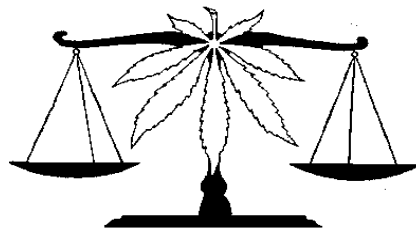


Provisional analysis of
Political opinions of drug users
(UK 1999)

Regular Users III preliminary results

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Provisional analysis of political opinions of drug users (UK 1998)

**Atha MJ, Blanchard S & Davis S (1999)
Independent Drug Monitoring Unit (IDMU Ltd)
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Abstract

Reported political views and voting intentions of UK drug users were studied in an anonymous survey of 1153 cannabis users during 1998. The data includes voting at the 1997 General Election and if an election were held 'tomorrow', with reasons for their choices, and attitudes to a range of legislative drug policy options.

Half of Labour supporters among users at the 1997 election had subsequently changed voting intention, with a large swing to the Green Party. Health and environmental issues are the main determining factors in deciding the votes of drug users, however the evidence suggests that drug policy may have become a more significant factor in deciding voter intentions.

While there is widespread support for cannabis law reform, and strong opposition to current government policies, the majority of users reject wider legalisation of all drugs, or an unregulated free market in cannabis. Most state that a change in the law would neither increase nor decrease their level of use.

1. Methodology

- 1.1 Anonymous questionnaires were distributed at a range of outdoor festivals and other events during 1998 as part of the third IDMU Regular Users¹² drug survey, of which 1153 valid forms were received by the closing date and entered on to a database, subsequently exported for statistical analysis (Statview v5.0).
- 1.2 Respondents were asked to indicate how they voted in the 1997 election, and how they would vote in a general election 'tomorrow'. They were also asked to indicate (by circling options) the main reasons for their actual and intended votes. They were further asked to indicate how they rated a specified list of drug legislation policies on a 0-10 scale.
- 1.3 The survey was not intended to form a representative sample of all cannabis users, as several batches of forms were distributed in Green-related festival sites or by Green Party activists, thus one would expect that 'Green' voters would be overrepresented among our sample.

2. Party Politics

- 2.1 Of the three main parties, Labour was overwhelmingly supported at the previous election by those who voted, with just under 35% of users electing the present government. The Liberal Democrats came in second place at 17.5%, with the Conservatives trailing badly under 5%. One in eight respondents claimed to have voted 'Green'. However, 27% of respondents did not vote, either because they refused to do so, were unable to vote, or were not interested. The 'Legalise' option is attributable to a handful of candidates standing on pro-legalisation tickets, and would reflect the presence of a number of pro-cannabis activists within the sample.
- 2.2 Intended voting patterns showed a substantially higher level of support for the Green party, with nearly a third of respondents expressing support. Labour support was at 18%, behind the Liberal Democrats on 19%, with the Conservative party supported by fewer than one in fifty respondents.
- 2.3 Comparing past allegiance with voting intentions, it would appear that nearly half the Labour voters from the last election had switched allegiance, with the Green Party and to a lesser extent the Liberal Democrats the main beneficiaries. The Conservative party, from a very low base, also lost half the support it had at the last election. The increase in Green support may be illusory, reflecting a lack of candidates in the General Election, and tactical voting to oust the Conservatives. The proportion who would not vote has decreased by nearly a quarter, suggesting that drug users may be becoming more politically active. The haemorrhaging of Labour support, maybe half a million votes across the UK, probably reflects the strong anti-drugs and anti-cannabis stance taken by the current government since the election.
- 2.4 Long Term Trends?: It is instructive to compare these 1998 results with data from a comparable sample taken in 1984³ during the Thatcher administration, at the height of the Miners strike, but before the 'Battle of the Beanfield' and active government opposition to the festival movement. The popularity of the Greens(Ecology) in 1984 was similar to the expressed intention in 1998, and the Labour party appears marginally less popular in 1998 than 14 years earlier when in opposition.

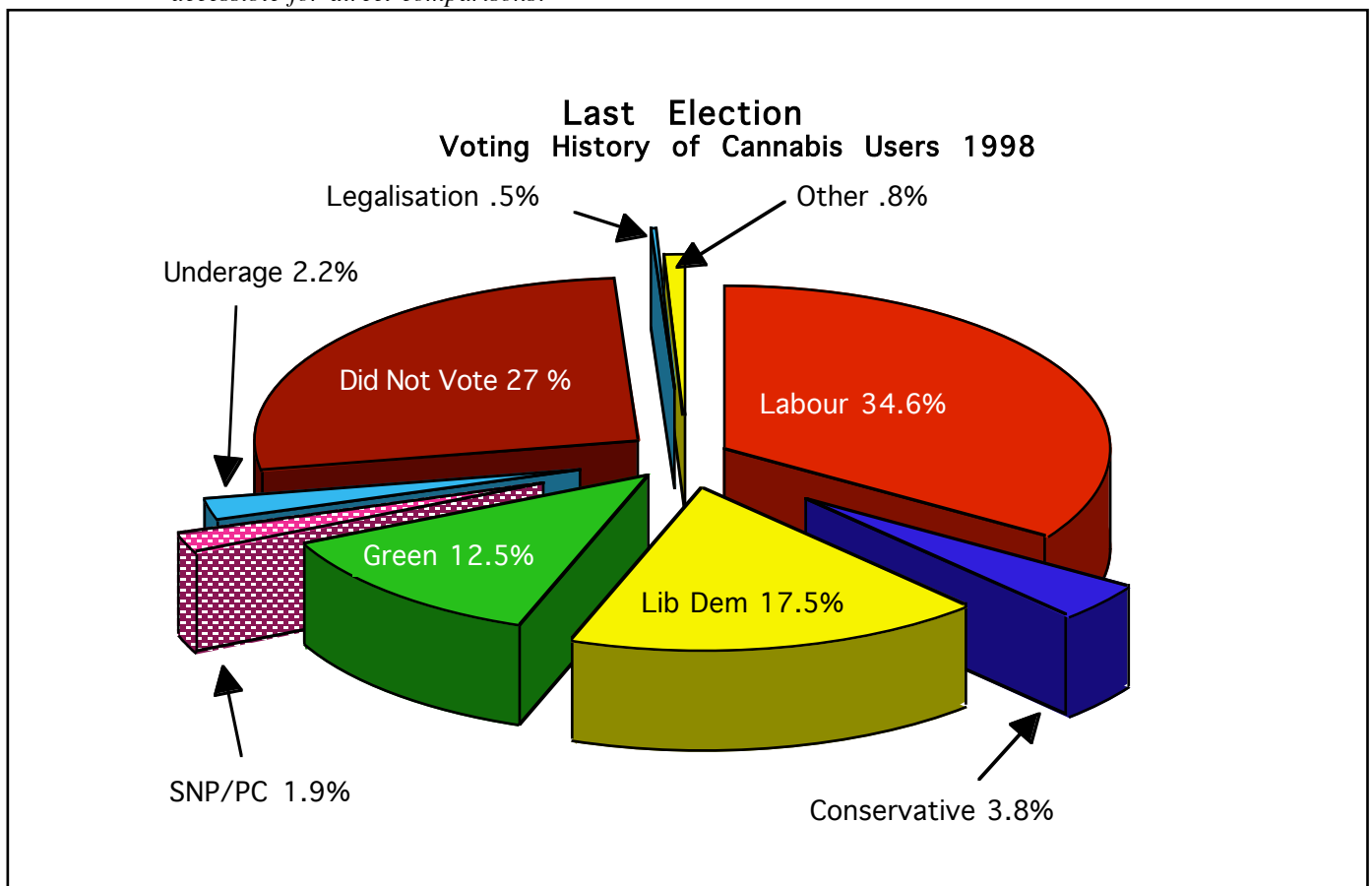
Voting History & Intentions of Cannabis Users (1998)								
Last Election			Next Election				1984 data	
Party	n	%	Party	n	%	% change	n	%
Labour	347	34.6%	Labour	173	17.7%	-16.9%	112	18.3%
Conservative	38	3.8%	Conservative	18	1.8%	-1.9%	26	4.2%
Lib Dem	176	17.5%	Lib Dem	186	19.0%	+1.5%	26	4.2%
Green	125	12.5%	Green	313	32.0%	+19.6%	205	33.4%
SNP/PC	19	1.9%	SNP/PC	25	2.6%	+0.7%	*	n/a
Underage	22	2.2%	Dont Know	39	4.0%	n/a	*	n/a
Did not vote	271	27.0%	Will not vote	202	20.7%	-6.3%	*	n/a
Legalisation	5	0.5%	Legalisation	11	1.1%	+0.6%	*	n/a
Other	8	0.8%	Other	11	1.1%	+0.3%	245*	40.0%
Total	1003	100%	Total	977	100%		613	100%

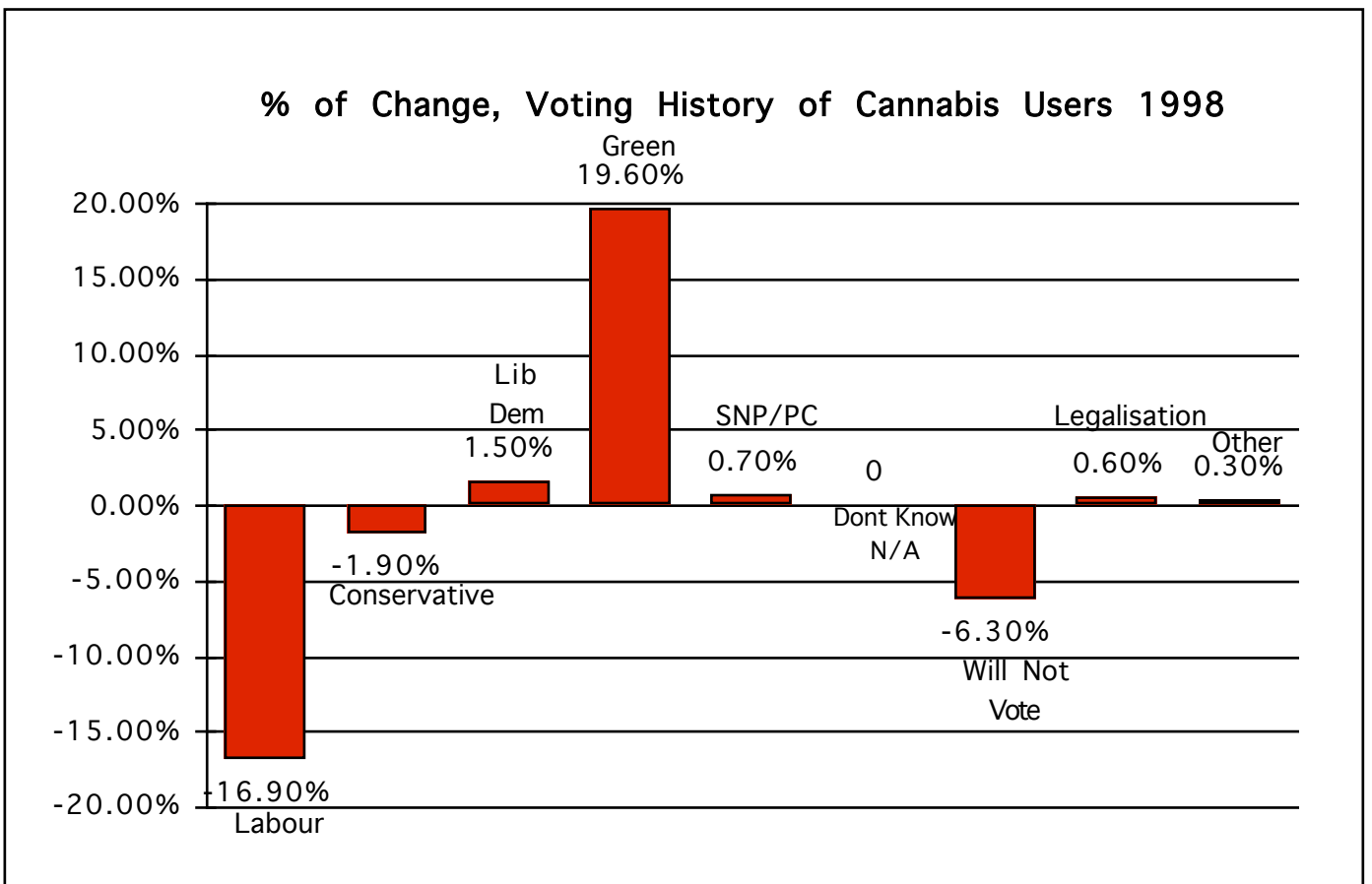
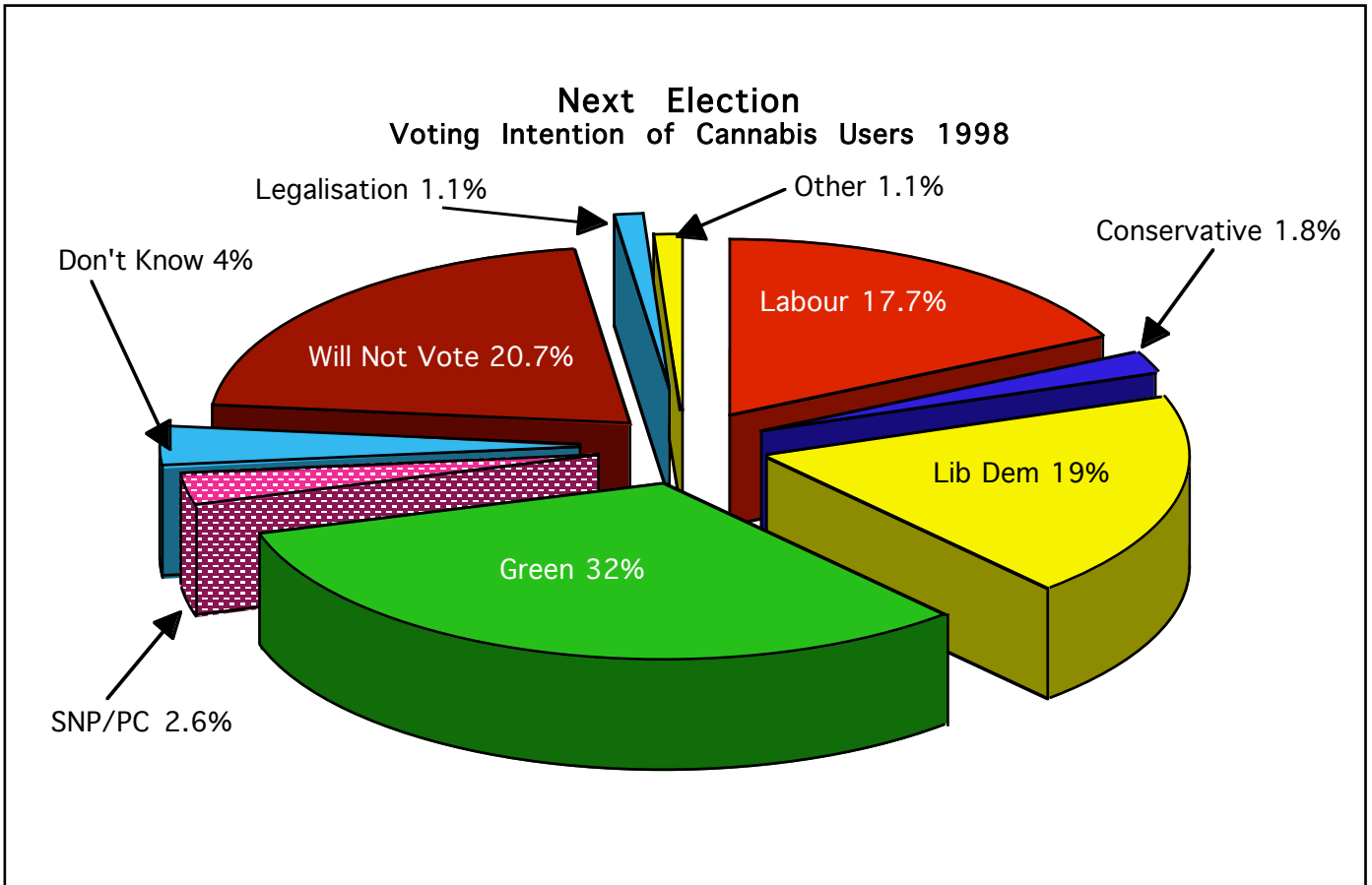
Notes:

Last Vote: Other included communist, socialist, BNP, looneys, Natural Law, Referendum (3) Did not vote included spoiled ballots (4). Underage included those who expressed preferences. 150 gave no response

Next vote: Other includes - 'any far left', class war, communist, socialist, looney (3), Natural Law, Referendum, 'me', Radical Party (italian respondent). Will not vote includes 5 intending to spoil ballots. 176 gave no response.

* **1984 data:** Asked respondents to circle party closest to own political beliefs. Libdem included SDP/Alliance, 'Other' category consolidated 'other socialist/communist', SNP/PC, Nat Front, Anarchy, Not interested, Don't Know and a write-in option. Original raw data not currently accessible for direct comparisons.





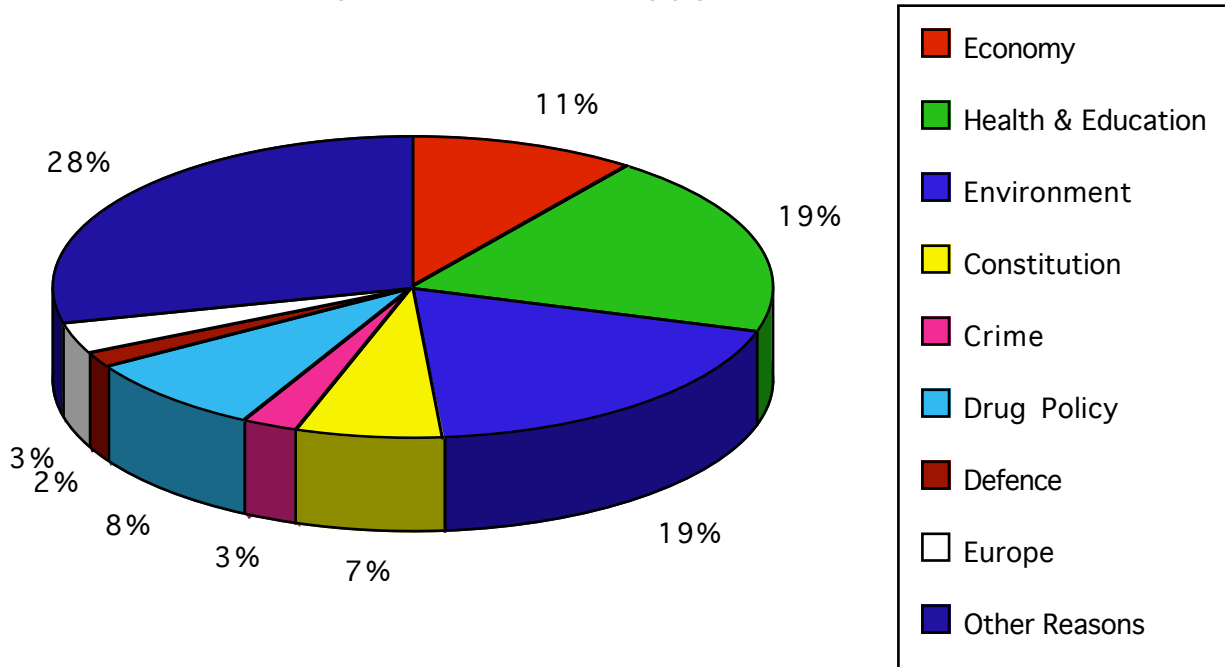
3. Reasons for voting

- 3.1 Respondents expressed a wide range of reasons for their past vote or current intentions, including the negative (don't trust 'x,y or all of them', tactical voting etc), the practical (not registered, no green candidate) the principled (Referendum party, anarchist, socialism/workers rights), and the silly or obscure ("I was on LSD", "nice suits", "Yogic Flying"). Many respondents chose a range of the listed options.
- 3.2 Past vote: Health & Education was the main reason, closely followed by environment. Half as many (14%) cited the economy, with drug policy a deciding factor for one in nine respondents, followed by constitutional issues (9%). Defence, Crime and European policy were each cited by less than 5% of respondents. Nearly four in ten respondents cited other factors to have influenced their vote.
- 3.3 Next vote: The most significant factor in influencing voting intention was environmental issues, now cited by 45% of respondents an increase of 19%, Health & Education was slightly up by 2% in second place, followed by drug policy, which had doubled the number of respondents citing this as a decisive factor in voting intent. Fewer respondents cited 'other reasons'. Defence had doubled in significance (from a low base), possibly reflecting increased international tension, and constitutional issues had become more important, possibly reflecting devolution and the future of the House of Lords. All of the listed options showed slight or significant increases in importance, with fewer other issues (largely relating to the previous government) a major factor. The apparent increase in the prominence of drug policy may reflect an real increase in the politicisation of users following the active government support for prohibition policies, or may reflect the fact that this was a survey targeted at drug users, with policy options to consider, raising the profile of the issue in the mind of the respondent.

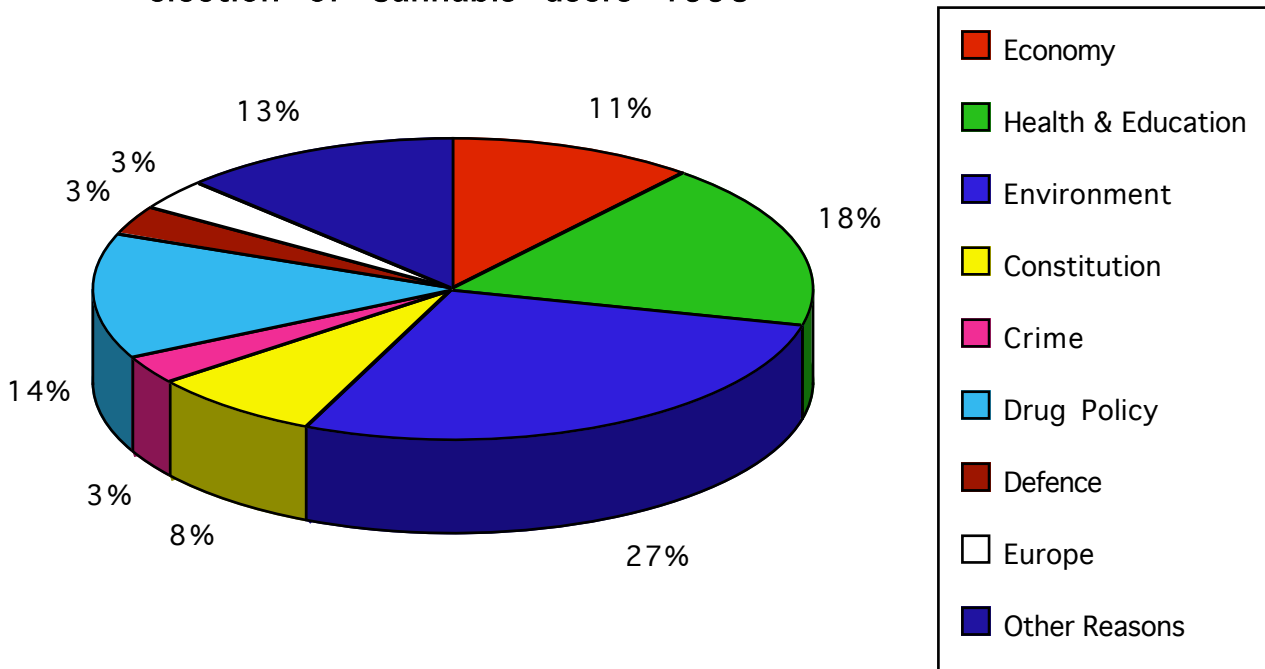
Main Policy Issues influencing vote or voting intentions of cannabis users (1998)					
Reason	Last Election		Next Election		
	n	%	n	%	% Change
Economy	116	14.3%	132	17.8%	3.5%
Health & Education	212	26.2%	211	28.5%	2.3%
Environment	209	25.8%	331	44.7%	18.9%
Constitution	74	9.1%	92	12.4%	3.3%
Crime	29	3.6%	34	4.6%	1.0%
Drug Policy	90	11.1%	163	22.0%	10.9%
Defence	18	2.2%	35	4.7%	2.5%
Europe	38	4.7%	39	5.3%	0.6%
Other Reasons	317	39.1%	148	20.0%	-19.1%
Total	810	100.0%	740	100.0%	0.0%

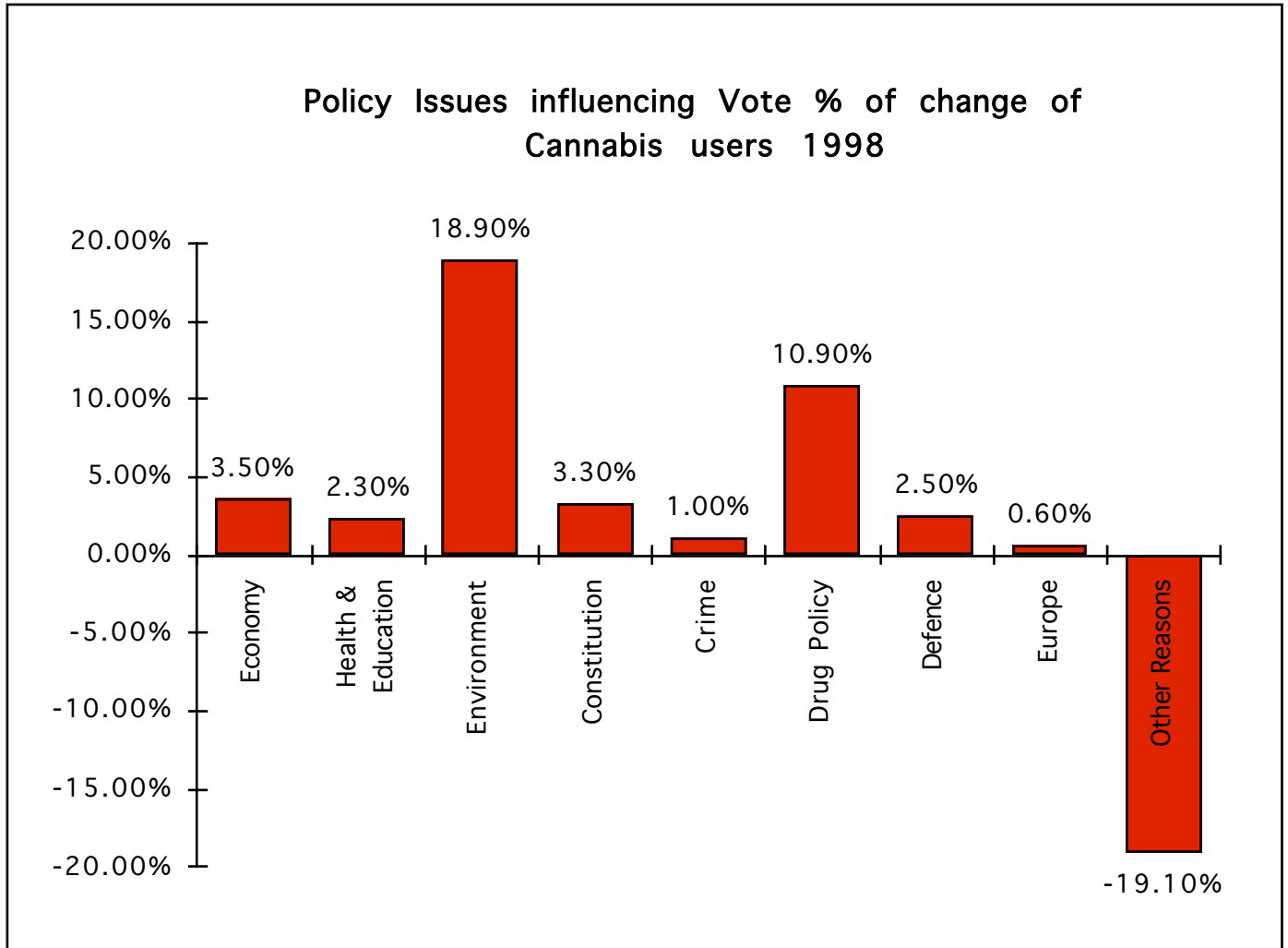
Note: As many respondents gave more than one reason, columns cannot be added together to form totals. No reasons listed for 343 respondents (last vote) and 413 (next vote)

Policy issues influencing vote intentions at Last Election of Cannabis users 1998



Policy issues influencing vote intentions at next election of Cannabis users 1998





4. Alternative Drug Policy Options?

- 4.1 Support among cannabis users is highest for policies which would distinguish between cannabis and other controlled drugs. Cannabis legalisation (76% for - 12% against) and decriminalisation of cannabis alone (73% - 15%) attracted the widest levels of support.
- 4.2 A majority opposed an unregulated free market in cannabis or other drugs, with 38% in favour and 42% against, one third being strongly opposed. Prescription (57% - 18%) and licensing systems (52% - 22%) both received lukewarm approval.
- 4.3 The status quo was roundly rejected (7% - 84%), as would be increased penalties for all drugs (3% - 93%), these options were strongly opposed by 78% and 90% respectively. However, there was a majority against the legalisation of all drugs (38% - 51%) with 43% strongly opposed, and a substantial minority (22% - 66%) would support increased penalties for (unspecified) 'hard drugs'.

Ratings of drug policy/legislative options by cannabis users												
Policy	Total <i>n</i>	Mean rating (1-10)	Strong positive (8-10)		Weak positive (6-7)		Neutral (5)		Weak negative (3-4)		Strong negative (0-2)	
			<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Legalise Cannabis Only	935	7.70	602	64%	116	12%	110	12%	26	3%	81	9%
Decriminalise cannabis possession, not supply	911	7.40	537	59%	124	14%	117	13%	34	4%	99	11%
Free-market	851	4.60	262	31%	63	7%	207	24%	64	8%	293	34%
Licensing	859	6.04	328	38%	122	14%	217	25%	46	5%	146	17%
Prescription	874	6.61	395	45%	108	12%	208	24%	39	4%	124	14%
Legalise all drugs	927	4.35	280	30%	72	8%	101	11%	78	8%	396	43%
Stay the same	855	1.34	39	5%	13	2%	80	9%	55	6%	667	78%
Increase penalties all drugs	855	0.63	22	3%	4	0%	30	4%	27	3%	772	90%
Increase penalties hard drugs	865	2.75	133	15%	61	7%	99	11%	45	5%	527	61%

- 4.4 Users were asked to assess how a relaxation in the cannabis laws would influence their use of the drug. Fourteen respondents (1.4%) stated their use would decrease, 95 (9.4%) stated use would increase, and 771 (77%) stated their level of use would be unchanged, 124 respondents (12%) did not know how legislative change would affect their use.

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References

- 1 Atha MJ & Blanchard S (1997) Regular Users: Self reported drug consumption patterns and attitudes to drugs among 1333 regular cannabis users. Wigan: IDMU Publications.
- 2 Atha MJ, Blanchard S & Davis S (1999) Regular Users II: UK drugs market analysis, purchasing patterns and prices 1997. Wigan: IDMU Publications.
- 3 Atha MJ (1987) Quantitative Assessment of Illicit Substance Use - MSc Thesis, Birmingham University