

# Using Google Trends to Assess Public Interest in Cannabis During Elections with Cannabis Legislation



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## INTRODUCTION

Cannabis, is the most popular illegal drug in the world, and is known for its medicinal and recreational applications(1). According to the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 19.8 million (81%) of adult drug users in the U.S. used cannabis in the month before they were surveyed(2).

The legality of cannabis has been a polarizing issue in the United States for decades. In 1970, the Controlled Substances Act was established. This law regulated the manufacture, importation, possession, use and distribution of certain drugs, including cannabis(3). As of November 2018, thirty-three states have reversed aspects of the Controlled Substances Act and legalized the prescription of medicinal cannabis. Ten states have legalized both medicinal and recreational cannabis(4).

Many studies have examined how the popularity of Google searches for health-related topics change over time using a tool called Google Trends. However, Google Trends has not been used to examine whether the popularity of google searches for cannabis changed following state elections with cannabis-related legislation.

## METHODS

We chose to use the Checklist for Documentation of Google Trends created by Nuti et al.(4) to enhance the reproducibility and credibility of our search. We first entered the keyword “Cannabis” into the search bar on the homepage of Google Trends and chose the search for cannabis that was categorized into the topic “Drug”.

To narrow the scope of our searches we applied the Location, Time Range, Category, and Search Type filters. We customized the dates included in our Time Range filter to include dates between May 1, 2008 and May 1, 2018. For our Category filter we chose “health”. For our Search Type filter we chose “web search”.

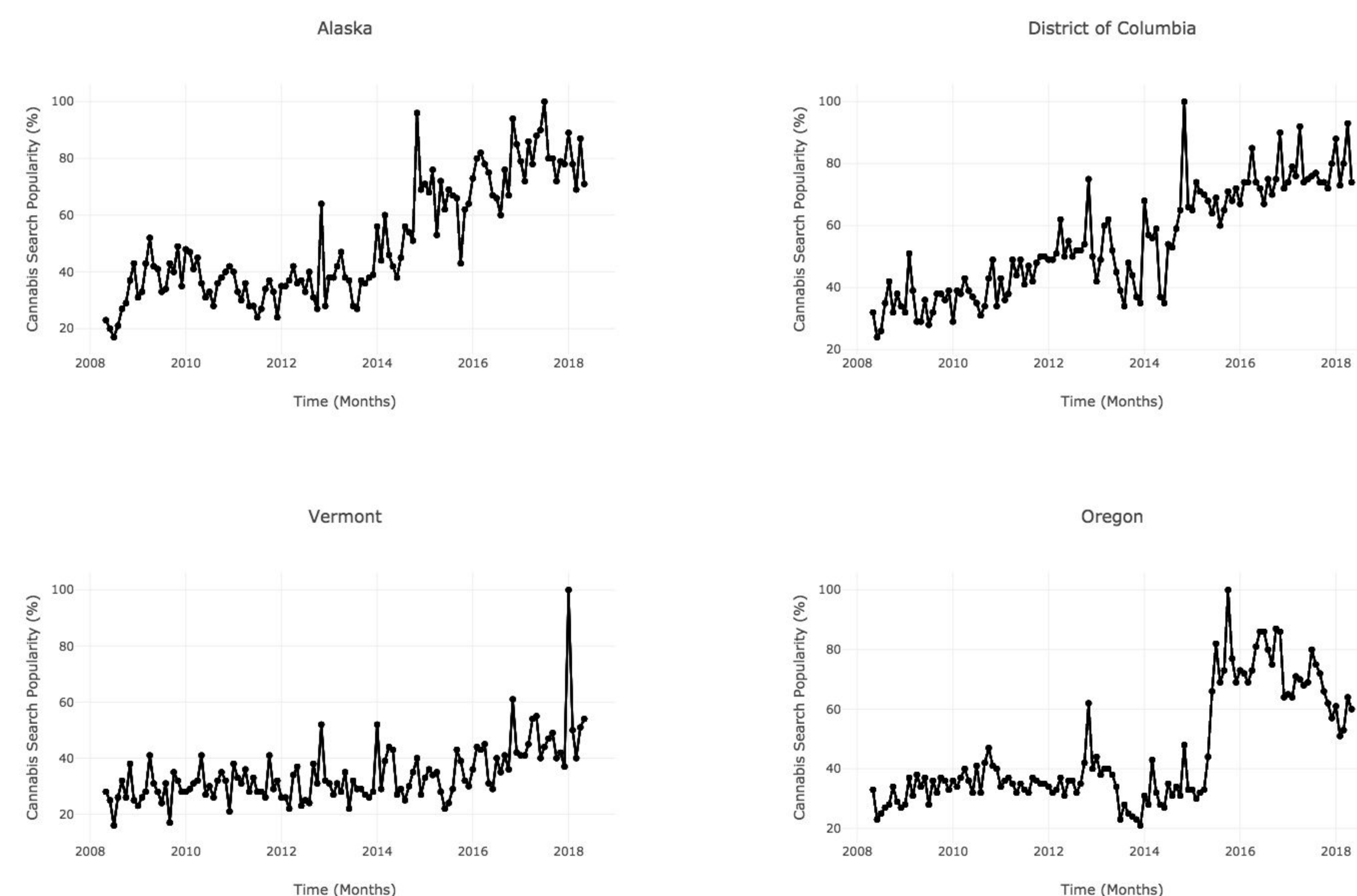
Upon completion of our search, we downloaded a graph generated by Google Trends that displayed the ‘interest over time’ data of our keyword search. The peak popularity of a keyword search equates to a value of 100, and an absence of the number of keyword searches needed to elicit data in Google Trends equates to a value of 0.

## RESULTS

### Vote to Legalize Cannabis Occurred During a Presidential Election Cycle



### Vote to Legalize Cannabis Occurred During a Midterm Election Cycle



## CONCLUSION

Mean public interest in cannabis increased following elections containing cannabis-related legislation. Future studies should be conducted to assess the quality of information available to the public online.

## REFERENCES

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