

Choosing the Unconventional:  
A Graduate Portfolio on California Cannabis Policy Analyzing the Transition from  
Contraband to Regulated Commodity

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## Portfolio Abstract

This graduate portfolio examines the evolution of cannabis policy in California following the passage of Proposition 64. It includes a policy analysis, three research artifacts, a professional development plan, a cover letter, and a resume, collectively demonstrating the integration of academic learning, applied policy skills, and career preparation. Together, these components reflect my deepening understanding of cannabis policy while positioning me for post-graduate opportunities in public policy.

Using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), the policy analysis examines chaptered cannabis legislation from 2017 to 2026 to understand how competing coalitions translate their core beliefs into legislative outcomes. The analysis identifies key actors within California's cannabis policy subsystem, including the state government, licensed cannabis industry professionals, social equity advocates, local governments, environmental groups, and medical advocates. The findings point to an uneven distribution of policy influence. State actors and licensed cannabis professionals are responsible for the majority of chaptered legislation that reflects their core beliefs, indicating that institutional authority and economic interests play a decisive role in shaping the state's regulatory framework. However, the emergence of cross-coalition legislation underscores the role of negotiation and compromise among competing groups. This dynamic highlights the incremental nature of cannabis policymaking in California, where progress often occurs through gradual adjustments rather than sweeping reform.

The three supporting artifacts expand on key themes identified in the policy analysis by exploring the persistence of illicit markets, regulatory barriers, and gaps within cannabis-related

literature. Collectively, they demonstrate the evolution of my understanding of cannabis policy over the course of my graduate studies, highlighting a growing awareness of the complexities and limitations of existing regulatory frameworks.

This graduate portfolio demonstrates that cannabis policy outcomes in California are not the result of neutral or purely technical processes, but instead emerge from ongoing competition among advocacy coalitions operating within constrained political and institutional environments. Through the application of the Advocacy Coalition Framework and supporting research, the portfolio shows how influence, resources, and institutional access shape legislative outcomes, often privileging state actors and industry stakeholders, while still allowing for incremental and negotiated policy change. At the same time, the professional development components, including the cover letter, resume, and career planning materials, translate academic growth into practical professional skills. Ultimately, this work reflects my development as both a policy analyst and an emerging professional committed to advancing effective public policy.

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I do not consider myself exceptionally gifted. I hope my journey serves as a reminder that determination and resilience can take you further than you ever imagined. I am proud to join the 8% of Latinas who have earned a master's degree, carrying with me the hopes of my family and the responsibility to open doors for those who will follow.

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# The Slow Burn: An Advocacy Coalition Framework Analysis of Post-Proposition 64 Cannabis Legislation in California

## **Introduction**

Proposition 64 legalized cannabis in California, but conflicting core beliefs among advocacy coalition groups, ranging from reparative justice to taxation revenue, have complicated the development of the regulatory framework. Policymakers operate under bounded rationality, meaning they make satisfactory rather than optimal decisions due to human cognitive limits (Simon, 1972). As a result, they can only work on a limited number of issues at a time. Advocacy coalitions must therefore strategically frame their priorities to secure space on policy agendas. When coalitions with conflicting core beliefs compete for this limited attention, gridlock can emerge, slowing or stalling reform.

This policy analysis examines cannabis legislation in California beginning in 2017, following the passage of Proposition 64 in 2016, to identify which advocacy coalitions have legislation aligned with their core beliefs. By analyzing California cannabis legislation and the influence of competing advocacy coalitions, this policy analysis seeks to answer the research question: How do competing advocacy coalitions shape cannabis policy outcomes in California, and what does this reveal about the distribution of influence within the policy subsystem? This analysis suggests that state actors and licensed cannabis professionals are primary influences on cannabis legislative outcomes.

## Literature Review

### *Standard Terms*

A Cannabinoid is a chemical compound found in cannabis plants that affects the human body by binding to its cannabinoid receptor system (Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 2022).

Cannabis research focuses on two cannabinoids: Cannabidiol and Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol. Cannabidiol (CBD) is a cannabinoid found in cannabis that does not produce psychoactive effects. Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the primary psychoactive cannabinoid present in cannabis (Mason et al., 2021).

The cannabis plant produces both hemp and marijuana, but they are legally classified differently based on THC content. Hemp is a type of cannabis plant that contains no more than 0.3% THC and does not produce psychoactive effects (Johnson, 2018). It is cultivated for fiber, textiles, food, and CBD products. Marijuana contains higher concentrations of THC and produces psychoactive effects. Marijuana is consumed in multiple forms, such as smoking, incorporating it into edibles, vaporizing, brewing it as tea, or eating the plant directly (Davis, 2020).

In addition to legal classifications such as hemp and marijuana, cannabis is also categorized based on plant characteristics and consumption effects. These categories are: Indica and Sativa. Indica plants are short and bushy, with wide, dark green leaves (Dresden, 2020). Consumers associate Indica with sedative and relaxing effects. Sativa plants are slim, tall plants with bright green leaves. Consumers associate Sativa with uplifting, stimulating, and energizing effects. The increase in cannabis cultivation has led researchers to question the accuracy of

classifying cannabis as indica or sativa, as modern research shows that most cannabis is highly hybridized (Clarke et al., 2016). These categories are less biologically accurate than they were in the past.

### *Overview of Cannabis Literature*

For decades, beginning in 1970 with the Controlled Substances Act, the federal government classified cannabis as a Schedule I substance under the system used by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, meaning it was considered to have no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse (Congressional Research Service, 2025). Researchers were required to obtain special Schedule I registrations, rely on federally approved cannabis sources, and comply with strict regulatory requirements, creating substantial barriers to advancing knowledge about cannabis (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, n.d.). In 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to reclassify cannabis to a Schedule III substance (Debusmann, 2025). When reclassified, it may encourage researchers to examine it through a broader range of lenses, rather than the dominant medical lens. The majority of existing cannabis literature focuses on cannabinoid pharmacology. Researchers were interested in cannabis's potential medical effects, particularly its ability to reduce seizures (Press et al., 2015) and assist with pain management (Webb et al., 2014). However, medical cannabis literature still contains important gaps (Moiseva, 2020). For example, researchers do not yet fully understand the long-term effects of sustained cannabis use, especially as more people begin recreationally using cannabis (Gali et al., 2021). Clinical evidence exists for limited medical uses, and many broader claims about cannabis, particularly those related to benefits or wide-ranging medical applications, continue to outpace the available scientific evidence.

Cannabis research experienced renewed academic interest as states have legalized its recreational use. State legalization reduced the stigma around cannabis research and increased funding opportunities. Researchers are beginning to show more interest in analyzing cannabis issues, including public health outcomes (Young-Wolff et al., 2022), youth usage rates (Gali et al., 2021), impaired THC driving (Pearlson et al., 2021), social equity in cannabis licensing (Kilmer et al., 2021), and dependence risk (Connor et al., 2021). State legalization creates new policy and health questions, reduces societal stigma, and leads to an increase in cannabis literature.

### *California Cannabis*

California has been a testing ground for innovative cannabis policy and regulations. The state legalized medical cannabis in 1996 through Proposition 215, allowing researchers to observe the outcomes of partial legalization (Heddleston, 2013). The later legalization of adult recreational cannabis through Proposition 64 in 2016 further expanded researchers' ability to observe and study the effects of legalization. Recreational legalization required California to develop a regulatory framework governing cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, testing, and retail sales for adults aged twenty-one and older. California's large consumer market, combined with favorable agricultural conditions and fertile soil in regions such as the Emerald Triangle, has historically made the state an important center of cannabis culture (Lux, 2019).

The California Department of Cannabis Control oversees the cannabis regulatory system, which licenses businesses, enforces product-safety, labeling, and environmental standards (Cohen et al., 2019). The Department of Cannabis Control also plays a key role in the regulatory framework that enables taxation. Additionally, the department supports research initiatives examining public health outcomes, criminal justice impacts, environmental effects, and industry

economic trends related to cannabis. This has contributed to a growing body of research that helps policymakers evaluate the successes and limitations of the state's regulatory policies (Department of Cannabis Control, n.d.).

Despite California's large and influential legal cannabis industry, businesses face several significant challenges. Barriers to entry remain high due to substantial licensing fees and the complexity of navigating the regulatory framework (Bodwitch et al., 2019). In addition, once businesses enter the market, they often encounter high taxation rates that reduce profit margins and limit pricing flexibility (Goldstein et al., 2019). These economic pressures can make it difficult for licensed cannabis retailers and cultivators to remain financially sustainable, particularly when competing with the persistent illicit cannabis market, which often operates with lower costs and fewer regulatory constraints. Furthermore, local governments hold the authority to permit or prohibit cannabis businesses within their jurisdictions, creating additional variation in market access across the state (Department of Cannabis Control, n.d.).

### *Advocacy Coalition Framework*

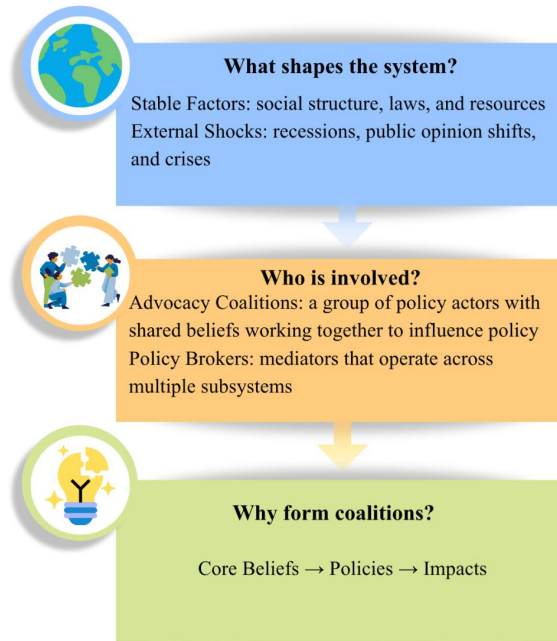
The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) is a causal theory of the public policy process developed in the early 1980s by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018). The ACF emphasizes the role of shared core beliefs in shaping policy outcomes, as policy actors organize into advocacy coalitions to turn these beliefs into public policy. While individual policy actors may have limited influence, participation in coalitions with others who share core beliefs enhances their collective capacity to influence policy outcomes (Weible & Sabatier, 2007).

Importantly, the ACF assumes that these coalitions are not formed merely for convenience but are grounded in enduring belief systems (Cairney, 2019). Coalitions may collaborate when they share compatible core beliefs, often facilitated by policy brokers who operate across multiple subsystems (Weible et al., 2011). Such collaboration allows coalitions to pool resources and increase their influence over policy agendas. Coalitions with conflicting core beliefs compete for limited attention and space on policy agendas (Schlager, 1995).

These coalitions operate within a subsystem of the larger political system. A subsystem is the set of actors, institutions, and processes involved in a specific policy domain (Sabatier & Weible, 2019). Within each subsystem, the ACF identifies a governing authority, referred to as the sovereign, which holds the formal decision-making power (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018). However, the sovereign does not have unlimited power and may also form advocacy coalitions to progress its own core beliefs. In addition to internal dynamics, coalitions may be affected by external shocks, which are significant events such as economic crises, budget constraints, natural disasters, etc., that cause coalitions to shift their strategies or adapt policy positions. The core concepts encompassed within the ACF are depicted in Figure 1 below.

## Figure 1

### *Advocacy Coalition Framework*



Adapted from: Cairney, P. (2019). The advocacy coalition framework. In *Understanding public policy: Theories and issues*

While current literature informs our understanding of cannabis policy and coalition behavior, more context is needed to assess how these dynamics operate in practice.

### **California Cannabis: Context & Constraints**

California became the fifth state to legalize cannabis for recreational use by passing Proposition 64 in 2016. This was a major policy shift, transitioning from a largely medical and illicit system to a regulated adult-use market. Medicinal access remains in place for patients under 21, and the illicit market continues to operate. California developed its legal cannabis industry from the existing medical cannabis framework. It took inspiration from the regulatory models of states that had already legalized recreational use, including Colorado and Washington

(Harris Sliwoski, 2021). California passed Senate Bill 94, also known as the Medical and Adult Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act, in 2017, which consolidated the recreational and medicinal regulatory programs (The Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, 2017).

In 2017, cities began to develop local regulatory organizations, such as Los Angeles' Department of Cannabis Regulation (City of Los Angeles Department of Cannabis Regulation, 2025). California's dual regulatory system has created a fragmented framework in which both state and local governments share authority over cannabis. While cannabis is legal for recreational use throughout the state, cities and counties retain the power to regulate, restrict, or prohibit cannabis businesses within their jurisdictions. According to the Department of Cannabis Control, 59% of cities and counties in California do not permit any type of cannabis business (Department of Cannabis Control California). As a result, access to cannabis varies significantly depending on location. For example, a resident over 21 may legally use cannabis but have limited or no access to retail storefronts; they effectively live in a "cannabis desert."

In 2021, California consolidated the Bureau of Cannabis Control within the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Manufactured Cannabis Safety Branch within the Department of Public Health, and CalCannabis Cultivation Licensing within the Department of Food and Agriculture into the Department of Cannabis Control to streamline oversight, improve coordination, and strengthen enforcement across the commercial cannabis industry (Schiller, 2021). This consolidation is significant not only because it reduced fragmentation and increased efficiency, but also because it further centralized authority within the state. Within the cannabis subsystem, the state government not only acts as the sovereign but also as an advocacy coalition, advancing policy priorities that reflect the interests of its leadership and regulatory agencies.

However, the state is only one of several advocacy coalitions operating within the cannabis policy subsystem. Additional coalitions, including local governments, licensed cannabis professionals, consumers, social equity advocates, environmental organizations, and medical advocates, advance competing policy objectives grounded in their core beliefs. These competing priorities create friction but also present opportunities for strategic alignment, particularly around issues such as taxation versus market viability, environmental protection versus industry growth, regulatory control versus consumer access, and social equity versus economic efficiency.

In this crowded policy subsystem, where agenda space is inherently limited, these coalitions must either compete or collaborate to advance their priorities, often resulting in slow, incremental policy change through legislation. Although multiple coalitions actively shape cannabis policy in California, the relative influence of these coalitions and their role in producing incremental legislative change remains insufficiently examined. As a result, it is unclear how coalition competition and collaboration translate into concrete policy outcomes over time. Understanding coalition behavior provides policymakers and stakeholders with tools to navigate political constraints, build effective alliances, and achieve more meaningful policy change. The next section outlines the methodology used in this analysis, explaining how legislative bills were analyzed to identify which coalitions most strongly influence legislative outcomes.

## **Methodology & Data**

Stakeholders within the California cannabis policy subsystem were identified through a review of policymaking activity following the passage of Proposition 64. The search covered the

period from November 2016 through March 2026 and focused on participation in cannabis-related legislation, rulemaking processes, implementation efforts, and responses to regulation. While conducting this research, relevant actors emerged over time as shown in Figure 2. All identified actors are considered stakeholders; however, the broader stakeholder group also includes individuals and entities affected by policy outcomes who have limited or no active participation in policymaking, such as consumers who may be indifferent to regulatory changes.

**Figure 2**  
*Example Advocacy Coalitions in the California Cannabis Subsystem*

State Government & Agencies	Local Governments	Licensed Cannabis Professionals	Consumers	Social Equity Advocates	Environmental Advocates	Medical Advocates
Governor	City Governments	California Cannabis Industry Association	Individual Consumers	ACLU	The Nature Conservancy	Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
California State Senate	County Board of Supervisors	United Cannabis Business Association	Cannabis Consumers Coalition	Last Prisoner Project	California Trout	California Medical Association
California State Assembly	League of California Cities	Humboldt County Growers Alliance	Patient collectives	Equity Trade Network	Sierra Club California	American Lung Association
California Dept. of Cannabis Control	CA State Association of Counties	Sonoma County Cannabis Alliance		California NORML	California Water Boards	Association of Cannabinoid Specialists
California Dept. of Public Health	Rural County Representatives of California	Origins Council		Drug Policy Alliance	Pacific Forest Trust	Society of Cannabis Clinicians

Note: This table presents sample policy actors within advocacy coalitions and is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

The actors were analyzed using the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), which conceptualizes policy subsystems as composed of competing coalitions organized around shared belief systems. Guided by this framework, qualitative analysis was conducted using publicly

available sources, including legislative testimony, regulatory comments, advocacy reports, position statements, and media interviews. This analysis was used to identify recurring policy themes, including taxation, regulatory intensity, environmental protection, market access, affordability, public safety, and social equity.

Actors were then organized into preliminary clusters based on similarity in recurring policy themes. These clusters were further refined into advocacy coalitions by assessing alignment across the identified policy themes. Each coalition’s core beliefs were inferred by examining the problems actors emphasized, the policy solutions they proposed, and the outcomes they prioritized in public advocacy. As illustrated in Figure 3, these core beliefs were connected with advocacy coalition groups.

**Figure 3**  
*Coalition Core Beliefs*

<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Core Beliefs</b>
State Government & Agencies	Tax Revenue & Regulatory Control
Local Governments	Local Control & Public Safety
Licensed Cannabis Professionals	Profitability, Reduced Taxation, & Operations
Consumers	Low Prices & Accessibility
Social Equity Advocates	Reparative Justice & Ownership Opportunities
Environmental Advocates	Environmental Protections
Medical Advocates	Increased Medical & Scientific Research for Public Health

Several distinct coalitions emerged from this analysis, and the following examples illustrate a subset of coalitions identified in Figure 3. Government actors frequently emphasized regulatory oversight and public revenue generation. For example, Governor Newsom stated that California’s cannabis market is regulated to ensure safety, accountability, and environmental protection, while generating billions in revenue that funds education, public health, and environmental programs (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2026). Licensed cannabis businesses highlighted the need for reduced taxation and fewer regulatory barriers to improve market competitiveness. This concern is reflected in industry perspectives, as Jerred Kiloh argued that tax increases will “only make legal retailers’ lives harder” and prevent them from competing with illicit market prices (Cunningham & Gordon, 2025). Social equity advocates emphasized reparative justice and ownership opportunities for communities harmed by prohibition. For example, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) advocates for reducing structural barriers to entry in the legal cannabis industry for historically disenfranchised communities by lowering application fees (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, 2023). Environmental organizations focused on the ecological impacts of cannabis cultivation. Abandoned pesticide sprayers at illicit cannabis grow sites on public lands can be gnawed open by wildlife, releasing toxic chemicals into the environment that threaten animals and ecosystems (Becker, 2026). Together, these coalitions represent networks of actors with distinct policy beliefs about cannabis regulation in California, forming the basis for analyzing how groups compete to shape policy outcomes within the subsystem.

After identifying the advocacy coalitions, I reviewed all chaptered cannabis-related Assembly and Senate bills from the 2017–2018 legislative session onward, as this period followed the passage of Proposition 64. Chaptered refers to bills that successfully passed both

legislative chambers and were signed into law by the Governor. I evaluated the substance of each bill and analyzed which advocacy coalition’s core beliefs each one most directly aligns with. To connect the bills to the previously identified coalitions, I used thematic coding grounded in their core beliefs, mapping each bill’s policy outcome to the beliefs it most closely reflected. Given that, within the ACF, coalitions seek to translate their core beliefs into policy outcomes, this approach identified how many bills aligned with their core beliefs. In many cases, individual bills reflected multiple core beliefs simultaneously.

## Figure 4

### *California Chaptered Cannabis Bills Following Proposition 64*

Bill	Session	Bill Name	Advocacy Coalitions
AB 1159	2017-2018	Cannabis: legal services	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 133	2017-2018	Cannabis Regulation	State Government
AB 710	2017-2018	Cannabidiol (CBD) regulation	Consumers and Medical Advocates
AB 873	2017-2018	Department of Food and Agriculture: commercial cannabis activity inspectors: peace officer duties	State Government
AB 1527	2017-2018	Cannabis Control Appeals Panel creation	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 1741	2017-2018	Cannabis tax payment procedures	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 1793	2017-2018	Cannabis conviction resentencing / expungement	Social Equity Advocates
AB 2020	2017-2018	Cannabis: local jurisdiction licensees: temporary event license	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 2215	2017-2018	Veterinarians: cannabis: animals	Consumers and Medical Advocates
AB 3067	2017-2018	Internet: marketing: minors: cannabis	State Government and Medical Advocates
SB 311	2017-2018	Commercial cannabis activity: licensed distributors	Licensed Cannabis Professionals

SB 1294	2017-2018	Cannabis: state and local equity programs	Social Equity Advocates
AB 747	2017 -2018	State Water Resources Control Board: Administrative Hearings Office	Environmental Advocates
SB 1127	2017 -2018	State Government (Local Regulations)	Local Governments
AB 2402	2017 - 2018	Cannabis: personal information	Consumers
AB 2799	2017 - 2018	Adult-use cannabis and medicinal cannabis: license application: OSHA training	State Government
AB 2164	2017 - 2018	Local ordinances: fines and penalties: cannabis	Local Governments
SB 1459	2017-2018	Provisional cannabis licenses	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 3261	2017 - 2018	Cannabis (Agency Names)	State Government
AB 106	2017 -2018	Cannabis: licenses: criminal records	State Government
SB 94	2017 - 2018	Cannabis: medicinal and adult use	State Government
AB 2899	2017 - 2018	Cannabis: advertisements	State Government
AB 2914	2017 - 2018	Cannabis in alcoholic beverages	State Government
AB 2721	2017-2018	Cannabis: testing laboratories	State Government and Medical Advocates
AB 37	2019-2020	State tax deductions for cannabis businesses	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
SB 34	2019-2020	Medical cannabis compassionate donation program	Consumers and Medical Advocates
SB 67	2019-2020	Cannabis appellations of origin	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
SB 97	2019-2020	Cannabis regulatory trailer bill	State Government
AB 102	2019 - 2020	Retirement savings	Licensed Cannabis Professionals and Social Equity Advocates
AB 82	2019 - 2020	State government	State Government
SB 527	2019 - 2020	Local government: Williamson Act: cultivation of cannabis and hemp	Local Governments
AB 1291	2019 - 2020	Adult-use cannabis and medicinal cannabis: license application: labor peace agreements	State Government
AB 858	2019 - 2020	Cannabis: cultivation	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals

SB 595	2019 - 2020	Cannabis: state licensing fee waivers: needs-based applicants and licensees: local equity applicants and licensees	Social Equity Advocates
AB 1458	2019 - 2020	Cannabis testing laboratories (Edibles)	State Government and Medical Advocates
AB 657	2019 - 2020	Cannabis cultivation: county agricultural commissioners: reporting	State Government and Local Governments
AB 1525	2019 - 2020	Commercial cannabis activity: testing laboratories	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 404	2019 - 2020	Commercial cannabis activity: testing laboratories	State Government
SB 223	2019 - 2020	Pupil health: administration of medicinal cannabis: schoolsites	Local Governments and Medical Advocates
AB 420	2019 - 2020	The California Cannabis Research Program	Medical Advocates
AB 1872	2019 - 2020	Cannabis	State Government
AB 397	2019 - 2020	Vehicles: driving under the influence	Local Governments
Ab 1529	2019 - 2020	Cannabis vaporizing cartridges: universal symbol	State Government
AB 185	2019 - 2020	Cannabis: marketing	State Government
SB 1244	2019 - 2020	Cannabis testing laboratories	State Government and Medical Advocates
AB 141	2021-2022	Department of Cannabis Control: licensure: safety and quality assurance	State Government
AB 1706	2021-2022	Automatic sealing of cannabis convictions	Social Equity Advocates
SB 166	2021 - 2022	Department of Cannabis Control: licensure: fee waivers and deferrals	Licensed Cannabis Professionals and Social Equity Advocates
AB 1954	2021 - 2022	Physicians and surgeons: treatment and medication of patients using cannabis	Consumers
AB 1894	2021-2022	Integrated cannabis vaporizer: packaging, labeling, advertisement, and marketing	State Government and Environmental Advocates
AB 2188	2021-2022	Employment protections for off-duty cannabis use	Consumers
SB 1326	2021-2022	Interstate cannabis commerce agreements	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals

SB 1496	2021 - 2022	Taxation: tax, fee, and surcharge administration: insurance tax rates	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 287	2021 - 2022	Civil actions: statute of limitations	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 1305	2021 - 2022	The Medicinal and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act: exemptions	Licensed Cannabis Professionals and Medical Advocates
AB 2925	2021 - 2022	California Cannabis Tax Fund: spending reports	State Government
AB 2210	2021 - 2022	Cannabis: state temporary event licenses: venues licensed by the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control: unsold inventory	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
SB 544	2021 - 2022	Cannabis testing	State Government
SB 311	2021 - 2022	Compassionate Access to Medical Cannabis Act or Ryan's Law	Consumers and Medical Advocates
AB 1138	2021 - 2022	Unlawful cannabis activity: civil enforcement	Local Governments and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
SB 160	2021 - 2022	Department of Cannabis Control: licensure: appellations of origin: trade samples	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 195	2021 - 2022	Cannabis	State Government
SB 1186	2021 - 2022	Medicinal Cannabis Patients' Right of Access Act	Consumers and Medical Advocates
AB 1885	2021 - 2022	Cannabis and cannabis products: animals: veterinary medicine	Consumers and Medical Advocates
SB 988	2021 - 2022	Compassionate Access to Medical Cannabis Act or Ryan's Law	Consumers and Medical Advocates
AB 1646	2021 - 2022	Cannabis packaging: beverages	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 2155	2021 - 2022	Cannabis beverages	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 2568	2021 - 2022	Cannabis: insurance providers	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 1222	2021 - 2022	Cannabis packaging: beverages	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 1448	2023-2024	Local cannabis enforcement authority	Local Governments
AB 1775	2023-2024	Cannabis cafes/lounges legalization	Local Governments, Licensed Cannabis Professionals, and Consumers

AB 51	2023 - 2024	Cannabis provisional licenses: local equity applicants	Licensed Cannabis Professionals and Social Equity Advocates
AB 1021	2023 - 2024	Controlled substances: rescheduling	Medical Advocates
SB 622	2023-2024	Cannabis plant identification tracking	State Government
SB 700	2023-2024	Employment discrimination protections for cannabis users	Consumers
SB 833	2023-2024	Cannabis licensing: cultivation licenses: changing license type: inactive status	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
SB 753	2023-2024	Cannabis: water resources	Environmental Advocates
AB 128	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: background checks and cannabis event organizer license type	State Governments
AB 1684	2023 - 2024	Local ordinances: fines and penalties: cannabis	Local Governments
SB 1109	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: demographic information of license applicants	State Government
SB 1498	2023 - 2024	Cannabis and industrial hemp: advertising: civil action	State Government
AB 1126	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: citation and fine	State Government
AB 993	2023 - 2024	Cannabis Task Force	State Government
SB 302	2023 - 2024	Compassionate Access to Medical Cannabis Act	Consumers and Medical Advocates
SB 1059	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: local taxation: gross receipts	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 2643	2023 - 2024	Cannabis cultivation: environmental remediation	Environmental Advocates
AB 623	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: THC testing variances	State Government
AB 2555	2023 - 2024	Sales and use tax: exemption: medicinal cannabis: donations	Consumers
SB 1064	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: operator and separate premises license types: excessive concentration of licenses	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 1171	2023 - 2024	Cannabis: private right of action	Licensed Cannabis Professionals

SB 540	2023 - 2024	Cannabis and cannabis products: health warnings	Medical Advocates
AB 564	2025 - 2026	Cannabis: excise tax: rate increase suspension: report	Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 8	2025 - 2026	Cannabis: cannabinoids: industrial hemp	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
AB 378	2025 - 2026	Online marketplaces: illicit cannabis: reporting and liability	State Government and Licensed Cannabis Professionals
SB 141	2025 - 2026	California Cannabis Tax Fund: Department of Cannabis Control: Board of State and Community Corrections grants	State Government
AB 1103	2025 - 2026	Controlled substances: research	Medical Advocates

### **Quantifying Influence: Coalitions and Legislative Results**

As illustrated in Figure 5, analysis of the dataset indicates that the advocacy coalitions with the highest number of chaptered cannabis-related bills that aligned with their core beliefs were the state government and agencies (44 bills) and licensed cannabis professionals (32 bills).

## Figure 5

### *Chaptered California Cannabis Bill Analysis*

<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Bills Aligned with Core Beliefs</b>
State Government & Agencies	44
Licensed Cannabis Professionals	32
Medical Advocates	18
Consumers	14
Local Governments	10
Social Equity Advocates	7
Environmental Advocates	4
<hr/>	
<b>Number of bills with cross-coalition core beliefs</b>	<b>31</b>

This indicates that California’s cannabis policymaking process is less pluralistic than initially assumed and is instead largely shaped by institutional authority and economic interests. When the same coalitions consistently see chaptered legislation that reflects their core beliefs, it suggests that they are not only participating in policymaking but also influencing the policy agenda. This concentration raises important questions about equity in agenda-setting. If policymaking were more pluralistic, a wider range of coalitions would be reflected in both the volume and direction of legislation. While this concentration of authority may contribute to regulatory stability, it also limits the diversity of perspectives represented in policy outcomes.

At the same time, the presence of 31 enacted bills that reflect cross-coalition core beliefs

points to the importance of negotiation and collaboration. These bills likely emerged through co-sponsorship, amendments, and compromise during the legislative process. Collaboration reduces conflict among coalitions, helping prevent delays and gridlock. However, this process also reinforces the incremental nature of policymaking. Even in a progressive state like California, policy change tends to occur gradually as coalitions adjust their positions to reach agreement. The amount of cross-coalition legislation also suggests that successful chaptered bills fall within an acceptable range of disagreement. Even when a bill does not fully reflect a coalition's core beliefs, its passage indicates that it does not provoke strong enough opposition to mobilize influential counter-advocacy. Policymaking outcomes are therefore shaped not only by coalition influence but also by strategic framing, where coalitions support bills that are compromises rather than ideals.

This analysis does have limitations. One limitation of this analysis is that the number of enacted bills attributed to each coalition does not fully capture their relative influence. If I were to continue this research, I would rate the bill's influence on a scale of 1 to 5 to capture that legislative impact varies significantly. Some coalitions may advance numerous bills that produce incremental adjustments, while others may pass fewer bills that result in substantial policy change. For example, the core beliefs of social equity advocates were associated with only seven enacted bills, yet one of these, Senator Steven Bradford's S.B. 1294 (Cannabis: state and local equity programs), represents a case of low-volume, high-impact influence. This bill allocated funding for equity programs, supported local initiatives, and aimed to diversify the cannabis industry. Its passage marks a significant policy achievement that closely aligns with the coalition's core goals. This example demonstrates that policy influence cannot be measured solely by bill quantity. A related limitation is that some forms of influence are difficult to

capture within a cannabis subsystem. Environmental concerns, for instance, are often addressed in other subsystems such as water regulation and land use. As a result, the role of environmental coalitions may be underrepresented in this analysis, as it focused solely on cannabis legislation, even though their influence may be evident in related policy subsystems.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis reinforces the ACF expectation that policy change emerges from competition among belief-driven coalitions, while also indicating that coalitions differ in their ability to convert those beliefs into legislative outcomes. In other words, coalition influence is not evenly distributed across the policy subsystem. These findings show that cannabis policy outcomes are not simply the product of neutral legislative processes. They emerge from competition among advocacy coalitions with differing core beliefs, resources, and strategies, operating within institutions that unevenly distribute influence.

Coalitions such as social equity advocates demonstrate the capacity to achieve high-impact policy change in targeted areas, even if they do not consistently shape the broader cannabis legislative agenda. This indicates that influence operates along multiple dimensions, including both the frequency of legislative outcomes and the substantive impact of individual policies. Future research could strengthen this analysis by incorporating measures of legislative impact alongside bill frequency. Not all enacted legislation carries equal weight, and evaluating the relative significance of bills would provide a more complete picture of coalition influence within the cannabis policy subsystem.

Policymakers seeking more equitable cannabis policy outcomes may need to create

institutional mechanisms that amplify underrepresented coalitions rather than relying solely on natural ACF competition. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for understanding how policy change occurs and for designing more equitable, effective, and transparent policymaking processes in California's cannabis sector.

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**Artifact One: The Illicit Cultivation and Sale of Cannabis in California**

Original submission: November 2022 as the final paper for PPA 200, taught by Professor Amal Kumar

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## **Standard Terms**

*Standard terms related to the cultivation and sale of cannabis will be defined to facilitate understanding of this paper's content.*

A Cannabinoid is a chemical compound found in cannabis plants that affects the human body by binding to its cannabinoid receptor system. Cannabis research focuses on two cannabinoids: Cannabidiol and Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol. Cannabidiol (CBD) is a cannabinoid found in cannabis that does not produce psychoactive effects. Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the primary psychoactive cannabinoid present in cannabis (Mason et al., 2021).

Hemp and marijuana are both derived from cannabis, but they are classified differently based on THC content. Hemp is a type of cannabis plant that contains no more than 0.3% THC and does not produce psychoactive effects (Johnson, 2018). It is cultivated for fiber, textiles, food, and CBD products. Marijuana contains higher concentrations of THC and produces psychoactive effects.

Cannabis is classified into two species: Indica and Sativa. Indica plants tend to be short and bushy, with wide, dark green leaves (Dresden, 2020). Consumers associate Indica with sedative and relaxing effects. Sativa plants are slim, tall plants with bright green leaves. Consumers associate Sativa with uplifting, stimulating, and energizing effects. Cannabis is consumed in multiple forms, such as smoking, incorporating it into edibles, vaporizing, brewing it as tea, or eating the plant directly (Davis, 2020).

## Introduction

In 2016, Proposition 64 gave Californian voters the power to legalize recreational cannabis for adults 21 and older. After Proposition 64 passed, it paved the way for a legal recreational cannabis industry, including cultivation, manufacturing, retail, and transportation. While legalizing recreational cannabis marked a significant milestone, the four-year-old legal industry has struggled to thrive under the developed taxation and regulatory systems. Cannabis products are taxed at multiple levels: 15% on retail sales, \$9.25 per ounce for flowers, and \$2.75 per ounce for leaves (Harris, 2016). In addition to state-level regulation, cannabis may be subject to local taxes and bans under municipal or county ordinances. The Department of Cannabis Control reports that 56% of California's cities and counties prohibit all cannabis businesses. Regulation of the cannabis industry at multiple levels has resulted in a patchwork regulatory system. Furthermore, these newly established businesses cannot claim many standard tax deductions because cannabis remains illegal at the federal level.

Proposition 64 did not eliminate the illicit cannabis industry. In addition to navigating administrative challenges, the legal cannabis industry faces significant competition from its illegal counterpart. The illicit cannabis industry functions outside the newly established regulatory framework. The absence of tax and licensing fees gives these entities greater flexibility in managing their pricing strategies, often enabling them to undercut the legal cannabis market. If the legal cannabis industry offered these lower prices, it would not be able to sustain itself. In California, possessing more cannabis than the legal limit or possessing it with the intent to sell is typically considered a misdemeanor. This type of offense is not often a strong deterrent. The illicit cannabis industry is a wicked problem. This paper examines the history of cannabis in California, analyzes how key stakeholders have framed the issue, applies the multiple-streams framework, explores the role of bureaucratic and administrative processes,

and predicts policy outcomes through the lens of public value governance.

## **Historical Context: Cannabis in California**

California's natural environment was conducive to the cultivation of cannabis long before the region came to be known as California. During the 1770s, colonial Spain invested in hemp production in New Spain to generate revenue from raw materials (Ingram, 2008). Spanish hemp producers shared their cultivation knowledge with local farmers to support the production of fiber and rope. Hemp cultivation began at the missions in the 1790s and later spread to other areas of the territory. By 1810, California was producing approximately 220,000 pounds of cannabis.

A 1913 amendment to the poison regulation laws by the California Board of Pharmacy criminalized cannabis in California (Gieringer, 1999). The Poison and Pharmacy Act was amended by the legislature in 1907 to include cannabis, effectively criminalizing its cultivation and sale. This was challenged in 1972 when Proposition 19 sought to legalize the cultivation, possession, and consumption of cannabis for personal use for adults 18 years or older (The University of California, Hastings College of the Law, 1972). Ultimately, Proposition 19 failed to pass.

In 1991, San Francisco adopted Proposition P, which legalized the medicinal use of cannabis and removed prescription penalties for medical professionals (Californians for Compassionate Use, 1991). Proposition P helped build statewide support for the legalization of medicinal cannabis, paving the way for Proposition 215, which successfully decriminalized its possession and use. The state government revisited cannabis public policy in 2010 with Senate Bill 1449, championed by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, which altered the misdemeanor punishment to an infraction for possessing less than an ounce of cannabis unrelated to medicinal legality (McCormick, 2021). In 2010, the California state government

revisited cannabis policy with Senate Bill 1449, championed by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. The bill reclassified the possession of less than an ounce of cannabis from a misdemeanor to an infraction, regardless of the legality of medicinal use. Public opinion on recreational cannabis became more positive in the years leading up to 2016, ultimately resulting in the passage of Proposition 64.

## **Wicked Problems & Stakeholders**

Proposition 64 made significant strides in judicial reform but did little to eliminate the wicked problem. The illicit sale and cultivation of cannabis in California remains a persistent problem. Wicked problems are characterized by their persistence and complexity, meaning they must be approached differently. In *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*, Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber compare governmental planning to the natural sciences, noting that, unlike scientists who can rely on clear formulas and methodologies, planners face far less straightforward work. They explain, “As distinguished from problems in the natural sciences, which are definable and separable and may have solutions that are findable, the problems of governmental planning—and especially those of social or policy planning—are ill-defined; and they rely upon elusive political judgment for resolution” (Rittel & Webber, 1973). From this perspective, Rittel and Webber introduce the concept of wicked problems: policy issues that are ambiguous, resist clear-cut solutions, and must be addressed uniquely.

Stakeholders are those invested in and concerned about a particular policy problem. Stakeholders can include individuals or organizations, such as governments, coalitions, administrative agencies, or other relevant entities. Stakeholders can increase the complexity of wicked problems by framing the same issue in different ways. The legal cannabis industry, state government, and federal government are three stakeholders in this wicked problem. The

following subsections examine how different stakeholders frame the illicit cannabis market in California.

## **The Legal Cannabis Industry**

The legal cannabis industry believes that regulations and government inaction are why cannabis continues to be cultivated and sold illegally in California. Barriers to entry and obstacles to long-term sustainability restrict participation in the legal market and inadvertently support the illegal market. These barriers encompass both bureaucratic regulations, administrative processes, and upfront costs, including high licensing fees. For example, cannabis cultivators must pay state license application fees ranging from \$135 to \$8,655 and annual state license fees ranging from \$1,205 to \$77,905, depending on the facility's size and location (Department of Cannabis Control, State of California). Dispensary operators must pay a non-refundable \$1,000 state license application fee and annual license fees ranging from \$2,500 to \$120,000, depending on yearly sales. Existing regulatory frameworks have established a rigorous entry process for participants in the legal cannabis industry. This complexity often drives cultivators, transporters, and retailers to engage in illicit activities, as compliance barriers can be prohibitively high. The legal market lacks the necessary resources to compete against the illicit cannabis market effectively. Stakeholders may organize collectively to bolster their influence and enhance their political power. The California Cannabis Industry Association has developed a legislative policy agenda to correspond with this framing (O’Gorman Jenkins, 2022). The policy agenda includes the following key points: eliminating the tax on cannabis cultivation, transferring the responsibility for cannabis excise taxes from distributors to retailers, and creating tax credits for the cannabis industry.

## **The State Government**

The state government addresses the illegal cannabis market through its agencies. The state government imposes taxes on legal cannabis to generate revenue, which is earmarked for various purposes, including funding cannabis research, covering administrative expenditures, and empowering enforcement actions against illegal cannabis cultivation (Koseff, 2022). From a policy perspective, the illicit cannabis market can be viewed as an ongoing issue that the state has been dealing with. In response, the state government aims to tackle illicit cannabis cultivation and sales through legal apprehension. California is expanding its seasonal illicit cannabis eradication program to a year-round program (McGreevy, 2019). The state is investing in its ability to prosecute illegal trade, environmental violations linked to cannabis cultivation, and labor law violations.

Some lawmakers in the state are trying to address the complicated issues surrounding the illicit cannabis industry. Recently, Senator Nancy Skinner introduced Senate Bill 398. This bill aims to simplify the rules and regulations governing the legal growth and sale of cannabis by making it easier for businesses to obtain the necessary licenses (McGuire, 2021). Senate Bill 398 would allow local governments to contract with the California Bureau for a minimum of 5 years to provide administrative services, such as issuing cannabis licenses for commercial use and permitting. Three state agencies currently regulate the cannabis industry in California: the Bureau of Cannabis Control, CalCannabis Cultivation Licensing, and the Manufactured Cannabis Safety Branch (McCormick, 2021). In 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom signed several state measures to support the cannabis industry (Newsom, 2022). Senate Bill 1326 allows the state to enter into agreements with other states to support interstate cannabis business and transactions. Senate Bill 1186 prevents the prohibition of medicinal cannabis delivery services. Assembly Bill 1706 seals old cannabis convictions. Assembly Bill 2188 protects the labor force

from discrimination for cannabis use away from the workplace.

## **The Federal Government**

The federal government approaches the issue of cannabis by maintaining its criminalization. Consequently, the illicit cannabis industry remains a subject for ongoing attention. Cannabis criminalization persists at the federal level in the United States. Federalism allows states like California to adopt statutes that differ from those enacted by the national legislature. The federal Controlled Substances Act, adopted in 1970, criminalizes cannabis as a Schedule 1 drug substance substantiated by the potential risks for psychological dependence and no recognized medical utility (United States Drug Enforcement Administration). The federal penalties for cannabis depend on criminal history and the amount of cannabis possessed or sold. Federal criminal penalties for cannabis range from \$1,000 fines to life in prison (McElfresh, 2018). Comparing the state and federal government framings, stakeholders establish contrasting truths about cannabis and its role in society. The way the federal government views illicit cannabis affects California significantly. Federal criminalization creates obstacles, such as preventing cannabis businesses from using traditional banks.

## **Multiple-Streams Framework**

Colorado's Amendment 64 and Washington's Initiative 502 built momentum for cannabis policy in 2012 by implementing state policy to legalize the substance (Hudak & Wallach, 2016). This established a precedent for enacting cannabis policy in other states. In 2016, California voters approved Proposition 64, allowing the state to adopt its own cannabis legalization policy (Harris, 2016). The Multiple-Streams Framework highlights the necessary conditions for significant policy change (Cairney, 2013). John Kingdon developed the Multiple-

Streams Framework in 1984. This conceptual structure identifies three streams that occur concurrently under certain conditions, creating a policy window. A policy window results in an opportunity to place a policy problem on a governing body's policy agenda. In the Multiple-Streams Framework, the problem, policy, and political streams shift from seeming independence toward coordinated collaboration to achieve policy change. The next section will present these three streams and apply the Multiple-Streams Framework to the wicked problem of the illicit cultivation and sale of cannabis in California.

Numerous complex social realities can be classified as situations that continue to contribute to challenging conditions due to inaction. A situation becomes a problem when decisive steps are taken to address these underlying issues. Resolving wicked problems requires careful consideration of feasibility and a focus on improving the quality of life rather than eliminating the problems altogether. In the Multiple-Streams Framework, the problem stream addresses bounded rationality, a human constraint in which cognitive capacity limits the amount of information used in decision-making (Cairney, 2013). There is no universal formula for policymakers to rank the importance and urgency of the problems their constituencies face. As a result of bounded rationality, problem advocates must utilize problem framing to highlight problem characteristics such as importance and urgency. In addition to problem framing, problems may garner policymakers' attention through a crisis. Presentism perpetuates a crisis's ability to move policymakers toward action by reinforcing the perception that lived experiences are exceptionally tumultuous (Spector, 2014). Presentism may help advocates build urgency and momentum for their respective problems if a crisis arises. The policy stream collaborates with the problem stream to identify policy solutions for specific problems. Before this collaboration, policy entrepreneurs developed policy solutions to anticipate problems that advocates and policymakers may face in the future (Cairney, 2013). Policy feedback and the current political

climate inform policy entrepreneurs about the feasibility of proposed policy solutions. Policy entrepreneurs must consider political feasibility and ensure that proposed solutions are acceptable to advocates and policymakers. The political stream sees policymakers recognize problems presented by advocates in the problem stream and accept a proposed solution from policy entrepreneurs. The collaboration among these three streams opens a policy window. Policymakers may choose to place a policy solution in relation to a problem on a policy agenda.

Proposition 64 became conceivable when the three streams collaborated to open a policy window to legalize recreational cannabis and regulate the cannabis industry (Harris, 2016). In the problem stream, problem advocates called attention to the growing unregulated cannabis industry operating illicitly and equity issues associated with the incarceration of cannabis convictions. Problem advocates championed these problems through a retrospective lens, citing the inefficiencies of cannabis criminalization and prohibition in California. The adoption of cannabis in other states, such as Colorado and Washington, helped problem advocates build the momentum needed to garner policymakers' attention (Hudak & Wallach, 2016). In the policy stream, policy entrepreneurs used precedent cannabis policy to draft the language of Proposition 64 and to develop regulatory frameworks for the cannabis industry. Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom led policymakers in the political stream, recognizing the unregulated cannabis industry and cannabis incarceration as problems and accepting Proposition 64 as the solution policymakers would campaign for (Koseff, 2022). Policy analysts have retrospectively analyzed Proposition 64, accounting for subsequent policy developments and identifying implementation challenges. As a result, legal cannabis industry professionals currently find themselves in the problem stream of the Multiple-Streams Framework, working to highlight industry challenges stemming from cannabis regulation under Proposition 64. The legal cannabis industry is particularly concerned with the growing illicit cannabis market and inaction from the state

government. California's illicit market is estimated to be worth \$8 billion annually (Nieves, 2021). This is significant because it is approximately double the volume of the legal market created by Proposition 64. Legal cannabis industry professionals hope a 2021 lawsuit against the Department of Cannabis Control will serve as a catalyst and garner support to reform current cannabis regulations (Roberts, 2021). The lawsuit seeks a court injunction to compel the Department of Cannabis Control to take action against an alleged illicit cannabis distribution network operating in California that is hurting the legal market's ability to produce profit. The Department of Cannabis Control and policymakers in the political stream are currently unwilling to collaborate with industry professionals in the problem stream. Current conditions prevent proposing a solution from the policy stream and opening a policy window for cannabis regulation reform. Cannabis industry professionals hope the conditions shift to allow for collaboration among the three streams of the Multiple-Streams Framework.

## **Administrative Frameworks**

California established essential bureaucratic administrative processes to regulate the emerging legal cannabis industry. Bureaucracy is an administrative management style that places bureau files at the center of effective administrative operations (Weber, 2013). Rather than depend on an individual's ability to execute tasks, bureaucracy values institutional knowledge and the ability to replicate processes. Bureaucracy combats the aforementioned bounded rationality of humans through established processes that can be applied repeatedly. Given the emphasis on processes, bureaucratic management depends on procedural justice. Procedural justice holds that the procedures used by a bureaucracy are fair and impartial. Bureaucracy was used as a framework for developing a regulated cannabis industry because bureaucratic administrative management styles have traditionally been used in government operations. The state of California funded the creation of a new bureau to regulate the legal cannabis industry

(Department of Cannabis Control, State of California). This bureau is the Department of Cannabis Control, charged by the state with regulating legal cannabis, including licensing and investigating complaints about illicit cannabis. The use of bureaucracy to regulate the cannabis industry has been unsuccessful because it is limited in its ability to address equity issues in an impactful manner. The regulation of cannabis resulted in the development of regulatory frameworks, including taxation structures and licensing procedures. As a result of the long history of criminalization, the illicit cannabis industry was well established when the state government began regulating it. The transition from illicit operations to the legal cannabis industry for cannabis cultivators, distributors, and sellers proved challenging. Cannabis industry professionals applying for licensing must be able to navigate the Department of Cannabis Control, a bureaucratic organization, and allocate significant financial resources toward licensing fees. The state presented equity pledges to the cannabis industry and those incarcerated for cannabis-related crimes that bureaucratic administrative management has been unable to fulfill (Koseff, 2022).

To address the shortcomings of the current bureaucratic management of the legal cannabis industry, the state government should utilize public value governance as a new administrative management framework (Bryson, 2014). Public value governance is an emerging approach to governance that embraces collaboration between government entities and the public in decision-making. The issues experienced by the cannabis industry are growing increasingly complex, and the current bureaucratic administrative framework is ill-equipped to address the needs of the cannabis industry. Addressing the critical analysis of current bureaucratic management, public value governance enables collaborative processes that incorporate dialogue on equity issues experienced by the cannabis industry, such as the need to develop tax credits. Collaboration will be integral to mediation between the state and the legal cannabis industry.

Public value governance centers its management style on public values, with the government acting as a guarantor of those values. Opening the Department of Cannabis Control to collaborative relationships with the legal cannabis industry and the public would result in regulatory processes informed by public values.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the illicit cultivation and sale of cannabis in California is a wicked problem that the state government attempted to solve with the implementation of Proposition 64. Indicative of the wickedness of this problem, this solution proved unsuccessful, leading to subsequent policy problems that must now be addressed. To summarize, this paper presented the history of cannabis in California, analyzed stakeholder framing, applied the multiple-streams framework, examined the impact of bureaucratic administrative processes, and predicted the outcomes of applying public value governance. The illicit cannabis industry is set to continue to outpace the legal cannabis industry unless action is taken to minimize the impact of this wicked problem on the legal cannabis industry.

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*Artifact Two:*

**Cannabis in California: Understanding Regulatory Barriers in Cannabis Cultivation**

Original submission: December 2023 as the final research prospectus for PPA 205, taught by  
Professor Ted Lascher

Revised for portfolio: May 2026

## **Introduction & Background**

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is a plant that is consumed for its psychoactive properties. California's natural characteristics make it well-suited to cannabis cultivation. Some regions of California are particularly favorable, such as the Emerald Triangle. Located in Northern California, the Emerald Triangle has long been the epicenter of cannabis cultivation. This is due to its soil, temperate climate, precipitation, and favorable winds. The Emerald Triangle is comparable to how the natural characteristics of Napa Valley make it well-suited for viticulture, the process of growing grapes.

Whether consumers are smoking cannabis or ingesting edibles, there has been a surge in consumption rates. This surge is attributed to the legalization of recreational marijuana use in many states. In 2016, Proposition 64 legalized the recreational use of cannabis in California. This increased the number of licensed cultivators in California. Cannabis has not been subject to cultivation regulations for as long as other agricultural goods. California sets the precedent for progressive policy decisions, serving as a prototype for the United States. California has been a pioneer in developing regulatory practices for cannabis.

Cannabis has an extensive and tumultuous history in California. It was first introduced to California by Colonial Spain in the 1700s. At this point in history, cannabis was predominantly used to create hemp, a raw material. California's cannabis history carries the wounds of its prohibition era. During this time, the state and federal governments used militant force to raid cannabis grow sites in Northern California in the 1970s. This era is marked by significant conflict and violence against the cannabis community. In the criminal justice system, cannabis-related incarceration has disproportionately impacted low-income and BIPOC communities.

This history is significant because there has been a transformative shift in the relationship between government and cannabis. The violent history of cannabis prohibition contrasts with the contemporary era of recreational consumption. The past can not be erased. This history has resulted in mistrust and resentment of the government among cannabis cultivators. Collaboration between cannabis cultivators and the government is critical for the success of the legal cannabis industry. The current lack of trust from cannabis cultivators puts the legal cannabis industry at a disadvantage. In the Emerald Triangle, there are long-time cannabis cultivators who hold an abundance of knowledge related to its cultivation, long-term consumption effects, and safety practices. However, these cultivators remain an untapped resource for the government due to the history of violent cannabis prohibition. Increasing government trust among cannabis cultivators is critical for the development of cannabis literature and for the future of the legal cannabis industry. To initiate progress, the government should build public trust through goodwill regulatory practices. To do this, we must learn what cannabis cultivators experience.

This research prospectus explores the question: “What regulatory barriers do cannabis cultivators in California experience?” The following research prospectus describes the current landscape of cannabis literature and proposes conducting exploratory research to examine the regulatory barriers that cannabis cultivators face.

## Literature Review

Cannabis is under-researched. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of literature on cannabis regulation. This results in a literature gap. This section will discuss the factors contributing to the scarcity of available cannabis literature and describe the available literature.

Access to communities is essential for producing meaningful research. Qualitative research efforts are limited by the weariness of the cannabis community. The contentious history of cannabis prohibition has made accessing this community very difficult. A stigma surrounding cannabis still exists, and I suspect that the cannabis community is not confident that researchers are conducting unbiased studies. For similar reasons, quantitative data is lacking in databases.

Cannabis continues to be illegal at the federal level. This results in a complex clash between federal and state laws. For example, possession of cannabis for recreational use is legal in California, but Sacramento State University students may not possess cannabis on campus due to institutional federal funding. Researchers may decide not to pursue research due to the complexity of navigating cannabis legality. It may also be difficult to use federal grants to fund their research.

The available cannabis literature provides insight into cannabis stigma, the financial barriers that exist in the cannabis industry, and explores the need for federal legalization. Ekaterina Katya Moiseeva studies the impact the War on Drugs has had on the lingering stereotypes about cannabis in her article, “The Logic of NIMBYism: Class, Race, and Stigma in the Making of California’s Legal Cannabis Market”. She finds that stereotypes held by NIMBYS are hindering the growth of the cannabis industry (Moiseeva, 2023). The author borrows the term NIMBYISM from housing literature. NIMBYISM is commonly used to describe opposition to

housing development initiatives. Taylor Giamo, Margaret Jodlowski, Parisa Kavousi, Zoë Plakias, and Keith Taylor studied the financial barriers that limit the legal cannabis market in their article, “On the money: characterizing banking and lending in the California cannabis industry”. Their study found that cannabis professionals have to resort to alternative financing practices because of their inability to use traditional finance resources such as banks or credit unions (Plakias et al., 2022). Daniel J. Mallinson and A. Lee Hannah study the impact that federal legalization could have on the cannabis community in their article, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Cannabis Policy in the United States: Challenges and Opportunities for Public Administration and Policy”. This article explored the influence states could have on federal cannabis legalization. They look at California’s history in setting the precedent for medical cannabis legalization as an example of this (Mallinson & Hannah, 2023). The authors contribute to cannabis literature by highlighting the complexities of federal and state cannabis laws. While the current state of the cannabis literature is limited, the available research supports our identification of future studies needed to address the literature gap.

## **Research Approach**

The following section proposes using exploratory research to examine the regulatory barriers that cannabis cultivators face. Exploratory research is the most appropriate method to address my research question, as we currently know little about this topic. Considering the limited existing cannabis literature, exploratory research has the potential to enhance the academic community’s understanding of the experiences of cannabis cultivators. In anticipation of subsequent research, this exploratory study aims to identify the regulatory barriers that cannabis cultivators face. With

this information available, future explanatory studies could research *why* those barriers exist. The ultimate goal is for the combined research to inform policy decisions on cannabis cultivation.

The proposed exploratory study will use interviews as its data collection method. Table 1 presents the questions that would be used during the conducted interviews:

1. How long have you worked in cannabis cultivation?
2. How did you become involved in the cannabis industry?
3. Have you been licensed to cultivate cannabis?
3a. If they have - Can you describe what the experience of obtaining a cultivation license is like?
3b. If they have not - What has stopped you from being licensed?
4. Have you experienced regulatory barriers?
4a. If they have - What are those barriers?
4b. If they have - How have these barriers impacted you?

These questions aim to understand how cannabis regulations, the independent variable, affect compliance, the dependent variable. Using interviews to collect qualitative data allows participants to provide as much information as they wish. This data collection method was selected over surveys because it allows participants to provide nuanced, in-depth responses to questions and fosters an open environment for discussing a sensitive topic surrounded by stigma. Interviews would also allow me to ask for clarification on any answers provided.

As a Cal Poly Humboldt alumnus, I am interested in collaborating with the university's cannabis department. California Polytechnic State University, Humboldt, offers a Bachelor of

Arts in Cannabis Studies. I would like to meet with the department's faculty to propose a collaboration on this exploratory study. Subsequently, I would collaborate with the department to develop a list of cannabis cultivators in California to contact. I would reach out to cannabis cultivators using emails and offer to meet using Zoom or over a phone call. I want to offer these interview formats to make participating as easy as possible. This study would use the snowball sampling method to recruit additional participants. Interviews promote human connection, making it easier for participants to recommend leads. I would then convert the collected qualitative data into quantitative data by creating a figure showing the frequency with which a theme or topic is mentioned. For example, if many cannabis cultivators express that the cost of license applications is preventing them from becoming licensed, I would quantify the number of times that barrier is brought up during interviews. I would be surprised to find that no regulatory barriers exist. This would be surprising, as California's cannabis regulatory framework has not reached its maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

## **Limitations**

With substantial funding and resources, an online survey could be conducted on a sample size of cannabis cultivators in California. There were 6,881 licensed cannabis cultivators in California in 2022 (Black, 2023). A sample size of 364 cannabis cultivators in California could participate in a survey. This sample size would provide insight into the regulatory barriers at the 95% confidence level. Exploratory research and a survey of this kind would provide valuable insight and detailed qualitative data. Yet, the proposed exploratory study in this research prospectus is resource-

limited. The proposed research is constrained by the resources of a graduate student. Though limited in its scope and capabilities, the study cannot proceed without preliminary data.

The proposed research is also susceptible to respondent bias. I suspect that respondents are unlikely to report being completely satisfied with cannabis regulation. Regulating cannabis is a difficult task, and licensees are not eager to be regulated by government agencies. I anticipate this is exacerbated by the history of cannabis in California. Interview participants may express dissatisfaction with the Department of Cannabis Control due to their personal beliefs about regulation, rather than specific regulatory practices.

## **Conclusion**

This research prospectus proposes to examine the question: “What regulatory barriers do cannabis cultivators in California experience?” It described the current landscape of cannabis literature and proposed using exploratory research to learn about the regulatory barriers cannabis cultivators experience. The proposed research aims to provide valuable insights into the limited cannabis literature. The collected qualitative data would then be converted into quantitative data by creating a figure showing the frequency with which a theme or topic is raised. While the current state of cannabis literature is limited, we have the opportunity to learn more and potentially begin to heal a history marked by violence and mistrust.

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Artifact Three:

A Literature Review on the Barriers to Cannabis Cultivation

Original submission: December 2023 as the final paper for PPA 240A, taught by Professor  
Ahrum Chang

Revised for portfolio: May 2026

## Standard Terms and History

An understanding of commonly used terminology in cannabis research shapes understanding and discourse. Cannabis is a widely consumed psychoactive drug. There are two species of cannabis: Indica and Sativa. The Indica cannabis plant is short and bushy, featuring broad, dark leaves that consumers associate with a relaxing effect (Dresden, 2020). The Sativa cannabis plant is tall and slender, with bright green leaves uplifting its consumers. Cannabis can be consumed in various forms, including edibles, smoking, preparing teas, or eating parts of the plant. It is used for both medicinal and recreational purposes.

Understanding the shifting legal and social landscape of cannabis in California reveals a complex legal history that resulted in significant gaps in academic research that are only now beginning to close after the 2016 legalization of recreational cannabis. Proposition 215, known as the Compassionate Use Act of 1996, increased legal access to medical-use cannabis, but recreational-use of cannabis remained prohibited. Many Californians were incarcerated for cannabis related crimes. The history of the War on Drugs, combined with societal stigma and the threat of incarceration, fostered a secretive and tightly guarded illegal cannabis industry. For example, in the 1990s, federal and state governments worked together to utilize military force in raiding cannabis grows located in the Emerald Triangle, which is the center of the cannabis industry. The Emerald Triangle is a geographic region encompassing Humboldt, Mendocino, and Trinity Counties. Northern California features remote stretches of redwood forest along rivers. These landscapes provided concealment, allowing illegal cannabis operations to remain hidden from law enforcement. The geographic isolation also contributed to a culture of secrecy, with locals resistant to outside presence or oversight. In the 1960s, this region became home to many

counterculturists opposed to war, commercialism, and government. As a result of this history, many cannabis cultivators distrust not only government authorities but also outside researchers, fearing that the information they provide could expose them to risk.

This history has resulted in mistrust between cannabis cultivators and the government. In 2016, public opinion about the recreational adult use of cannabis shifted progressively. Proposition 64 legalized the possession and consumption of cannabis for recreational use. Proposition 64 was the culmination of a long California history with cannabis. Subsequently, it required the state government and cannabis cultivators to collaborate and nurture a legal cannabis market. This task appears idealistic when recalling the history of cannabis in California.

## **Introduction**

This paper explores the following research question: “What administrative barriers exist in the Department of Cannabis Control's cannabis licensing framework? How can the department better serve cannabis cultivators?” Proposition 64 increased the number of licensed cultivators in California. I am interested in learning how California can better serve its cannabis cultivators. This research topic is important because of California’s history of cannabis criminalization. I want to understand how California can increase public trust among cannabis cultivators while the legal cannabis market is young. With its history of mistreating cannabis cultivators, California must work to minimize regulatory burdens to increase public trust. This paper will review relevant cannabis literature, compare and contrast these works to understand their relationships, and discuss gaps in the cannabis literature.

## Current Cannabis Literature

Hekia Bodwitch, Michael Polson, Eric Biber, Gordon M. Hickey, and Van Butsic research why cannabis cultivators don't participate in the legal market in their article, "Why comply? Farmer motivations and barriers in cannabis agriculture". The authors administered an anonymous survey to cannabis cultivators in California and found that one-third of the 362 respondents had never applied for licensure (Bodwitch et al., 2021). The survey found that cannabis cultivators experienced difficulty overcoming participatory barriers in the legal market. These included financial, administrative, and psychological barriers. This article contributes to cannabis literature by concluding that mitigating administrative barriers should be explored to increase legal compliance. The authors also recommend developing agricultural resources and supporting cannabis cultivator collectives. The explanatory research the authors conducted expands our understanding of the barriers that prevent cannabis cultivators from complying with licensure requirements. The survey data provides greater insight into the regulatory experiences of cannabis cultivators. Further studies could examine how regulatory changes affect compliance with licensure requirements among cannabis cultivators.

Despite shifting attitudes, cannabis stigma persists. In her article, "The Logic of NIMBYism: Class, Race, and Stigma in the Making of California's Legal Cannabis Market", Ekaterina Katya Moiseeva studies the lingering impact of the War on Drugs and the stereotypes about cannabis that continue to be perpetuated. Moiseeva finds that cannabis legalization, while a significant step, did not dismantle the deeply ingrained preconceptions of cannabis. Her article examines why there is a gap between the community that has a high demand for cannabis products, middle-class white consumers, and the location of cannabis supply, lower-income

communities (Moiseeva, 2023). Moiseeva concludes that NIMBYISM, commonly used to describe opposition to housing development initiatives, is a factor contributing to hindering the growth of the cannabis industry. A predominant strength of this article is that it applies the well-researched concept of NIMBYISM, a term from the housing literature, to the cannabis literature. Moiseeva draws similarities between attitudes toward cannabis and attitudes toward affordable housing developments. This article examines the cultural barriers facing the cannabis industry.

Taylor Giamo, Margaret Jodlowski, Parisa Kavousi, Zoë Plakias, and Keith Taylor examine the financial barriers that constrain the legal cannabis market. The authors focused on interviewing stakeholders in the Emerald Triangle in their article, “On the money: characterizing banking and lending in the California cannabis industry”. The study found that cannabis professionals use alternative financing practices due to their inability to access traditional financial resources such as banks or credit unions (Plakias et al., 2022). This study contributes to the findings in “Why comply? Farmer motivations and barriers in cannabis agriculture”, by focusing on the barriers created by financial institutions. Cannabis professionals are unable to access critical finance services provided to professionals in every other sector. The conflict arising from differences in federal and state cannabis legalization is important to study. Banks and other financial institutions will not do business with the cannabis market. This study indicates the need to evaluate federal cannabis laws to expand access to financial resources. Although not directly related to administrative barriers, this study continues to develop our understanding of the various barriers the cannabis industry experiences.

Building on the complexities of federal and state legalization, Daniel J. Mallinson and A. Lee Hannah analyze the need for federal cannabis legalization through a War on Drugs reparation lens in their article, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Cannabis Policy in the

United States: Challenges and Opportunities for Public Administration and Policy”. The authors explored the role states could play in paving the way toward federal cannabis legalization. They examine California’s history as a precedent for medical cannabis legalization (Mallinson & Hannah, 2023). This is significant because it indicates California’s capacity to set an example for comprehensive and informed cannabis regulation. This article contributes to the cannabis literature by further illuminating the complexities of federal cannabis prohibition. California has the opportunity to learn from federal regulatory shortcomings.

## **Gaps in Cannabis Literature**

In contrast to the rich history of cannabis in California, cannabis is not well-researched academically. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to the subsection on the challenges posed by California regulatory barriers. This has resulted in a gap in the available literature. Identifying gaps in the literature is critical to advancing cannabis research. The scarcity of cannabis literature can be attributed to many factors. At the federal level, possession of cannabis continues to be an illegal act. This results in a complex clash between state and federal laws. For example, possession of cannabis is legal in California, but Sacramento State University students may not possess cannabis on campus due to institutional federal funding. Substantive research requires access to communities. The cannabis community’s perception of outside entities is still influenced by the long history of cannabis criminalization. Researchers may not be able to conduct substantive qualitative research because cannabis cultivators are wary of outside entities. A similar barrier includes the lack of quantitative data available in databases. While the cannabis literature remains sparse, understanding it is essential to addressing and closing the research gap.

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