Scorecard of 2016 Presidential Candidates

Updated October 29, 2015

Highlights

- **SAM evaluated the positions of 18 candidates** (15 Republicans, 3 Democrats) on their support of an **evidence-based marijuana policy:**
    - Opposition to marijuana legalization for recreational purposes
    - Support of prevention, intervention, and treatment for marijuana use
    - Regulated, FDA-approved approach to the legitimate medical use of marijuana components
- Some candidates **are still formulating a position**
    - SAM will be sending a questionnaire to the candidates to clarify their stance
- **Best Candidates:**
    - Marco Rubio
    - Chris Christie
    - Ben Carson
- **Worst Candidates:**
    - Bernie Sanders
    - Rand Paul

SAM evaluated 18 presidential candidates:
15 Republicans and 3 Democrats

Republicans

Bush

Carson

Christie

Cruz

Fiorina

Gilmore
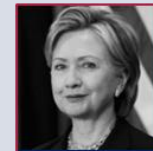
Graham

Huckabee

Jindal

Kasich

Pataki

Paul
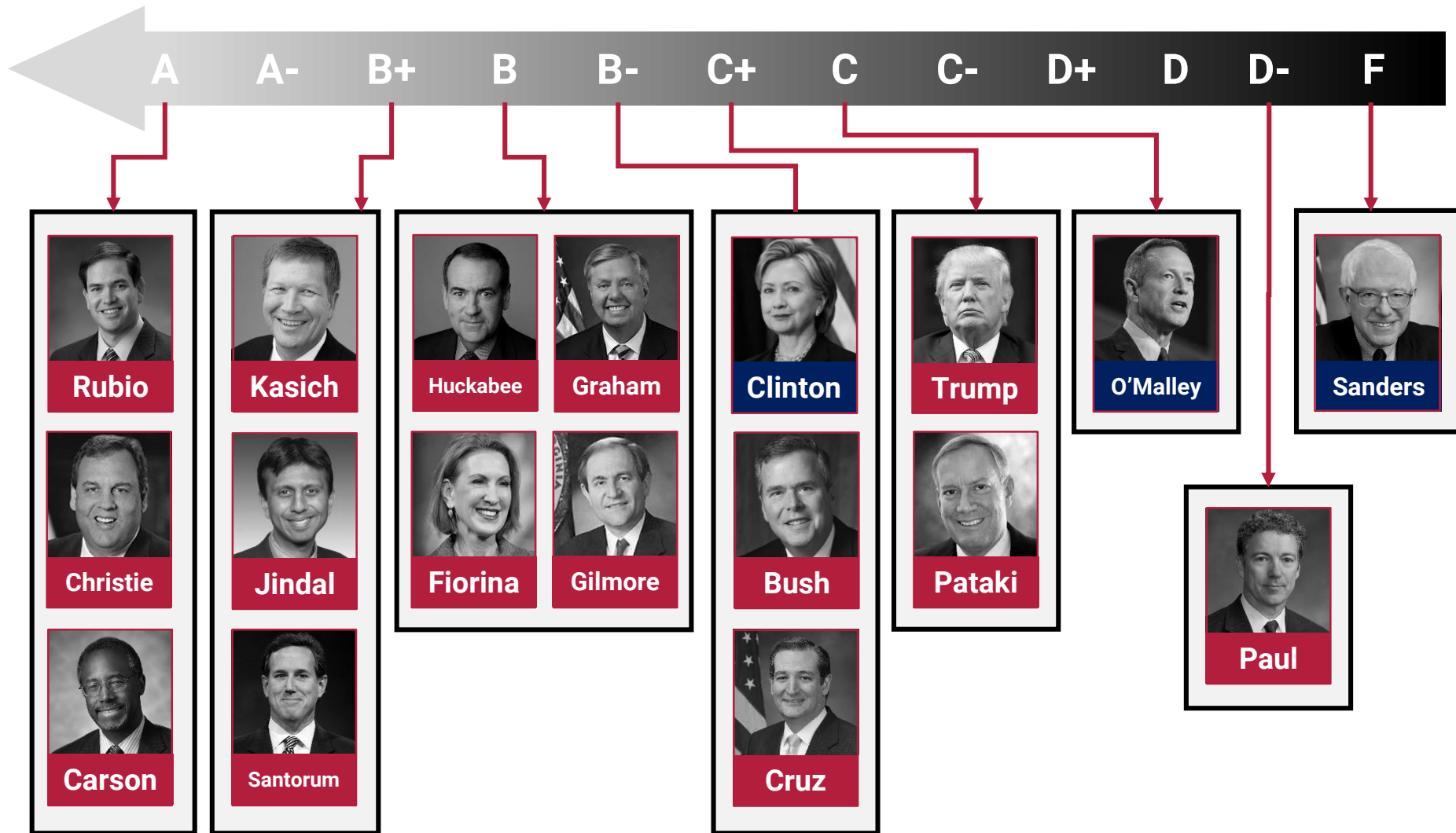
Rubio

Santorum

Trump

Democrats

Clinton

O'Malley

Sanders

The candidates grouped by grade

A — A- — B+ — B — B- — C+ — C — C- — D+ — D — D- — F

A
- Rubio
- Christie
- Carson

A-
- Kasich
- Jindal
- Santorum

B
- Huckabee
- Graham
- Fiorina
- Gilmore

B-
- Clinton
- Bush
- Cruz

C+
- Trump
- Pataki

C-
- O'Malley

D-
- Paul

F
- Sanders

The candidates grouped by their position on legalization for recreational use

Oppose legalization for recreational use at federal and state levels
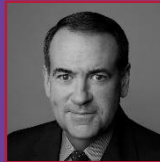

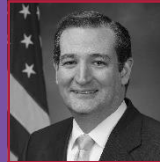Rubio | Carson | Christie | Jindal | Santorum | Kasich | Gilmore

Oppose federal legalization for recreational use; states can decide

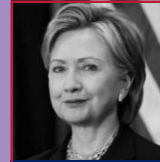Fiorina | Huckabee | Cruz | Trump | Bush | Clinton | Pataki | O'Malley | Paul

Support legalization for recreational use at federal and state levels

Sanders

Unclear/undecided

Graham

Candidate-by-Candidate

Marco Rubio

Grade: A

His position: Mr. Rubio has shown limited support for "medical" marijuana that does not contain psychoactive compounds, but opposes legalization for recreational use. He would also revisit sentencing and penal law "with great care."

In his own words: "[W]e need to enforce our federal laws. Now do states have a right to do what they want? [T]hey don't have a right to write federal policy.... I don't believe we should be in the business of legalizing additional intoxicants in this country for the primary reason that when you legalize something, what you're sending a message to young people is it can't be that bad, because if it was that bad, it wouldn't be legal." Interview with Hugh Hewitt (April 2015).
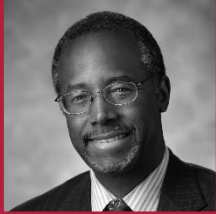
Chris Christie

Grade: A

His position: Mr. Christie opposes legalization at both the state and federal levels, indicating that he would enforce federal law. He has also restricted his support of medical marijuana to "medically-based" cases.

In his own words: "Marijuana is a gateway drug. We have an enormous addiction problem in this country. And we need to send very clear leadership from the White House on down through the federal law enforcement. Marijuana is an illegal drug under federal law. And the states should not be permitted to sell it and profit from it." Interview with Hugh Hewitt (April 2015).

"What there's a huge demand for is marijuana. Not medical marijuana. Because when we run a medically based program, you don't see the demand. What did these folks say? They weren't making enough money. You know, if this was a medical program, what's everybody worried about making money for? ... We are going to make it a medically based program.' No demand there — or very little." WKXW-FM Radio 1015 (June 2014).

Ben Carson

Grade: A

His position: Dr. Carson opposes legalization at the federal and state level, and recognizes the relationship between marijuana use and problems with mental development. He also has indicated that he supports "medical" marijuana in "compassionate" cases.

In his own words: "There are medicinal uses for the active ingredients of marijuana. However, we must also look at the fact that regular exposure to marijuana in the developing brain has been demonstrated definitively to result in decreased IQ. And the last thing we need is a bunch of people running around with decreased IQ. So, I think we have to take both those things into account. There are ways that you can create pills and ointments and things like that that are used for medicinal purposes while still enforcing federal law. …

"[Yes I would probably enforce the federal drug laws in states like Colorado], providing the use, the appropriate use of medical marijuana." Western Conservative Summit (June 2015).

John Kasich

Grade: B+

His position: Mr. Kasich opposes legalization of marijuana federally, and in the state of Ohio where he currently serves as governor.

In his own words: "[Legalization is] a terrible idea. … It sends mixed messages to young people about drugs … I don't think we should do that. … I would try to discourage the states from [legalizing marijuana]. Hopefully we'll defeat it in Michigan and Ohio, but if states want to do it … I haven't made a final decision, but I would be tempted to say I don't think we can go and start disrupting what they've decided." MLive.com (September 2015).

"Here's my great concern. First of all, you have a states' rights issue. The people in those states have voted that way. The federal government has decided to kind of look the other way. … I'm totally opposed to it, because it is a scourge in this country." Interview with Hugh Hewitt (April 2015).

"Sending kids mixed signals about drugs is a disaster." Republican debate (October 2015).

Bobby Jindal

Grade: B+

His position: Mr. Jindal supports changing sentencing laws to favor rehabilitation of marijuana users over incarceration. He opposes marijuana legalization at both the state and federal levels.

In his own words: "I'm not for legalization. In Louisiana, we've certainly supported efforts towards smarter sentencing. You know, if there are folks we can rehabilitate and it would be more cost effective for taxpayers and better for them, I'm for that. I have said if it was tightly controlled with a doctor's supervision, I could even be okay with medical marijuana. But I'm not for legalization. …

"Yeah, look, I don't think you can ignore federal law. Federal law is still the law of the land. It still needs to be enforced." Interview with Hugh Hewitt (March 2015).

Rick Santorum

Grade: B+

His position: Mr. Santorum has come out against marijuana legalization at both the state and federal level, and would enforce federal drug law across the country. He has not articulated a clear position on penal reform for personal marijuana possession.

In his own words: "I think Colorado is violating the federal law. And if we have controlled substances, they're controlled substances for a reason. The federal law is there for a reason, and the states shouldn't have the option to violate federal law. As Abraham Lincoln said, you know, states don't have the right to wrong." Interview with Hugh Hewitt (April 2015).

"The federal government does have a role in making sure that drug use – that states don't go out and legalize drugs. That there are drugs that are hazardous to people, that do cause great harm to the individual as well as society to the whole. And the federal government has a role in making sure those drugs are not in this country and not available…." Santorum campaign event (January 2012).

Mike Huckabee

Grade: B

His position: Mr. Huckabee opposes marijuana legalization at the federal level. He has made recent comments about states' rights to experiment with legalizing recreational use, in the context of equivalency of states' rights to refuse to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

In his own words: "Added to tax revenues from medical marijuana, that totaled monthly tax revenue to the state of $3.5 million. But at what cost? … [W]hat is a young person supposed to think when the state says, 'Don't do drugs…even though everyone around you is…and the same authority figures who tell you it's bad not only condone it, but are also making a big profit off it'?" Facebook post (March 2014).

"[H]ow come it is that liberals are OK with not keeping the federal law when it comes to the marijuana laws…but if it comes to a county clerk in Kentucky who doesn't believe that she can abide by a federal court ruling…she goes to jail…. I'm willing to let states operate under the Tenth Amendment." KCCI News (October 2015).

Lindsey Graham

Grade: B

His position: While Mr. Graham appears to favor "medical" marijuana in certain cases, he opposes marijuana legalization for recreational purposes. His position on legalization at the state level is not entirely clear.

In his own words: ""I'm against legalizing marijuana for recreational purposes. But when it comes to medical marijuana and this [CBD] oil, I think politicians should embrace what makes sense. When it comes to issues like this, I don't want to be academic in thought. This is about people. This is about families with sick children. Why should someone in my position get in the way of helping a child, if you can reasonably and logically do it?" WBTV (Feb. 2014).

"To be honest, [marijuana is] pretty far down my list of priorities." *The Washington Post* (Nov. 2014).

Carly Fiorina

Grade: B

Her position: Ms. Fiorina does not support marijuana legalization. She has indicated, however, that she would allow states to legalize. She has indicated hesitation with the use of "medical" marijuana, citing the lack of understanding of its effects on the human body. Additionally, she appears to argue against incarcerating low-level drug offenders.

In her own words: "While I do in general support states rights, and the voters of Colorado have made a decision, I would also very quickly add that I think the legalization of marijuana is a very bad idea. I think it's misleading to young people in particular when we tell them smoking pot is like drinking a beer. It is not." Statement to reporters during Western Conservative Summit (June 2015).

"If we want to use medicinal marijuana, then regulate it like a medicine, with the right controls and the right safeguards. But don't go out and say to young people, 'Hey, it's no big deal, just get stoned all day long….'" Statement to the *Des Moines Register* (May 2015).

Jim Gilmore

Grade: B

His position: Mr. Gilmore opposes marijuana legalization for recreational purposes, but his stance on other marijuana-related issues is not entirely clear, prompting the B grade.

In his own words: "I'm not a legalization guy. I think that it's not a substance, it's a lifestyle, and a quality of life and approach that I'm afraid I can't adhere to. I understand that some people are able to use marijuana in a recreational way and it probably doesn't hurt society, but at the end of the day, I don't believe we ought to be legalizing and putting the legitimacy of the state on to substance abuse. I just don't believe it." WMUR (June 2015).

Hillary Clinton

Grade: B-

Her position: Ms. Clinton does not support legalization of marijuana for recreational use. She has indicated that she would support states and localities "experimenting" with legalization as "laboratories of democracy," but has not specified what that support would entail. She has expressed reservations about "medical" marijuana, but does support overhaul of the criminal justice system to avoid incarcerating low-level drug users, and supports treatment-based approach to addiction issues.

In her own words: "States are the laboratories of democracy...I would support states and localities that are experimenting with this." KPPC (July 2014).

"I do support the use of medical marijuana, and I think even there we need to do a lot more research so that we know exactly how we're going to help people for whom medical marijuana provides relief.

"We have got to stop imprisoning people who use marijuana." Democratic presidential debate (October 2015).
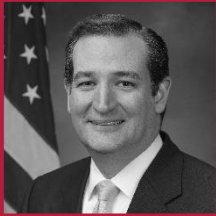
Jeb Bush

Grade: B-

His position: As governor of Florida, Mr. Bush opposed large-scale "medical" marijuana programs. He also opposes legalization of marijuana generally. He has recently indicated, however, that he would allow states to decide whether to legalize the drug in their territory.

In his own words: "Florida leaders and citizens have worked for years to make the Sunshine State a world-class location to start or run a business, a family-friendly destination for tourism and a desirable place to raise a family or retire. Allowing large-scale, marijuana operations to take root across Florida, under the guise of using it for medicinal purposes, runs counter to all of these efforts" Statement by Gov. Bush (August 2014).

"[Marijuana legalization] should be a state decision." GOP debate (September 2015).

"I thought [legalizing marijuana in Colorado] was a bad idea, but states ought to have that right to do it. I would have voted 'no' if I was in Colorado." Conservative Political Action Conference (February 2015).

Ted Cruz

Grade: B-

His position: Mr. Cruz does not support marijuana legalization. He would allow states to legalize, however, a change from his position in 2014.

In his own words: "I actually think [legalization in Colorado] is a great embodiment of what Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis called 'the laboratories of democracy.' If the citizens of Colorado decide they want to go down that road, that's their prerogative. I personally don't agree with it, but that's their right." Conservative Political Action Conference (February 2015).

"Now, that may or may not be a good policy, but I would suggest that should concern anyone — it should even concern libertarians who support that policy outcome — because the idea that the president simply says criminal laws that are on the books, we're going to ignore [them]. That is a very dangerous precedent." Interview with Reason (February 2014).

Donald Trump

Grade: C+

His position: Mr. Trump opposes legalization of marijuana, but would allow states to legalize its use. He supports "medical" marijuana programs. He has not articulated a position on sentencing issues concerning marijuana possession and use.

In his own words: "I think [legalization] is bad, and I feel strongly about that. They've got a lot of problems going on right now in Colorado, some big problems. ...

"[When asked about the states' rights aspect to marijuana laws:] If they vote for it, they vote for it. ...

"I think medical marijuana, 100 percent." Conservative Political Action Conference (February 2015).

George Pataki

Grade: C+

His position: Mr. Pataki is in favor of allowing states to legalize marijuana, but opposes legalizing it at the federal level.

In his own words: "I'm a great believer in the 10th Amendment. And I believe in both [Colorado and Washington] there were referenda where the voters approved. So I would be very strongly inclined to change the federal law to give states, when they've had a referenda, the opportunity with respect to marijuana to decriminalize it, except for two factors. One is we have to know that neighboring states or the rest of the country are not being subjected to illegal marijuana because of the free selling of it and marketing in those states, and second with respect to young people." Interview with Hugh Hewitt (April 2015).

"I am not in favor of legalizing marijuana, but having said that I am a great believer that states are the laboratory of democracy." Bloomberg (January 2015).

Martin O'Malley

Grade: C

His position: Mr. O'Malley would reclassify marijuana as a Schedule II drug and signed laws decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana and setting up a "medical" marijuana program. He has made statements indicating opposition to "medical" marijuana. O'Malley's recent event with Colorado marijuana industry representatives negatively affects his score.

In his own words: "I now think that [decriminalizing the possession of marijuana] is an acknowledgment of the low priority that our courts, our prosecutors, our police and the vast majority of citizens already attach to this transgression of public order and public health." Official Statement by Gov. O'Malley (April 2014).

"I'm not much in favor of [legalization]. We've seen what drug addiction has done to the people of our state, to the people of our city. This drug, its use and its abuse can be a gateway." Marc Steiner Show (January 2014).

"I'm not there [supporting legalization] yet." Statement to marijuana lobbyists (September 2015).

Rand Paul

Grade: D-

His position: Dr. Paul does not support marijuana legalization nationwide, but favors allowing states to legalize and to ease restrictions on state-licensed marijuana businesses, including letting them use the U.S. banking system. He would exempt from federal law those who produce, distribute, or consume the drug for medical purposes in compliance with state law. Dr. Paul should be commended for supporting laws to halt incarceration of those convicted of personal possession or use of marijuana, but his stance on legalization, and fundraising activities with the marijuana industry, lowers his grade.

In his own words: "I think the federal government shouldn't interfere. One of the problems is the federal government has come into states that have allowed medical marijuana and still harass them so I think the federal government ought to stay out." Statement to press (July 2015).

"I'm not for having the federal government get involved. I really haven't taken a stand on … the actual legalization. I haven't really taken a stand on that, but I'm against the federal government telling them they can't." Election Day statement by Dr. Paul (November 2014).

Bernie Sanders

Grade: F

His position: Mr. Sanders has stated he would "remove the federal prohibition on marijuana," removing it from the list of controlled substances altogether, although he does not necessarily advocate that states do so. He supports "medical" marijuana programs. While his interest in alternatives to incarceration of drug users is positive, his stance on legalization ironically would undermine his desire to reduce the power of Wall Street.

In his own words: "I suspect I would vote yes [on the Nevada initiative to legalize recreational use of marijuana]. And I would vote yes because I am seeing in this country too many lives being destroyed for non-violent offenses. We have a criminal justice system that lets CEOs on Wall Street walk away and yet we are imprisoning or giving jail sentences to young people who are smoking marijuana." Democratic presidential debate (October 2015).

"It is time to tax and regulate marijuana like alcohol." Speech at George Mason University (October 2015).

SAM
Smart
Approaches to
Marijuana
preventing another big tobacco