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## American voters are waiting to see how Colorado's pot experiment turns out

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The Supreme Court has handed the marijuana-legalization movement an important victory.

Two states — Nebraska and Oklahoma — sought to invalidate the landmark Colorado measure known as Amendment 64, which legalized recreational marijuana in that state. But the challenge fell flat when the Court announced last week that it wouldn't hear their case.

That means the Colorado law will remain in effect — and more states can opt to legalize also.

No one can deny the gathering momentum behind the legalization movement. Since 2012, four states have approved referenda that essentially legalize marijuana for recreational purposes:

Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska. (Washington, DC, has embraced legal marijuana also.) At least five more states will be voting on pot in November: California, Nevada, Massachusetts, Arizona and Maine.

Drug reformers have several reasons to be optimistic about their prospects. First, according to a recent Gallup poll, 58 percent of Americans say marijuana should be legal. And that number has been climbing steadily — majority support for the third consecutive year.

Second, young people overwhelmingly support marijuana legalization — and they turn out to vote when there's a presidential election.

Third, older voters are more supportive than they have been in the past.

Like it or not, more and more Americans regard adult marijuana use as something akin to gambling on the NCAA tournament — it may be illegal, but it shouldn't be. Some adults like to relax with a beer or a glass of wine, but others prefer to relax with a marijuana cigarette. It's just not a big deal to them.

Of course, not everyone agrees. Supporters of the war on drugs have been watching the marijuana-legalization movement with alarm. They keep saying it's "dangerous," but fewer and fewer people seem to agree.

Facing losses at the ballot box, the warriors took their objections to court. Ever since the initial, pivotal measures passed in Colorado and Washington in 2012, there have been voices saying that those state laws would never hold up against a legal challenge because federal law criminalizes marijuana possession and federal law is supreme when there's a conflict with state law.

At first, the Obama Justice Department was widely expected to bring a legal challenge in court. But that never happened, so the state attorneys general in Nebraska and Oklahoma brought their own case to the Supreme Court.

Even though the Supreme Court declined to hear the dispute, the legal challenge was weak and would have likely failed anyway. Federal agents with the Drug Enforcement Administration can still make marijuana arrests in Colorado if they choose to do so. The Colorado law makes no attempt to nullify federal law — so there is no “conflict.” Amendment 64 basically says that Colorado police are no longer going after adults who buy and use marijuana.

Under the principle of federalism, states can decide for themselves what they want their police to focus on. The Supreme Court has made it clear that state and local police can't be commandeered by federal authorities.

Drug reformers have history on their side. Alcohol prohibition was a disastrous policy that created more problems than it solved. It began to unravel when New York state repealed its local Volstead Act prohibiting liquor sales. Other states followed, and prohibition eventually fell by the wayside.

The same thing is starting to happen with marijuana. Thus far, reformers have been successful with the ballot-initiative process, but now even state legislatures are moving. This year, the general assembly in Vermont approved a marijuana-legalization bill. That's another indication that the political climate is shifting toward reform.

It's fair to say that many Americans have adopted an attitude of “Let's see how this experiment with marijuana sales works out in Colorado.” That's a prudent position to take. Drug reformers are confident things will continue to proceed smoothly there. And the Supreme Court just bought the marijuana movement more time to allay the fears of skeptics.

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