae Tingman*

**PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

*My name is Shadae Tingman. I am an American student with the SIT Morocco: Multiculturalism and Human Rights (Spring 2019) program. I want to invite you to participate in a month-long study I am conducting as part of my study abroad program. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to consent.*

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY** *I want to explore many aspects of cannabis in Morocco. There is much literature surrounding the agricultural, economical, and political implications of cannabis, but I want my research to focus on social perceptions of cannabis and the laws. As a public policy major, a lot of my work is hands-on and focuses on how everyday people are affected by policies. I want to research past government attempts to legalize marijuana and what went wrong. I then want to interview members of local organizations to learn the work they are doing to help get the legalization of marijuana passed and learn why they hope to pass the legislation. Lastly, and for THIS PART of the survey, I want to interview Moroccans to understand their perceptions of cannabis and laws regarding cannabis to understand the social implications of cannabis laws for Moroccan.*

**STUDY PROCEDURES** *Your participation will consist of this anonymous survey, participant observation, and if in-person, in-depth follow-up interviews. It will require approximately 10-15 minutes, or less, of your time.*

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS** *As always, there is a minimal risk of violence by state and non-state actors when discussing the queer experience in Morocco; this risk will be reduced by holding interviews and focus groups in private locations. There is also a risk of psychological discomfort when discussing this topic. During the research process, you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.*

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY** *There is much literature surrounding the agricultural, economical, and political implications of cannabis, but I want my research to focus on social perceptions of cannabis and the laws. What are the social implications of cannabis laws for Moroccans? The results of this study will provide a deeper understanding of how the controversial topic of cannabis affects Moroccans, personally.*

**CONFIDENTIALITY** *This survey will not collect any names, or any identifying information, besides the answers you provide in the survey. However, no one, including myself, will know who you are. I will have the aggregate data.*

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL** *Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. Moreover, at any time during or after your participation, you can revoke anything you said, and it will not be included in my research. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study.*

**RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION** *If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please WhatsApp me at +13479180981 or email me at [stingman@hamilton.edu](mailto:stingman@hamilton.edu).*

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION** *In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher, please contact the Institutional Review Board at: School for International Training Institutional Review Board 1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676 Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 United States of America [airb@sit.edu](mailto:airb@sit.edu) +1 802-258-3132*

*"I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."*

I CONSENT

I DO NOT CONSENT

Have you lived in Morocco for at least 10 years?

Yes

No

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Were you born in Morocco?

Yes

No

---

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to answer

Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is your religion?

- Christian/Protestant/Methodist/Lutheran/Baptist
  - Catholic
  - Mormon
  - Greek or Russian Orthodox
  - Jewish
  - Muslim
  - Buddhist
  - Hindu
  - Atheist or agnostic
  - Prefer not to answer
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to answer

---

How do you identify, financially?

- Low class
  - Low-middle class
  - Middle class
  - Upper middle class
  - Upper class
  - Prefer not to answer
- 

Where do you and your family identify with yearly income, MAD?

- 0 to 30,000
- 30,001 to 50,000
- 50,001 to 60,000
- 60,001 to 80,000
- 80,001 to 180,000
- More than 180,000
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

In your opinion, should marijuana be legal for medical use? Why?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- Maybe \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_

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In your opinion, should marijuana be legal for recreational use? Why?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- Maybe \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_
- 

In your opinion, where would you place marijuana in terms of its negative health effects on the human body? Please rate the substances in order of effect (1=less worse, 6=most worse)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Cannabis
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sugar
- \_\_\_\_\_ Caffeine
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tobacco (Cigarettes)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Alcohol (Drinking)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hard drugs (i.e. heroin, cocaine)
- 

Have you ever used cannabis? (in any form, hashish, kif, marijuana, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

How often have you used cannabis?

- Once or twice
- A few times year
- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily
- Prefer not to answer

What age did you start using cannabis (in years)?

Less than 14

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

Over 25

What other drugs have you tried?

- Alcohol
  - Prescription medicine
  - Hallucinogens
  - Ecstasy
  - Cocaine
  - Amphetamines
  - PCP
  - Heroin
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - Prefer not to answer
  - None
-

What are the advantages of cannabis compared to other drugs?

- No hangover (morning sickness)
  - Can't overdose
  - Not physically addictive
  - Doesn't make me throw up
  - Increases creativity
  - Makes me more social
  - Less dangerous to drive while high
  - No advantages
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

What are the disadvantages of cannabis compared to other drugs?

- Reduces motivation
  - Leads to other drug use
  - Damaging to the brain
  - Increases your chance of developing lung cancer
  - Mentally addictive
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
-

Do you believe cannabis is addictive?

- Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
- 

Do you believe cannabis is damaging to the brain?

- Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
- 

Are you familiar with past cannabis legislation in Morocco? Briefly what do you know?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  - Maybe \_\_\_\_\_
  - No
- 

Do you believe cannabis will ever be legalized? Why?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  - Maybe \_\_\_\_\_
  - No \_\_\_\_\_
-

Will legalizing cannabis make it seem safer?

- Yes
  - Maybe
  - No
- 

Will legalizing cannabis make it more socially acceptable?

- Yes
  - Maybe
  - No
- 

In your opinion, why is cannabis illegal? Do you want it to be legal? What do you think of cannabis?

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Would you be interested in a follow-up interview? Can I call you or meet to discuss my project more? Thank you!  
If yes, please add your WhatsApp number or email address.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- Whatsapp # \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- No, sorry

End of Block: Default Question Block