

Gay Marriage, Marijuana Highlight Ballot Measures

While the general election might not break partisan gridlock in Congress, it could result in historic changes for U.S. social policy: Several states had a chance to be the first to approve **same-sex marriage** by popular vote and to legalize recreational use of marijuana.

Dating back to 1998, same-sex marriage has been rejected in all 32 states that have held popular votes on the issue. Gay-rights advocates believed they had a chance to break that streak as Maine, Maryland and Washington voted on ballot measures to legalize same-sex marriage, and Minnesota voted on whether to place a ban on gay marriage in the state constitution.

Marijuana legalization was on the ballot in Washington, Oregon and Colorado; each measure would allow adults to possess small amounts of pot under a regimen of state regulation and taxation. The Oregon proposal had lagged, but the Washington and Colorado measures were believed to have a decent chance of passage.

If approved, the measures would set up a direct challenge to federal drug law.

In Arkansas and Massachusetts, voters were deciding whether to allow marijuana use for medical reasons, as 17 states have done previously. Arkansas would be the first Southern state in that group.

In California, voters were deciding whether to repeal the state's **death penalty**. If the measure prevailed, the more than 720 inmates on death row there would have their sentences converted to life in prison.

While 17 states have ended **capital punishment**, most did so through legislative action. Only in Oregon, in 1964, did voters choose to repeal the death penalty; they later reversed themselves to reinstate it.

In all, there were 176 measures on the ballots Tuesday in 38 states, according to the Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California.

All four elections on same-sex marriage were expected to be close. In Maine, the latest poll showed gay-marriage supporters with a 13 percentage point lead, down from a 21 point lead in September.

Maine's referendum marked the first time that gay-marriage supporters put the issue to a popular vote. They collected enough signatures over the summer to schedule the vote, hoping to reverse the outcome of a 2009 referendum that quashed a gay-marriage law enacted by the Legislature.

In both Maryland and Washington, gay-marriage laws were approved by lawmakers and signed by the governors earlier this year, but opponents gathered enough signatures to challenge the laws.

In Minnesota, the question was whether the state would join 30 others in placing a ban on gay marriage in its constitution. Even if the ban is defeated, same-sex marriage would remain illegal in Minnesota under statute.

Gay marriage is legal in six states and the District of Columbia—in each case the result of legislation or court orders, not by a vote of the people.

Other notable ballot measures:

- Massachusetts could join Oregon and Washington in allowing terminally ill patients to obtain lethal doses of medication if doctors say they have six months or

less to live.

- Another contentious measure in California would require most genetically engineered processed foods sold in supermarkets and other outlets to be labeled as such.
- California labor unions were the target of a measure that would prohibit them from collecting money for state political activities from members through paycheck deductions.
- In Michigan, labor unions succeeded in getting a vote on a first-of-its-kind ballot initiative that would put collective bargaining rights in the state constitution.
- Maryland voters were deciding whether to uphold a new state law allowing some illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at public colleges.
- A measure in Montana would require people who receive certain state services to provide proof of U.S. citizenship or legal residency.
- Oklahoma voters voted on whether to abolish affirmative action programs in state government and education.
- Minnesotans were deciding on an amendment that would require showing a photo ID in order to vote.

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