

Cannabis Battle in Florida Becomes Costly Election Issue

Cannabis and Abortion Dominate Florida's Political Landscape, Outspending Presidential Race

With over \$100 million spent on two key amendments, it's clear that cannabis legalization and abortion rights are capturing the attention—and dollars—of Florida voters more than the presidential race. The 2024 election cycle in Florida has seen a surprising shift in advertising priorities, with massive amounts of money being funneled into these state ballot initiatives, overshadowing the typically dominant focus on presidential campaigning.

Cannabis Legalization Draws More Ad Dollars Than Presidential Race

As the 2024 election season ramps up, political ad spending in Florida reveals a stark contrast between state-level issues and the presidential race. Cannabis legalization, in particular, has emerged as the dominant topic, drawing significantly more ad spending than the battle for the White House. According to AdImpact, a media tracking firm, only \$1.4 million has been spent on television ads in Florida for the presidential contest between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. This figure represents a sharp decline compared to previous election cycles in the state, signaling a dramatic shift in voter focus.

In comparison, the 2016 presidential election saw a hefty \$55 million spent on TV ads in Florida, while the 2020 election ballooned to an even more substantial \$177 million. The drastic reduction in ad spending for the 2024 presidential race reflects Florida's waning status as a crucial battleground state and the increasing emphasis on local, high-stakes issues like cannabis and abortion.

\$68 Million Poured Into Cannabis Legalization

The most striking difference in political spending this cycle is the overwhelming focus on cannabis legalization. Amendment 3, which seeks to legalize adult-use cannabis in Florida, has garnered a staggering \$68 million in advertising—more than any other issue on the ballot. This makes it the most heavily funded political cause in the state for 2024.

Much of the financial backing for Amendment 3 comes from Trulieve Cannabis Corp., one of the largest cannabis companies in the country. Trulieve has spent \$55 million in support of the amendment, primarily through its backing of the advocacy group Smart & Safe Florida, which is leading the charge for cannabis legalization. The group has launched an extensive media campaign, with ads promoting the potential economic benefits of legalization, including job creation and new tax revenues for the state.

Opposition to Amendment 3 has also mobilized significant resources, though not at the same scale. The Florida Republican Party and the anti-legalization group No on 3 have spent a combined \$11.7 million to defeat the measure. Their ads emphasize concerns about public health and safety, highlighting potential risks

such as impaired driving and the impact of increased cannabis availability on youth.

Slashing Budgets in the Presidential Race

While cannabis legalization is capturing the majority of political ad dollars, the presidential race has seen its budget slashed in Florida. Once considered a critical swing state, Florida's political landscape has shifted, and both the Harris and Trump campaigns have largely deprioritized the state in terms of advertising.

Kamala Harris' campaign has spent a modest \$539,000 on TV ads in Florida—a stark contrast to the multimillion-dollar expenditures in previous cycles. Donald Trump's campaign, along with the national Republican Party, has virtually ignored Florida altogether in 2024, banking on Trump's strong foothold in the state and its 30 electoral votes. Confident of their ability to secure Florida, Republicans are spending their resources elsewhere, in more competitive states.

This shift in strategy reflects Florida's evolving political demographics, as the state has steadily moved from purple to red in recent election cycles. Trump's dominance in the state has made it less of a battleground for presidential campaigns, even as it remains fiercely contested on social and economic issues.

Social Issues Take Center Stage: Abortion Rights Also in Focus

Cannabis legalization isn't the only issue driving massive ad spending in Florida. Abortion rights, another hot-button issue, is also shaping the political conversation. Amendment 4, which seeks to enshrine the right to abortion in the state's constitution, has drawn significant financial support, with \$32.8 million poured into the campaign thus far.

Proponents of Amendment 4 argue that the measure is essential to protect abortion access in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, leaving abortion laws up to individual states. Ads supporting the amendment have focused on the importance of safeguarding women's reproductive rights and preventing further restrictions on access to abortion services in Florida.

Opponents, however, have launched their own media campaigns, warning that the amendment would create a legal environment for unrestricted abortion. Their ads emphasize moral and religious concerns, appealing to conservative voters who believe in tighter regulations on abortion.

A Shift in Voter Priorities: State Issues Overtake National Concerns

The combined ad spending on cannabis legalization and abortion rights—totaling over \$100 million—underscores a significant shift in voter priorities in Florida. In past election cycles, presidential races dominated the political landscape, with Florida serving as a key battleground that could tip the scales of national elections. However, in 2024, state-level issues like cannabis legalization and abortion rights are at the forefront of voters' minds.

This change reflects the evolving political landscape of Florida, where local and social issues have become increasingly salient. With both Amendment 3 and Amendment 4 poised to have far-reaching impacts on Florida's economy and social fabric, voters are focused on shaping the future of the state through these ballot initiatives.

Cannabis and Abortion Capture the Spotlight

The political spending trends in Florida reveal a clear shift in focus away from the presidential race and toward local ballot measures that address divisive social issues. With over \$100 million spent on cannabis

legalization and abortion rights, these two amendments are dominating the political conversation and reshaping the state's electoral dynamics.

As voters prepare to head to the polls in 2024, it's clear that issues like cannabis legalization and abortion are at the forefront of their concerns, far outstripping the attention given to the presidential race. The outcome of these amendments will have profound implications for Florida's legal and economic landscape in the years to come.

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