

# [***Biden's historic marijuana shift is his latest election-year move for young voters***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BXJ-YJM1-DYMD-61M2-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

April 30, 2024 Tuesday 11:45 PM GMT

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**Section:** DOMESTIC NEWS; POLITICAL NEWS

**Length:** 923 words

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**Dateline:** PHOENIX

**Body**

PHOENIX — President Joe Biden may eventually [*ban TikTok*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-tiktok-campaign-account-young-voters-ban-d351ccb17c59890473af1685a0a756f3), but he's moving to give something back to the [*young people*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-2024-campaign-oldest-president-young-voters-152d11d3090518a2e5eee63b9a596673) who dominate the popular social media app — a [*looser federal grip on marijuana*](https://apnews.com/article/marijuana-biden-dea-criminal-justice-pot-f833a8dae6ceb31a8658a5d65832a3b8).

Facing softening support from a left-leaning voting group that will be [*crucial*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-2024-campaign-oldest-president-young-voters-152d11d3090518a2e5eee63b9a596673) to his reelection hopes in November, Biden has made a number of election-year moves intended to appeal in particular to [*younger voters*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-youth-activists-joint-endorsement-reelection-age-15ea5b67e05f2dc6c41ba7f48cfccdcd). His move toward reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug is just the latest, coming weeks after he canceled student loans for another 206,000 borrowers. He has also made abortion rights central to his case for reelection.

The push to highlight issues that resonate with younger voters comes as Biden fights to hold together the coalition that sent him to the White House in 2020.

Biden, the oldest president in U.S. history, is battling a perception among voters that he's [*lost a step*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-state-of-union-mental-capacity-trump-reelection-66d8784586d21f30885d8153f949510c) as he's aged. Discontent with his handling of Israel’s war against Hamas in Gaza has exploded into [*unrest on college campuses*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinian-campus-protests-timeline-f7cd3abe635f8afa4532b7bed9212b56). While inflation has [*ebbed from its peak*](https://apnews.com/article/inflation-prices-rates-economy-federal-reserve-biden-f02b969d1b44a7ccb0385be03f766de0) and the job market remains strong, polls show Americans still blame Biden for high prices and high interest rates, which are squeezing first-time buyers out of the housing market.

A proposal by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration would recognize [*the medical uses of cannabis*](https://apnews.com/article/marijuana-health-schumer-becerra-dea-c00db5dabbeb9efd94cf17baff241e85) and acknowledge it has less potential for abuse than some of the nation’s most dangerous drugs. However, it would not legalize marijuana outright for recreational use.

Biden called for a review of federal marijuana law in October 2022 and moved to [*pardon thousands of Americans*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-marijuana-government-and-politics-2d5e3d9e2cfbbbe3ee114536738894a8) convicted federally of simple possession of the drug. He has also called on governors and local leaders to take similar steps to erase marijuana convictions.

“The American people have made clear in state after state that cannabis legalization is inevitable,” Rep. Earl Blumenauer, an Oregon Democrat and an early proponent of easing marijuana laws, said in a statement. "The Biden-Harris administration is listening."

Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris both touted their support for marijuana law reform to mark the 4/20 cannabis holiday at exactly 4:20 p.m. Saturday.

The comments are latest sign the administration plans to continue to focus on the popular issue ahead of the November election.

“Sending people to prison just for possessing marijuana has upended too many lives and incarcerated people for conduct that many states no longer prohibit,” Biden posted on the social media platform X. “It’s time that we right these wrongs.”

The ***politics*** of marijuana are favorable for the president.

According to AP VoteCast, 63% of voters nationally in the 2022 midterm elections said they favor legalizing recreational use of marijuana nationwide, compared with 36% who said they were opposed. Support for legalization was higher among adults under age 45, 73% of whom were in favor. About 8 in 10 Democrats, roughly two-thirds of independents and about half of Republicans were in favor.

Biden has issued [*pardons to thousands of people for federal marijuana possession*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-marijuana-pardons-clemency-02abde991a05ff7dfa29bfc3c74e9d64) and commuted long sentences handed down for nonviolent drug offenses. In 2022, he urged governors to pardon state offenses.

While young voters lean left, they are also less likely to vote. Biden can't afford for a reliable group of supporters to stay home or vote for a third-party candidate like independent Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is aggressively courting young voters, or the Green Party's Jill Stein, who is leaning into her opposition to Israel's war in Gaza.

The last two elections were decided by fewer than 100,000 votes in three states.

Despite growing public acceptance, Biden's move has prominent detractors, including several former top DEA officials. Opponents say the potency of today’s marijuana could lead to harmful side effects, including psychosis and anxiety.

“This is a political act — it’s not following the science,” said former DEA Administrator Tim Shea. “It’s ***politics*** in election year. It’s like forgiving student loans. It’s aimed at a select group of people and the impact is going to be bad.”

“Law enforcement can’t believe it’s happening,” Shea added.

During the crack epidemic of the 1980s and '90s, then-Sen. Biden was a prominent voice in the so-called “War on Drugs.”

Ethan Nadelmann, who has been advocating for drug legalization for decades, said Biden probably senses now that a more lenient stance on pot could help rally younger voters and progressive members of his party.

“It will end the hypocrisy,” Nadelmann said.

Former President Donald Trump’s views on marijuana are unclear. But as a resident of Florida he’ll have the chance to vote on a legalization initiative on the ballot in November. In an interview last year with Newsmax, the GOP presidential nominee said pot causes “significant damage” even as he acknowledged that legalizing cannabis is a “pretty popular thing” among voters.

Federal drug policy has lagged behind much of the country, with 38 states having already legalized medical marijuana in addition to [*24 that have approved its recreational use.*](https://apnews.com/article/ohio-marijuana-legalization-election-2023-6d15efb27fdcd41e7364f2b7cd3177f4) That’s helped fuel fast growth in the U.S. marijuana industry, with sales estimated to be worth $25 billion a year.

Easing federal regulations could reduce the tax burden that can be 70% or more by allowing businesses to take tax deductions and seek loans, according to industry groups. It could also make it easier forscientists to research marijuana.

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Associated Press writers Joshua Goodman in Miami and Jim Mustian in New Orleans contributed.

**Load-Date:** April 30, 2024

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