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Abstract

Introduction. Are consumers of recreational marijuana more likely to be victims of crime in the Americas? Several studies have identified a relationship between drug use and different forms of crime victimization. However, the direction of the relationship remains uncertain. Some studies pose that victimization may increase the consumption of drugs, including cannabis, while others suggest that marijuana use exposes consumers to criminal incidents.

Methods. We use data from Vanderbilt University’s Americas Barometer (AB) surveys in three Latin American countries with very different policy regimes toward marijuana consumption (Colombia, Jamaica, and Uruguay). With national representative samples of more than 1,500 adults, the AB surveys provide information about marijuana use, perceptions of insecurity, and different forms of crime victimization.

Results and Discussion. This paper explores whether the recreational use of cannabis raises the likelihood of being a victim of a crime in Latin America. We find empirical evidence that cannabis use is related to crime victimization only in Jamaica and we attribute such relationship to the fact that distribution of cannabis is heavily associated with violent criminal groups. We discuss the implications of marijuana policy for the control of crime in Latin America and the Caribbean.
Introduction

Several studies have studied the link between violence and drugs and the direction of the causality. While some scholars pose that there is strong evidence supporting the link between illicit drug use and crime (White & Gorman, 2000), others point to the complexity, as well as the spurious and/or recursive nature of this relationship (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Several studies have highlighted the role of the conditions or environment that lie behind both types of behaviors: drug use and criminal activities (Fagan, 1990; Skogan, 1990). The association between drugs and crime can be examined under the framework developed by Goldstein (1985), where the link between drugs and violence can be explained either by a) ‘psychopharmacological violence,’ this is, when crime occurs as a consequence of drug consumption; b) ‘economic compulsive violence,’ when criminal violence is the result of certain individuals’ actions involved in illegal activities to fund their personal drug consumption; and c) to ‘systemic violence,’ when crime is the result of actions of criminal organizations conducive to enforce contracts in the absence of a legitimate framework that will resolve the disputes through the legal system (Goldstein, 1985).

Cannabis use occupies a particular place in the drug/violence nexus discussion. Most studies have concluded that marijuana consumption tends to inhibit violent behavior, disqualifying the psychopharmacological argument (White & Gorman, 2000), although a review by the National Research Council concluded that long-term cannabis use can affect the nervous system prompting violence behavior (National Research Council, 1994). By the same token, marijuana use rarely generates economic violence as it does not produce the compulsive need to generate income to fund consumption (Caulkins, Hawken, Kilmer, & Kleiman, 2012). For example, among those who committed crimes with economic motivation in Chile, 17% were dependent only on marijuana and 41% on some cocaine (cocaine or base paste), while another 42% was dependent on both (Valenzuela & Larroulet, 2010). Finally, given the low profitability of marijuana markets in comparison with other drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, observers believe that marijuana use does not play a significant part in the systemic type of violence (Pacula & Kilmer, 2003).

Yet some recent studies have found an association between marijuana use and violent behavior (Norström & Rossow, 2014; Pedersen & Skardhamar, 2010; Schoeler et al., 2016). However, several observers believe that the link between marijuana use and criminal conduct is better explained by the presence of an additional set of factors, which are associated with both behaviors (Caulkins et al., 2012; Moore & Stuart, 2005; Simpson, 2003). According to this explanation, violence would be the result of the same factors that prompt cannabis consumption. Some of these factors are contextual influences, criminal group membership, childhood abuse, type of socialization, and personality disorders, among others.
However, the relationship between marijuana consumption and criminal behavior is different from the link between cannabis use and crime victimization. Some studies have found evidence that early victims of violence may be more likely to use drugs in the future than people who have not been victimized (Carson, Sullivan, Cochran, & Lersch, 2008; Martin, English, Clark, Cilenti, & Kupper, 1996). However, the direction of the relationship remains uncertain for cases of ongoing victimization. Some studies pose that victimization may increase the consumption of drugs, including cannabis, while others suggest that marijuana use exposes consumers to criminal incidents (Brothers, 2003).

Latin America and the Caribbean remain as the most violent regions of the world due to crime (UNODC, 2013), and there are legitimate questions among policymakers and the general public about how marijuana liberalization may impact the prevalence of violent crime in the region (García Sánchez & Ortiz Riomalo, 2014; Garzón Vergara, 2015). The questions about the potential impact of marijuana use on criminal violence have taken a new sense of urgency as several governments have taken steps to decriminalizing and, in some cases, legalizing medicinal and recreational marijuana (Bergman, 2018). Legalization of recreational cannabis in Uruguay in 2013 and medicinal marijuana in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Jamaica in recent years (Gonzalez, 2017) are part of a wave that is disrupting the region’s consensus on prohibition and the war on drugs.

In these circumstances, it is essential to ask whether consumers of recreational marijuana are more likely to be victims of crime than people who do not use cannabis. Cognizant of the fact that victimization may increase the consumption of substances such as marijuana—as well as the other way around—, this paper explores the potential association between crime victimization and marijuana use in three very different Latin American and Caribbean countries: Colombia, Jamaica, and Uruguay. This paper is based on the results of the AmericasBarometer 2016/2017; a public opinion survey developed and conducted by Vanderbilt University’s Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in 31 countries of the Americas. Although the regional study is focused on issues of democracy and governance, the surveys in Uruguay, Jamaica, and Colombia incorporated items about marijuana use that provide general data about the prevalence of marijuana consumption in those countries.

**Drug policy and violence in Latin America**

In December 2013, the Uruguayan government passed a law regulating the growth, sale, and distribution of recreational cannabis. This move was considered a milestone in drug policy reform in the world (Room, 2014). The 2013 law not only upheld the use of recreational marijuana, but also regulated the cultivation of cannabis at home, the formation of social clubs for growth and use, and the retail of cannabis through pharmacies across the country (Arraras & Bello-Pardo, 2014). The new law established that to obtain recreational...
marijuana, users must first register with the government’s office for the control and regulation of cannabis: the Institute for Regulation and Control of Cannabis (IRCCA). Although the initial reform had very little support from the Uruguayan public, the government argued that the law would help to fight and deactivate drug trafficking organizations that profited from local marijuana distribution (Cruz, Boidi, & Queirolo, 2016).

The Uruguayan initiative prompted a discussion in several countries of the hemisphere about the need to review and redefine the prohibition-oriented policies that have dominated the legislation toward marijuana in recent decades (Hetzer & Walsh, 2014). Before long, in 2015, the Jamaica parliament approved legislation to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of cannabis and legalize its medicinal use. The new law also created a government office, the Cannabis Licensing Authority (CLA), which would regulate the mechanisms for the therapeutic and scientific uses of cannabis in the Caribbean island (Bargent, 2015). Although by early 2018, the CLA has granted only a few licenses for legal operation in the cannabis industry, observers agree that the reform is being steadily implemented.

While Colombia had decriminalized the possession of small quantities of marijuana—as well as cocaine—and the cultivation of up to 20 plants in 2012, the Congress of Colombia approved the legalization of marijuana use for scientific and medicinal purposes in 2016 (Gonzalez, 2017). The new marijuana legislation was the last step of the Colombian government’s effort to reform drug policy in a country that has been severely affected by the international regime of prohibition and the U.S. sponsored war on drugs (Durán-Martínez, 2017). In fact, drug policy reform initiatives in Latin America, including marijuana use, are intricately linked to public security and the high levels of criminal violence associated with the activities of drug trafficking organizations. As in the case of Uruguay, several Latin American countries have moved toward the decriminalization of marijuana use under the expectation that less restrictive policies would help reduce the incentives of criminal organizations to control drug markets and generate violence (Nieto & Morini, 2014). These expectations also include redirecting state resources to tackle the structural causes of violence and reduce the burden of law-enforcement institutions.

We decided to test the association between crime victimization and reports of marijuana use in these three countries because, in addition to their efforts toward cannabis liberalization reform, these countries exhibit very different levels of crime-related victimization. Uruguay is considered one of the safest countries in the region, where criminal violence and drug-related criminality is very low for Latin American standards (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). In contrast, Jamaica and Colombia show some of the highest levels of drug and gang-related violence in the region (UNODC, 2013). While Colombia has been in a sustained effort to reduce violence in the last decade and most indicators of crime have shown a significant drop,
Colombia is at the forefront of the hemispheric struggle against transnational drug-trafficking, with important implications for the domestic use of cannabis. Conversely, while Jamaica has a significant history of cannabis use linked to cultural and religious practices, street gangs vie for the control of illicit drug markets (Sives, 2012), turning this Caribbean nation in one of the most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Methodology
We used the 2016/2017 AmericasBarometer survey datasets to explore the association between crime victimization and marijuana use in the Uruguay, Jamaica, and Colombia. The AmericasBarometer are national surveys that collect public perceptions on institutions, data on crime victimization, and reports of public behavior across the region. They use national probabilistic samples of the adult population of each country. The surveys from which these data are drawn were conducted in 2017 during March and May in Uruguay, between February and April 2017 in Jamaica, and between August and October 2016 in Colombia.

In every round, the AmericasBarometer surveys include questions about crime victimization, and we worked with the LAPOP leadership to develop the items related to cannabis use. In each country, survey respondents were selected following a stratified multi-stage cluster sampling based on three variables: the population size of municipalities, the urban/rural areas of the country, and the regions. In every country, approximately 1,515 face-to-face valid interviews were conducted. They were carried out by trained interviewers in the household where the respondent lived using tablets equipped with a survey questionnaire application. In Uruguay and Jamaica, we were able to include several questions on the marijuana legalization process; in Colombia, we could only add one single question that taps on marijuana use.

To gauge marijuana use in Uruguay, we asked the following questions: “And thinking about your particular case, have you ever tried marijuana? (1) Never tried; (2) Tried only once; (3) Consumed sometimes; (4) Consumed frequently.” For those who answered they had consumed cannabis at least once, we also asked: “How often have you used marijuana in the past 12 months? (1) Never in the last 12 months; (2) One time; (3) Sometimes during the last year; (4) Sometimes per month; (5) More than once per month.” In Jamaica, the questions were formulated differently. There, the question about lifetime cannabis use was: “Have you ever used marijuana?,” with the follow-up question: “Do you currently use marijuana?” Finally, in Colombia, we were able to include only one question about cannabis use: “Do you currently use or take marijuana?” Regarding crime victimization, the

1 For more information about the AmericasBarometer, visit: http://www.americasbarometer.org/
same wording was used in all three countries as part of the standard set of questions of the AmericasBarometer: “Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?”

To determine whether crime victimization is associated with marijuana consumption, we ran a logistic regression for each of the countries tested taking into account the complex survey design in the estimation of standard errors using the “svyset” command in Stata 14.2 (Stata, 2015b). We use crime victimization as the dependent variable and report of marijuana use (whether lifetime or during the last year) as the main independent variable. As controls, we included not only the socio-demographic variables usually linked to crime victimization (gender, age, level of education, and household income) but also an index of social disorder in the community where the respondent lives. This index of social disorder is a composite variable created from four items that tap into conditions of social disorganization observed by the interviewer in the community during the interview. Those items are: a) whether there is garbage in the street, b) there are kids with no supervision wandering in the street; c) there are people under the influence of alcohol and drugs in the streets; and d) there are people arguing in the streets. We included this measure of social disorder as a proxy of social disorganization. Following the literature (Sampson & Groves, 1989), we anticipate that crime victimization might be more likely in communities with higher levels of social disorganization.

Results
Table 1 presents the general results of the variables used in the analyses. Regarding the lifetime use of cannabis, the data show that 23% of interviewed Uruguayans have used marijuana at least once in their lives and 55.8% of those have use cannabis during the last year. In contrast, in Jamaica, nearly 42% of respondents said they had consumed marijuana in the past, and 48.2% remain using cannabis regularly during the last year. The Jamaica survey reports a higher percentage of people (85.7%) saying that family and a close friend use marijuana than in Uruguay (52.2%). In other words, the survey results suggest that marijuana consumption is more prevalent in Jamaica than in Uruguay. In Colombia, where it was possible to include only one question about current use, the data return a very low percentage of current cannabis use: 5.7%.

Regarding crime victimization, the data show a higher percentage of crime victimization in Uruguay than in Jamaica and Colombia. 23.5% of interviewees in Uruguay reported being victims of crime during the last year, whereas 18.6% of interviewees in Colombia and nearly 11% of respondents in Jamaica said they faced a victimization event in the last 12 months. These results, however, do not correspond with the data showing Uruguay with one of the lowest crime rates in the region. Instead, they indicate that reports of crime
victimization in Uruguay more than double that of Jamaica, which is usually depicted with severe problems of criminal violence (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). Table 1 also provides the average results of the social disorder index scale for each of the countries in the study. Colombia presents the highest average in the social disorder scale with 22.4, whereas Uruguay the lowest, with 5.44.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Uruguay</th>
<th>Jamaica</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% or X (N)</td>
<td>% or X (N)</td>
<td>% or X (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52.4 (1,514)</td>
<td>50.0 (1,515)</td>
<td>49.7 (1,563)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>46.5 (1,514)</td>
<td>39.3 (1,515)</td>
<td>39.5 (1,562)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>9.9 (1,511)</td>
<td>10.3 (1,481)</td>
<td>9.8 (1,550)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income**</td>
<td>8.13 (1,406)</td>
<td>8.33 (1,077)</td>
<td>8.03 (1,349)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in rural area</td>
<td>6.87 (1,514)</td>
<td>39.3 (1,515)</td>
<td>21.2 (1,563)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents who have tried marijuana*</td>
<td>23.0 (1,512)</td>
<td>41.9 (1,506)</td>
<td>--- (---)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents who are using marijuana</td>
<td>55.8 (260)</td>
<td>48.2 (631)</td>
<td>5.7 (772)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or friends consume marijuana</td>
<td>52.2 (1,514)</td>
<td>85.7 (1,481)</td>
<td>--- (---)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime victimization</td>
<td>23.5 (1,512)</td>
<td>10.9 (1,510)</td>
<td>18.6 (1,503)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social disorder index (0-100)</td>
<td>5.44 (1,514)</td>
<td>12.6 (1,515)</td>
<td>22.4 (1,543)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The question in Colombia referred to current marijuana use.
**Results show the average of the numeric categories of family income.

Is marijuana use associated with personal crime victimization? Do marijuana users in each of these countries are more likely to be victimized by crime? To respond to these questions, we regressed crime victimization on reported cannabis use. We added demographic variables, including the marital status of the respondent, and the index of social disorder in the community where the interviewee lives.² We present the results of the regression in Table 2. As it can be seen, only in Jamaica, the lifetime use of marijuana appears associated with crime victimization in the last 12 months. There, personal

² We used a categorical version of the social disorder scale due to a skewed distribution of the data.
cannabis use emerges as the most substantial predictor of crime victimization, the only statistically significant variable in the model. It is important to note, however, that reported cannabis use by the social circle of the respondent is not significant in the model, suggesting that the link between cannabis use and victimization is limited to personal consumption.

Table 2. Factors associated with crime victimization in Uruguay, Jamaica, and Colombia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uruguay</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jamaica</th>
<th></th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coef. (Lin. Std. Error)</td>
<td>z-score</td>
<td>Coef. (Lin. Std. Error)</td>
<td>z-score</td>
<td>Coef. (Lin. Std. Error)</td>
<td>z-score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.026 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-0.062 (0.21)</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-0.022 (0.19)</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td>-0.017 (0.005)</td>
<td>-3.43*</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>-0.009 (0.007)</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>0.083 (0.02)</td>
<td>4.07**</td>
<td>0.042 (0.04)</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.037 (0.02)</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in rural area</td>
<td>-0.616 (0.32)</td>
<td>-1.90</td>
<td>-0.199 (0.20)</td>
<td>-0.96</td>
<td>-0.404 (0.26)</td>
<td>-1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>-0.051 (0.01)</td>
<td>-1.89</td>
<td>-0.022 (0.02)</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td>0.021 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.198 (0.16)</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-0.078 (0.21)</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>-0.083 (0.20)</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0.835 (0.24)</td>
<td>3.45*</td>
<td>0.068 (0.44)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.411 (0.40)</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widower</td>
<td>0.544 (0.35)</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.093 (0.80)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.040 (0.57)</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have tried marijuana?</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>0.226 (0.10)</td>
<td>2.24*</td>
<td>-0.072 (0.38)</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or friends consume marijuana</td>
<td>0.102 (0.07)</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.084 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social disorder (Medium)</td>
<td>0.383 (0.15)</td>
<td>2.5*</td>
<td>-0.261 (0.26)</td>
<td>-0.98</td>
<td>0.167 (0.28)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social disorder (Medium-high)</td>
<td>0.233 (0.18)</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.132 (0.24)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.172 (0.22)</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.833 (0.47)</td>
<td>-1.74</td>
<td>-2.127 (0.77)</td>
<td>-2.73*</td>
<td>-0.859 (0.65)</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N observations</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>654</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.001
*p<0.05

In Uruguay and Colombia, in contrast, the models do not show any significant relationship between lifetime personal marijuana use and crime victimization. In both cases, the coefficients remain statistically non-significant and with a negative sign, suggesting that less marijuana use might be associated with crime victimization. It is interesting to note, however, that in Uruguay, medium levels in the scale of social disorder (as opposed to no social disorder) are related to crime victimization. In other words, people who live in communities with intermediate levels of social disorder are more likely to be
victimized than people who live in districts with no social disorder. In Colombia, none of the variables included in the model turned out to be significant.

These results do not provide evidence that personal use of marijuana is associated with the likelihood of crime victimization in Colombia and Uruguay. In Jamaica, lifetime consumers seem more likely to report being victims of crime, ceteris paribus. Yet, based on these models, it is not possible at this point to determine the direction of the relationship. In other words, although the report of marijuana use refers to the lifecycle of the respondent whereas the account of victimization only to the last year, it is possible that people who were victimized in the previous year felt prompted to use cannabis because of their experience with crime.

To help us understand whether the current use of marijuana in these countries might be associated with a recent experience of crime victimization, the turned the models around and utilized the variable of current use of marijuana as the dependent variable and regressed on crime victimization and control variables. We present the results in Table 3. In none of the countries studied, reports of recent crime victimization appear significantly associated with current cannabis consumption. Although in all cases, the coefficients show a negative sign, meaning that people who have not been victims of crime might currently consume marijuana regularly, such association is not statistically significant. In other words, people who are regular users of marijuana do not seem to have faced crime victimization in a different ratio than people who are not regular consumers of marijuana.

The models, however, show that other variables are associated with current marijuana use. These factors are age, gender, education, and the use of marijuana by the close social circle. Younger people report more current cannabis use than the rest of the population in all countries. Males in Jamaica and Colombia are more likely to use marijuana. People with fewer years of school tend to use marijuana more than the rest of the population; and in Uruguay and Jamaica, people who have friends and relatives who consume marijuana are more likely to consume cannabis as well.
Table 3. Factors associated with current marijuana use in Uruguay, Jamaica, and Colombia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uruguay</th>
<th></th>
<th>Jamaica</th>
<th></th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coeff. (Lin. Std. Error)</td>
<td>z-score</td>
<td>Coeff. (Lin. Std. Error)</td>
<td>z-score</td>
<td>Coeff. (Lin. Std. Error)</td>
<td>z-score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.370 (0.24)</td>
<td>-1.52</td>
<td>-1.437 (0.24)</td>
<td>-5.45**</td>
<td>-1.094 (0.43)</td>
<td>-2.51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td>-0.038 (0.01)</td>
<td>-2.33*</td>
<td>-0.020 (0.008)</td>
<td>-2.50*</td>
<td>-0.063 (0.01)</td>
<td>-3.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>0.072 (0.04)</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>-0.101 (0.04)</td>
<td>-2.23*</td>
<td>-0.108 (0.05)</td>
<td>-1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in rural area</td>
<td>0.748 (0.83)</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.019 (0.22)</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-1.563 (0.75)</td>
<td>-2.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>-0.037 (0.03)</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
<td>-0.031 (0.02)</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
<td>0.063 (0.04)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.872 (0.31)</td>
<td>-2.75*</td>
<td>-0.208 (0.22)</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>-0.746 (0.43)</td>
<td>-1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>-1.013 (0.49)</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.574 (0.50)</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-0.311 (1.10)</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widower</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-1.455 (1.16)</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>0.761 (1.23)</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or friends consume marijuana</td>
<td>0.769 (0.28)</td>
<td>2.70*</td>
<td>0.761 (0.29)</td>
<td>2.62*</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of crime</td>
<td>-0.272 (0.28)</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
<td>-0.132 (0.28)</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
<td>-0.084 (0.39)</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social disorder</td>
<td>0.386 (0.19)</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.353 (0.12)</td>
<td>2.75*</td>
<td>0.037 (0.21)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.618 (1.48)</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td>1.557 (1.03)</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.360 (1.51)</td>
<td>2.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N observations</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>654</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.001
*p<0.05

Discussion
The data provided by the AmericasBarometer survey in 2016/2017 do not offer consistent evidence of an association between general crime victimization and marijuana use across the countries included in this study. Only in the case of Jamaica, people who have a previous history of cannabis consumption appeared with more probabilities of being victims of crime in the last 12 months. In that case, lifetime personal marijuana use was the only factor associated with crime victimization in the model, as other variables remain statistically non-significant. By the same token, when current marijuana use was regressed on crime victimization and control variables, no evidence emerged in any of the countries.
that recent cannabis consumption was somehow related to events of victimization during the last year.

These results, thus, suggest that the association between marijuana use and crime victimization might be simply dependent on the social and contextual factors surrounding the behaviors of consumers. Among the three countries explored in this study, Jamaica in the nation with the most complex history of cannabis use. The prevalent use of cannabis by different sectors of the society—attested by the results of this survey—and its association with a local criminal economy that supports distribution may be behind the seeming relationship with crime victimization. In contrast with Colombia, where the criminal economy revolves around other illicit and more valuable substances, such as cocaine and heroin, and is more oriented to exportation, in Jamaica, the combination of a strong culture of cannabis use and its historical dependence on illegal networks may explain the particular association between crime victimization and marijuana use.

The policy implications of these findings, if modest, are clear. The efforts of cannabis liberalization in a country like Jamaica might represent an opportunity to decrease the influence of criminal organizations in the distribution of cannabis, reducing the chances of victimization for consumers. This has been the rationale for the implementation of marijuana reform in several Latin American countries, starting with Uruguay in 2013. However, the results of this paper suggest that it is in Jamaica, where street crime is more related to drug distribution, where cannabis legislation reform might be more consequential to reduce crime.
References


