METHODS BRIEF

Patterns of Marijuana Enforcement

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Introduction
As of December 2020, 35 states have enacted or voted (many through voter referendum) for laws that legalize the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes and 15 for recreational purposes. There are multiple implications of the legalization of marijuana, related to underage marijuana consumption and the continued harms of the criminalization of marijuana use through the War on Drugs. Few studies, however, have examined whether the enforcement of these policies by local law enforcement agencies differentially impacts communities in the United States.

Study Design and Methods
We examined data from two sources: a national survey of local (county, city, town) law enforcement agencies and the American Community Survey. In 2019, we conducted a telephone survey with local law enforcement agencies across all 50 states in the US (n=1631). The survey presented here is a follow-up to a similar survey conducted in 2010. The selection was stratified to include communities of both small and large population size. In addition to the original survey of law enforcement agencies in 2010, we identified an additional set of agencies to obtain 50% coverage of the county population in the 168 most populous counties across the country. The was due to the survey's primary focus on alcohol enforcement and the associated available outcome data. In addition to alcohol enforcement, we asked critical questions related to marijuana and opioid enforcement. The survey was sent out via e-mail at first with one follow-up e-mail. If there was no response after these two attempts, we attempted five phone calls for a final sample size of 1,030. We asked to speak with the person most knowledgeable about marijuana enforcement. The survey included questions about whether the agency conducted marijuana retail establishment compliance checks, enforcement related to possession and/or use of marijuana by those under age 21, illegal provision of marijuana to persons under age 21, public use of marijuana, and use of false or fake ID to purchase marijuana where applicable. Additionally, in states without legalized recreational marijuana, we asked agencies to report on enforcement priorities related to small amounts of marijuana. For each agency, we also merged in various community characteristics obtained from the American Community Survey. Community characteristics included but were not limited to the community's racial composition, median household income, percentage of people living below the poverty line, median age, and population density.

Challenges and Opportunities
The primary methodological challenge was the survey design and implementation. While the survey's overall response rate was around 63%, reaching this response rate was difficult. Even before contacting law enforcement agencies, obtaining the most accurate contact information was an arduous task. While a few law enforcement databases exist, none included all law enforcement agencies we wished to survey. As mentioned, this survey was a follow-up to a survey conducted in 2010. Since 2010, many agencies have either been absolved or merged with other agencies, making longitudinal work difficult. Future work looking to survey law

enforcement agencies could benefit from a national repository of all law enforcement agencies with their updated jurisdictional boundaries and responsibilities and up-to-date contact information.

Discussion Questions:

1. In a follow-up survey, what questions would be critical to explore?
2. What community characteristics should we examine?
3. What if any enforcement strategies should we be focused on following the legalization of marijuana?