



# Three US states vote to legalize recreational use of marijuana

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Voters in California, Nevada, and Massachusetts have agreed to the legalization of the recreational use of marijuana, joining Colorado, Oregon, and Washington state.

The ballot victories mean that around one in five Americans can now legally use marijuana recreationally. Voters in Arizona rejected the legalization of the drug and, as of Thursday morning, the result in Maine was too close to call.

Arkansas, Florida, and North Dakota voted to legalize the medical use of marijuana, while in Montana voters passed a measure that would loosen restrictions on doctors prescribing the drug.

As well as voting for candidates for federal, state, and local offices, voters in some US states had health related initiatives on their ballots for the 8 November election. Such initiatives let voters bypass legislators and put measures on election ballots through a signature gathering process. If an initiative gained a simple majority, the measure would become law.

In California the cities of Albany, Oakland, and San Francisco followed the lead of neighboring Berkeley by introducing a one cent per ounce tax on sugar sweetened beverages. Voters in Boulder, Colorado agreed to a two cent per ounce tax.

In 2014, Berkeley became the first US city to impose a “soda tax” that, according to one study, was followed by a 21% decline in the consumption of sugar sweetened drinks in the city’s low income neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup>

Colorado voters also passed a law that would let physicians prescribe lethal doses of drugs to terminally ill patients who were expected to die within six months. The measure was opposed by the Roman Catholic and Mormon churches, which have a large number of followers in the state. Colorado was the

sixth state to adopt such legislation, joining California, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington state.

Voters in Nebraska also chose to reinstate the death penalty, a year after it was repealed. While in California voters rejected a proposal to repeal the death penalty.

In California, voters rejected an initiative that would have required state health programs to pay no more for prescription drugs than the price negotiated by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans Affairs health system, the largest in the nation, typically secures heavy discounts from drug makers because of its size.

Californians also rejected a measure that would have toughened the enforcement of rules requiring actors in pornographic films to wear condoms during sex scenes to reduce the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. Although state law already required the use of condoms in pornographic films, the Division of Occupational Safety and Health generally enforced the law only in response to a complaint. If the ballot initiative had passed, any state resident would have been able to file a lawsuit to enforce violations of the law.

In Colorado, voters rejected a measure that would have created a government run, single payer insurance plan. The plan would have replaced most private insurance plans, but voters balked at the steep tax increases needed to fund the estimated \$25 billion (£20bn; €23bn) a year budget.

<sup>1</sup> McCarthy M. Soda tax brings sharp fall in sugary drink consumption in Californian city. *BMJ* 2016;355:i5940. doi:10.1136/bmj.i594027815249

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