

AMERICA'S OVERSEAS VOTERS: HOW THEY COULD DECIDE THE US PRESIDENCY IN 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Even before voting began in the 2016 Democrat and Republican primaries, they had produced drama and surprises. The rise of anti-establishment candidates such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders has overturned preconceptions of what is politically feasible in the US, and set the scene for a tight contest in both parties, where every vote will count. This short report considers the critical importance of American citizens living outside the US – an estimated 6 million people – in influencing the outcomes of elections in the US.

Democrats Abroad is recognised as a 'state' for primary voting purposes and will send a similar number of delegates to the Democrat National Convention as Wyoming or Alaska. In a race as tight as the current Clinton–Sanders contest, the expat vote could prove to be decisive.

The UK has the largest US expat population outside North America. Registered Democrats will be able to vote at several polling stations around Britain – including one at the Rothermere American Institute (RAI) in Oxford on Super Tuesday (March 1). Overseas Republican organisations do not provide the same formal mechanism for expats to send delegates to the party convention that determines the presidential candidate, but also have been active during the primaries and encourage their members to vote in their home state primaries through absentee ballots.

The report also considers the Democrat and Republican parties' relationships with the US expatriate community and what this tells us about the state of each organisation within the US.

Political Impact of Expat Voters

Expatriate voters have played a decisive role in elections in the past. The most dramatic came in the 2000 presidential election, when overseas ballots put George W. Bush narrowly in the lead when the Florida recount was stopped by the Supreme Court. Had the election been decided based on the ballots that had arrived by the 26 November deadline, Al Gore would have won the state of Florida, and the presidential election, by 202 votes.

There are other instances of expatriates playing a decisive role: for instance, in Jim Webb's victorious Senate campaign in 2006, which delivered control of the Senate to the Democratic Party. Expatriate voters also contribute substantial amounts of money to presidential candidates. In the 2008 cycle, for instance, overseas voters contributed around \$6 million to presidential campaigns. The Obama campaign proved the most successful at tapping that donor base, taking some \$5 million. Fundraising for 2016 is well underway. Democratic National Committee Chairman Governor Howard Dean will be in London for a breakfast on 23 February to raise funds to help get out the expat vote.

The UK is the most popular destination outside North America for American expatriates. The US State Department estimates that around 224,000 Americans live in Britain, and the figure may be even higher. Turnout rates for expat voting have been lower than among the domestic population in past elections. The parties are therefore taking steps to mobilize this important, though usually forgotten, voting group.

Party Comparisons

The two parties structure overseas voting during presidential primaries in different ways. The Democrats are better organized and institutionalized. The Republicans are taking steps to catch up, but will it be too little too late?

Democrats Abroad was founded in 1964 and has been formally recognised by the Democratic National Committee as the equivalent of a 'state' (for primary voting purposes) since 1976. This gives Democrats abroad the right to participate in choosing the party's presidential nominee and to send delegates to the national convention. By contrast, Republicans Overseas has no formal institutional relationship to the national Republican Party. It has technically only existed since 2013, although its predecessor organisation, Republicans Abroad, was founded in 1978.

Instead of a primary or caucus, members of Republicans Overseas were offered the opportunity to register their support for a particular candidate in an online straw poll (#ROStrawPoll). The results of that poll – comprising voters from 67 countries – were released on January 27. Marco Rubio led among UK-based American voters (27.07%), with Donald Trump in second place (19.55%) and Rand Paul in third (15.04%). With Rubio at around 2.5 times his national average at the time, and Trump substantially behind his, this suggests a more moderate Republican electorate in the UK than in the US.

Both Democrats Abroad and the organisations representing Republican voters living overseas are ambitious, and determined to find new and creative ways to represent party members and the wider expatriate community. However, the current integration of DA into the national party structures gives that organisation advantages over its Republican counterparts, not least in the enthusiasm it can generate and the voting opportunities it gives to its members. To address this gap, Stacy Hilliard, former Vice-Chair of Republicans Overseas will announce the creation of a new Political Action Committee (PAC) at the RAI on 1 March at 12.30pm. Though not an organisational outgrowth of Republicans Overseas, this PAC will promote conservative causes.

'Super Tuesday' in Oxford

1 March is 'Super Tuesday', the most significant single day of presidential primaries in the United States. Up for grabs are 13 states and 1,038 delegates (close to one quarter of the total). The Democratic Party will hold the first day of its 'Global Presidential Primary' on this date in polling stations around the world. At stake are 21 delegates (similar in size to the state delegations of Wyoming and Alaska) that will help decide the party's nominee.

A key voting station in the UK will be in Oxford at the Rothermere American Institute (RAI). Polls will be open from 12pm-7pm. As part of the day's activities, the RAI will host a panel discussion entitled 'The Mobilization of Voters Overseas' at 12.30pm. RAI Director Jay Sexton will moderate discussion between Bill Barnard of Democrats Abroad and Stacy Hilliard, former Vice-Chair of Republicans Abroad.

Local / British Connections

Both Democratic candidates have connections to Oxford. Hillary Clinton's husband, Bill, was a Rhodes Scholar at University College, Oxford, from 1968 to 1970, and their daughter, Chelsea, read International Relations in Oxford in 2003. Bernie Sanders's elder brother, Larry, has lived in Oxford since 1969. He was a Green Party councillor on Oxfordshire County Council, 2005-2013, and ran as the Green Party's parliamentary candidate for Oxford West and Abingdon in 2015. Larry Sanders will vote at around midday at the RAI polling station and will be available for media interviews.

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FULL REPORT

Introduction: Transnational Electorates, Global Parties

In January 2009, *Forbes* contributor Elisabeth Eaves described President-elect Obama, then days away from his inauguration, as the nation's 'first cosmopolitan president.' With his 'Kansan mother and Kenyan father, [and his] upbringing in Hawaii and Indonesia ... Obama is a global citizen in the most reassuring way.'¹ Others echoed this, with historian Douglas Brinkley describing Obama as America's 'first global president.'² If Obama is the first global president, he entered office in an era of increasingly global political parties. Globalisation – the process by which the world becomes ever more interconnected – has not left the political parties untouched. As Taylor Dark has written, 'American party organizations have taken the first steps to become "global" organizations themselves' and thus 'the assumption that American electoral politics can be understood simply by examining domestic party activity is no longer tenable.'³

A global party depends on a global electorate. Americans have lived overseas since the republic gained its independence, but only in recent decades have political parties sought to mobilize these voters. This has led to the rise of a phenomenon which scholars have called 'political transnationalism,' defined as 'direct cross-border engagement' by migrants in the politics of their country of origin, either directly (by voting or supporting political parties) or indirectly (by engaging with the political institutions of their country of residence).⁴ Current research suggests that the political participation of Americans' overseas does not differ greatly from that practiced by Americans in the US: 'They vote, discuss US politics, engage in protest, lobby in Washington, contact legislators and more.'⁵

Expatriate voters have played a decisive role in the outcome of American elections in the past. Perhaps the most famous example of this came in 2000, when delayed overseas ballots gave George W. Bush a narrow 537-vote lead when the Florida recount was stopped by the Supreme Court. Had the election been decided based on the ballots that had arrived by the 26 November deadline, Al Gore would have won the state of Florida, and the presidential election, by 202 votes.⁶ There are other, less dramatic, instances of overseas voters playing a decisive role in the outcome of elections: for instance, in Jim Webb's victorious Senate campaign in 2006, which delivered control of the Senate to the Democratic Party.

With the aim of drawing on the support of expatriate voters, both major political parties have overseas arms: Democrats Abroad (DA) and Republicans Overseas (RO). However, although superficially similar, the two display striking differences. Indeed, at least at the presidential level, the distinctions between DA and RO confirm the conclusions many commentators have reached about the organisational advantages cultivated

¹ Elisabeth Eaves, "The Cosmopolitan President," *Forbes*, January 15, 2009, <http://www.forbes.com/2009/01/15/cosmopolitan-nussbaum-obama-oped-cx_ee_0115eaves.html>, accessed January 24, 2016.

² Chuck Raasch, "Obama is America's First Global President, Historian Says," *USA Today*, April 7, 2009, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/raasch/2009-04-07-newpolitics_N.htm>, last accessed January 24, 2016.

³ Taylor Dark III, "The Rise of a Global Party? American Party Organizations Abroad," *Party Politics*, 9:2 (March 2003), 241, 242.

⁴ Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Processes," *International Migration Review*, 37:3 (September 2003), 762.

⁵ Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates? Americans in Europe* (Basingstoke, 2014), 175

⁶ David Barstow, Don van Natta, Jr., "Examining the Vote; How Bush Took Florida: Mining the Overseas Absentee Vote," *New York Times*, July 15, 2001.

by the Democratic Party that proved key in the election, and re-election, of Barack Obama. Research undertaken in the UK reveals an expatriate Democratic organisation that is robust, well-developed, and integrated into the national party structure, and Republican organisations taking hurried steps to catch up.

Defining the Overseas Electorate

The first challenge that confronts any researcher looking at the American expatriate community is that there is simply no accurate figure for the number of Americans currently living overseas. Expatriates are not included in the census, although the Census Bureau has tried some creative ways to gain an accurate estimate. There is substantial disagreement from other sources, ranging from 2.2 million (the World Bank) to 6.8 million (the Association of Americans Resident Overseas [AARO]).⁷ The generally accepted figure is closer to six million, which would mean that, as a community, 'overseas Americans' constitute a larger population than all but the most populous nineteen US states.⁸ The United Kingdom is the third most popular destination for American expatriates after Mexico and Canada (and therefore the most popular outside of North America). The World Bank estimates somewhere in the region of 183,183 Americans currently living in the UK, while the State Department has estimated that the figure is around 224,000. Factoring in, for example, dual citizens, the true figure may be even higher.⁹

The most comprehensive academic study of American expatriates has been undertaken by Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, a senior lecturer at the University of Kent. According to von Koppenfels' research, American expatriates in the UK are more likely than the general US population to be educated (95.3% hold a bachelor's degree, and 56% hold a masters) and are most likely to work in the IT/communications, professional/scientific/technical, education, or financial sectors (21.3%, 18.1%, 11.7%, and 9.6% respectively). The most common reasons given for relocating are – unsurprisingly – romance, employment, and education.¹⁰ Most are what she terms 'accidental migrants.' In such cases 'a short-term trip, internship, study abroad, military service or short-term employment ultimately, incrementally, becomes long-term overseas residence.'¹¹

American expatriates secured the right to vote with the passage of the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act (OCVR) in 1975, after determined lobbying by a variety of expatriate groups. This act, subsequently amended by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) in 1986, affords all Americans living overseas the right to vote by absentee ballot in federal elections via the state and congressional district in which they most recently resided. Whether expatriates are able to vote in local elections is a matter for the states. The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), part of the Department of Defense, is responsible for ensuring that members of the US armed forces and civilians overseas are able to exercise their franchise. FVAP exists to encourage voter registration overseas and requires states to transmit absentee ballots to eligible voters in advance of a federal election.¹²

⁷ Joe Constanzo, Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, "Counting the Uncountable: Overseas Americans," *Migration Information Service: The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, May 17, 2013

<<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/counting-uncountable-overseas-americans>>

⁸ Taylor E. Dark, III, "Americans Abroad: The Challenge of a Globalized Electorate," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 36:4 (October 2003), 733; "Population Estimates: State Totals: Vintage 2015," *United States Census Bureau*, <<http://www.census.gov/popest/data/state/totals/2015/index.html>>, last accessed February 10, 2016.

⁹ Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates?*, 30, 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-38

¹¹ Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, "The Face of Overseas Americans," *American Citizens Abroad* <<https://americansabroad.org/files/8613/5972/6757/acapiecejan2013.pdf>>, last accessed January 28, 2016.

¹² 'About', *Federal Voting Assistance Program*, <<https://www.fvap.gov/info/about>>, last accessed January 27, 2016

Compared to the general US population, voter turnout among expatriates is low, lower even than among that most notoriously unengaged demographic: the young. In the 2012 cycle, some 876,362 ballots were sent to overseas voters (51% of these were to those in the armed services, and 44.4%, or 388,917 individual ballots, to ‘overseas civilians’). Of these, 69.2% (or 606,425) were returned. Of the ballots counted, 278,212 (45.9%) came from civilians.¹³ Assuming a population of five million eligible voters overseas, this represents a turnout rate of 12%. By contrast, turnout among 18-24 year olds was more than triple that, at 41.2%.¹⁴ Even taking into account expatriates who leave the US with the intention of cutting political ties, this is a strikingly low figure.

Increasing turnout among expatriates is one of the principal goals of both overseas party organisations. In this, Democrats Abroad has one clear advantage over its rival, in that its members are able to participate in a primary vote to choose the party’s presidential candidate. This year, Democrats Abroad will hold its third ‘Global Presidential Primary,’ which it first introduced in 2008. From January 11 until March 8, registered Democrats across the world will be able to vote for their preferred candidate. As well as being able to cast their ballot via post, fax, and e-mail, expatriates will also be able to vote in person at designated Voting Centers, from March 1 (‘Super Tuesday’) until March 8.

The Voting Center in Oxford will, for the second time, be at the Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford (in the UK, similar Voting Centers will be established in London, Cambridge, Edinburgh, and St. Andrews). Any American living abroad who will be 18 by Election Day 2016 and is a member of Democrats Abroad (and prepared to sign an affidavit affirming their support of the Democratic Party) is eligible to participate, provided they have not voted, and do not intend to vote, in their home state primary. Voters are allowed to join at the Voting Centre on the day of the primary.

Following the Global Primary, Democrats Abroad will hold a series of caucuses to choose their delegates to the national convention, culminating in its own Global Convention in Berlin in May, which will draft policy platform proposals and elect an additional three at-large delegates for the national convention. DA will also select delegates to fill a seat on each of the convention’s standing committees – Rules, Credentials, and Platform – giving them some say over the rules governing the convention and the party’s platform (i.e. manifesto) for the 2016 election. In total, Democrats Abroad will send 21 delegates to the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. As the convention consists of 4,764 delegates in total, DA’s impact will obviously be limited. However, the delegation is comparable in size to those of, for instance, Wyoming or Alaska.

Democrats Abroad

Democrats Abroad dates its own founding to the twin committees established in London and Paris during the 1964 presidential campaign by politically-active expatriates. These were the outgrowth of looser support networks that had been created in the two capitals on behalf of John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign in 1960. The committees were formally recognised by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 1964 and the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed an official liaison. Before the 1968 election, Democrats Abroad had embarked on a decade-long campaign to ensure full voting rights for US citizens living

¹³ US Election Assistance Commission, *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, Survey Findings*, July 2013, 1, 6, <http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/Documents/508compliant_Main_91_p.pdf>, last accessed January 28, 2016.

¹⁴ Claire M. Smith, “These Are Our Numbers: Civilian Americans Overseas and Voter Turnout,” *Overseas Vote Foundation Research Newsletter*, vol. 2, issue 4, Aug 2010, 9, <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/files/OVF_NL_July-Aug2010.pdf>, last accessed February 1, 2016; Paul Taylor, Mark Hugo Lopez, “Six Take-aways from the Census Bureau’s Voting Report,” *Pew Research Center*, May 8, 2013, <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/05/08/six-take-aways-from-the-census-bureaus-voting-report/>>, last accessed February 1, 2016.

overseas. Prior to the passage of the OCVR, US citizens overseas could fundraise and generate publicity for their chosen party, but had no right to vote.

Since 1976, Democrats Abroad has been recognised as a ‘state’ by the Democratic National Committee, which gives it the right to send voting delegates to the national convention and to elect members to the DNC. DA has been at the forefront of efforts to remove obstacles to voting by overseas citizens, supporting the passage of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002.¹⁵ The organisation’s primary goal is the registration of voters abroad and, to that end, the Democratic Party has established a website (www.votefromabroad.org) to guide eligible voters through the process of requesting an absentee ballot.

Democrats Abroad receives no financial support from the DNC, and does not charge membership dues. It relies on private donations, money raised from events, and volunteers to meet its operating costs. Democrats Abroad UK has only one paid employee, a quarter-time clerical assistant.¹⁶ In financially tight times, the DNC would be hard-pressed to extend funding even if it wanted to, although it did offer DA office space in its Washington, D.C. headquarters for a few years after the 2000 election. Political donors in the US tend to make contributions to individual candidates, rather than to party organisations; this explains the fact that Obama could raise over \$1 billion for his re-election bid in 2012, while the DNC had debts totalling \$6.9 million (and only \$4.7 million cash on hand) as of October 2015.¹⁷

Though accorded the status of a state party, Democrats Abroad does not have recourse to a crucial means of fundraising available to most state parties: as the expatriate community elects no representatives (governors, lieutenant-governors, mayors, etc.) it is unable to charge prospective candidates filing fees. Nonetheless, it is creative in its fundraising initiatives. It holds speaker events, debates, and social gatherings. Democrats Abroad UK’s largest fundraising event is the annual Independence Day Picnic, held on July 4th in Portman Square, London, which typically nets the organisation a profit of around £4,000.¹⁸

DA’s delegate apportionment gives the organisation patronage powers denied to Republicans Overseas. They can use these positions ‘as selective incentives to draw in new members and reward long-time activists.’¹⁹ In this way, Democratic expatriates can remain politically engaged, and even cultivate political careers, despite not being based in the US. Many DA volunteers have prior experience in politics or political activism. Bill Barnard, former chair of Democrats Abroad UK, describes himself as a ‘Democrat by inheritance.’ Barnard comes from a politically active family of Democrats – his great-grandfather was a US congressman during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson – and he got his start in Alabama politics in the 1960s. He attended his first Democratic National Convention in 1964, albeit as a freelance journalist. After his move to the UK, he became politically ‘inactive’ but was galvanised to re-engage by the election of George W. Bush in 2000.²⁰

The contested election of 2000, with its resolution influenced by the votes of overseas citizens, had a galvanic effect on the overseas Democratic community. ‘George [W.] Bush was the best recruiter we ever had, both his victory and his administration,’ recalled Barnard. The introduction of the 2008 Global Presidential Primary brought more enthusiasm, not least because of the high drama of that year’s Democratic race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. According to Barnard, the 2008 primary brought ‘an incredible camaraderie’ in the American expatriate community in the UK, particularly in London, despite the intense

¹⁵ ‘History,’ *Democrats Abroad*, <<http://www.democratsabroad.org/history>>, last accessed February 1, 2016

¹⁶ Author interview with William D. Barnard, January 27, 2016.

¹⁷ Stephen Dinan, “Struggling DNC Craves Tax Dollars for Convention,” *The Washington Times*, December 13, 2015, <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/13/dnc-craves-tax-dollars-for-convention/?page=all>>, last accessed January 29, 2016; Kenneth P. Vogel, Dave Levinthal, and Tarini Parti, “Obama, Romney Both Topped \$1B,” *Politico*, December 7, 2012, <<http://www.politico.com/story/2012/12/barack-obama-mitt-romney-both-topped-1-billion-in-2012-084737>>, last accessed January 29, 2016.

¹⁸ Barnard interview.

¹⁹ Dark, “The Rise of a Global Party?,” 246.

²⁰ Barnard interview.

division between Obama and Clinton partisans. ‘There were groups in London ... who were very organized for Hillary and for Obama ... But one of the things they hit on early on [was] ... to hold joint meetings in people’s homes, and dinners and the rest, partly to raise funds for DAUK, but partly just to bring [their] children and let them see what American politics is like, what political issues are like.’ Out of this, recalls Barnard, grew ‘a sense of identification as an American community, as an American Democratic community’ that was very useful during his time as chair. The most practical outgrowth was the establishment of the ‘Sterling Circle,’ a scheme whereby members who donated a certain amount in a year (\$1,000 for an individual, \$1,500 for a couple) would receive free entry to all DAUK events.²¹

In 2008, the year of the first Global Primary, some 22,715 expatriate Democrats worldwide cast ballots. Obama won in a landslide, 67% to Clinton’s 33% (a larger proportion than he garnered in his home state, Illinois).²² Some 1,800 voters descended on Porchester Hall in London, one of the only Voting Centers in the UK that year. A line three-wide stretched out into the street and fire safety inspectors had to prevent voters from loitering inside to comply with safety regulations. Barnard notes that, while there is still considerable enthusiasm in 2016, there is no comparable division between the Clinton and Sanders supporters in advance of this cycle’s primary. The ‘movers and shakers of the American community in London,’ who were divided between the candidates in 2008, appear to be more solidly pro-Clinton this year. Eric Lee – a DAUK-affiliated organiser for Sanders in London, trade union activist, and founder of Labour Start – is banking on the Democratic community abroad being more liberal than that at home and on the substantial student population.²³

Why should American expatriate Democrats vote in the Global Primary, rather than their home state primaries? Democrats Abroad give four principal reasons: (1) it demonstrates to the world and the US how important voting is to US citizens living abroad; (2) each individual vote carries greater weight in the Global Primary, which will reach a total electorate of perhaps half a million, significantly smaller than the primary electorates of, for instance, New York or California (states from which the majority of US citizens abroad hail); (3) a higher turnout gives DA ‘a stronger voice and greater weight’ within the DNC, and thus strengthens the ability of DA to campaign for policy changes important to overseas Americans; (4) as the Global Primary coincides with Super Tuesday, and comes comparatively early in the process, participants have more chance of shaping the nominating contest.²⁴ In addition, the Global Primary enfranchises those citizens whose home state holds a caucus (e.g. Iowa) and who would otherwise have to travel back to the US and participate in person to register a preference for a candidate.

Democratic candidates have tapped expatriates, on average wealthier than the general population of the US, as a donor base. The Obama campaign was particularly energetic in pursuing these sources, sending clipboard-toting volunteers to overseas exhibition games staged by the National Football League (NFL) and National Hockey League (NHL) to enrol backers.²⁵ FEC data on the 2008 cycle showed that expatriate Americans donated around \$6 million to presidential candidates in the primary and general elections, a significant increase on the nearly \$500,000 raised from overseas donors, in total, during the entire 2000 campaign. Obama received the lion’s share of this, taking almost \$5 million. Only \$330,000 went to his

²¹ Barnard interview

²² “Primary Season Election Results,” *New York Times*, <<http://politics.nytimes.com/election-guide/2008/results/votes/>>, last accessed February 4, 2016.

²³ Barnard interview

²⁴ Bob Vallier, “Global Presidential Primary FAQ,”

http://www.democratsabroad.org/bobvallier/frequently_asked_questions_about_the_global_presidential_primary, last accessed January 31, 2016.

²⁵ Leslie Wayne, “Forget Iowa. How About That Antarctica Vote?” *New York Times*, March 16, 2008.

Democratic primary opponent, Hillary Clinton, while Republican presidential nominee John McCain received \$400,000.²⁶

The Oxford chapter of Democrats Abroad UK, chaired by Katherine Warren, draws heavily on the community of Rhodes Scholars at Oxford University. Its founder, Chris Hansen, formerly a Marshall Scholar at Linacre College, is currently running for a seat in the Colorado House of Representatives.²⁷ Like Barnard, Warren was politically active before moving to Oxford, having worked for the Department of Health and Human Services. The Oxford group, according to Warren, has a ‘pretty diverse membership,’ consisting principally of a mix of long-time expatriates and students. The chapter holds social functions and speaker events, including bipartisan events with its rival, Republicans Overseas. One recent such event, titled the ‘Gang of Oxford,’ was named after the ‘Gang of Eight,’ a bipartisan group of senators who came together in the cause of immigration reform.²⁸

Republicans Overseas

The predecessor organisation of Republicans Overseas, Republicans Abroad, was founded in 1978, spurred by the passage of the OCVR. Unlike its Democratic counterpart, Republicans Overseas has no formal affiliation to the national Republican Party. It holds no primary or caucus and sends no delegates to the national convention.²⁹ Up to 2012, Republicans Abroad was principally financed by Chris Fussner, a technology entrepreneur based in Singapore. RA had offices based in Washington and Fussner was given a speaking slot at the 2012 Republican National Convention. In January 2013, Fussner took the decision to cease funding the organisation internationally, and it folded. Its successor, Republicans Overseas, was established later that same year by Solomon Yue, an entrepreneur and Chinese-born American citizen based in Oregon. He is currently Vice-Chairman and CEO of RO. Some expatriate Republican organisations – in Norway, for example – continue to operate under the ‘Republicans Abroad’ brand. For reasons of convenience, and because of the UK-focus, this paper uses ‘Republicans Overseas.’

Republicans Overseas, says former Events Chair of ROUK David Hawkins, is ‘self-contained and self-funded’ – like DA, it receives no money from the Republican National Committee (RNC) and similarly depends on a mix of private donations, fundraising, and volunteers.³⁰ Republicans Overseas is registered with the IRS under Section 527 of the US Internal Revenue Code – the same provision that covers most Political Action Committees (PACs) and Super-PACs.³¹

The explanation for the Republican Party’s failure to follow the Democratic lead in establishing a Global Primary (or indeed to incorporate overseas voters into the party structures in any formal way) is explained by Hawkins as a matter of ideology (‘Independence is always respected on the right’) and staffing issues (officials at the RNC with a keen understanding of the importance of overseas ballots have a tendency to move on, meaning RO is persistently having to make views ‘loud and clear’ to new arrivals).³²

There are, however, moves afoot to strengthen the organisational sinews of Republican voters abroad, or at least in the UK. On March 1, 2016, for instance, Stacy Hillard, former Vice Chair of Republicans Abroad, will

²⁶ Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates?*, 201; Lindsay Renick Mayer, “Sending Money Home,” *OpenSecrets.org*, Center for Responsive Politics, September 20, 2007, <<http://www.opensecrets.org/news/2007/09/sending-money-home/>> last accessed February 12, 2016.

²⁷ “Chris Hansen: Democrat for State House,” <<http://hansenforcolorado.com/>>, last accessed January 31, 2016

²⁸ Author interview with Katherine Warren, January 29, 2016.

²⁹ Republicans Overseas, “About,” <<http://www.republicansoverseas-uk.com/about>>

³⁰ Author interview with David Hawkins, via email, February 1, 2016.

³¹ Kent Cooper, “Republicans Overseas Inc. Established to Speak on Public Policy,” *Roll Call*, September 25, 2013, <<http://blogs.rollcall.com/moneyline/republicans-overseas-inc-established-to-speak-on-public-policy/>>, last accessed January 30, 2016

³² Hawkins interview

announce the creation of new Political Action Committee (PAC). Though not an organisational outgrowth of Republicans Overseas, this PAC will promote conservative causes and seek to boost turnout among expatriate Republicans.

In lieu of a primary or caucus, members of Republicans Overseas were offered the opportunity to register their support for a particular candidate in an online straw poll (#ROStrawPoll). The results of that poll – which recorded the participation of voters from 67 countries – were released on 27 January and showed Marco Rubio leading among US voters based in the UK, 27.07%, with Donald Trump in second place (19.55%) and Rand Paul in third (15.04%).³³ With Rubio at around 2.5 times his national average at the time and Trump substantially behind him, this suggests a more moderate Republican electorate in the UK than in the US.³⁴

On the Issues

Neither Democrats Abroad nor Republicans Overseas formally endorse candidates. To that extent, they behave very much like state party organisations in the US, despite their very different relationship to the national party structures. Nonetheless, both organisations have issue agendas that they pursue on behalf of their members. According to representatives of both DA and RO, the issues that motivate expatriate voters are largely the same as motivate voters back home. Of course, there are issues that are peculiar to the expatriate community. Bill Barnard cites as example issues relating to the status of children born to Americans living abroad but who have never themselves lived in the US. Where do they vote? How do they register?³⁵

One of the most contentious issues for Americans living overseas has been the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA). Passed in 2010, the act was designed to counteract tax evasion by US citizens who maintain overseas accounts. Its acronym is a deliberate allusion to ‘fat cat.’ FATCA requires that US citizens report all financial holdings outside of the US in excess of \$200,000 to the IRS. Co-ownership of any company must also be reported. In addition, foreign banks must report information on American account holders to the IRS. The complexity of the reporting requirements, combined with onerous penalties for non-compliance, has led to many foreign banks refusing American customers.³⁶ FATCA has been identified as one of the leading causes of expatriate Americans renouncing their citizenship, which has climbed to record levels in recent years.³⁷

Democrats Abroad seeks reform of the law. It contends that FATCA was passed ‘to bring an end to illegal tax avoidance by Americans in the US who use overseas financial accounts to secret [*sic*] untaxed earnings out of the country.’ DA proposes instead a ‘Safe Harbor for Americans abroad’ (also known as the ‘Same Country Exemption’) which would free Americans living abroad, and paying taxes in their host country, from reporting their accounts to the IRS.³⁸ Republicans Overseas, by contrast, favours full repeal of FATCA. A petition supported by RO describes FATCA as a violation of the US Constitution, ‘morally reprehensible,’ and imposing

³³ “First International GOP Presidential Straw Poll – Results and Debate,” Powerpoint presentation, supplied by David Hawkins, Republicans Overseas, January 27, 2016.

³⁴ Of course, a nonbinding online straw poll hardly guarantees a representative sample of voters. “Polls, 2016 Republican Presidential Nomination,” *Real Clear Politics*, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/us/2016_republican_presidential_nomination-3823.html>, last accessed January 31, 2016

³⁵ Barnard interview.

³⁶ Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates?*, 259-60.

³⁷ Linda Dimyan, “Expatriates Choosing to Leave the US Rather than Pay Taxes,” *CNBC*, September 12, 2015, <<http://www.cnbc.com/2015/09/11/expatriates-choosing-to-leave-the-us-rather-than-pay-taxes.html>>, last accessed February 1, 2016

³⁸ *Democrats Abroad*, “Taxation,” <<http://www.democratsabroad.org/taxation>>, last accessed February 1, 2016

a ‘horrible choice [on Americans living overseas] between citizenship and livelihood.’³⁹ In this they have the support of former presidential candidate Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, who is one of the plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging the act in an Ohio district court.⁴⁰

Katherine Warren expects that recent changes to UK immigration rules, particularly with regard to foreign students, will likely be a focus of activism in the near future.⁴¹ If the case of Dr. Paul Hamilton – a California native and recent PhD graduate of the University of Birmingham, arrested in January and held for ten days at an immigration removal centre, having not been notified that his application for leave to remain had been refused – is a forewarning, then expatriate groups are likely to devote increasing energy to this issue.⁴² This would form part of Warren’s broader ambition ‘to really engage with the UK itself,’ in particular to pursue events programmes that directly engage with political debates in the UK.⁴³

Conclusion

In the 2008 and 2012 elections, there was much commentary about the superiority of the President Obama’s ‘ground game’ over that of his Republican rivals. In 2012, the Obama campaign could boast that its field offices outnumbered those of the GOP by a two-to-one margin – three-to-one in some battleground states.⁴⁴ It seems clear that this logistical edge is reflected in the relative strength and vitality of the overseas wings of the political parties. Of the UK respondents in von Koppenfels’s surveys, 42% belong to Democrats Abroad, as opposed to only 0.6% who belong to Republicans Abroad (as was).⁴⁵

However, it is easy to overstate the Democratic organisational advantage. In fact, as *Vox*’s Matthew Yglesias has pointed out, the Democratic Party is in a difficult condition below the presidential level.⁴⁶ And the problem of low voter turnout remains stubbornly intractable, despite initiatives undertaken by both DA and RO. Bill Barnard believes that in terms of reaching those ‘people who are politically active, who are interested in identifying with a party, the Democratic Party, and who wish for their involvement to be in Democrats Abroad,’ the organisation has ‘probably penetrated about as much as [it is] going to do.’⁴⁷

Nonetheless, both Democrats Abroad and Republicans Overseas remain vibrant and ambitious organisations, determined to find new and creative ways to represent the interests of party members and the wider expatriate community. The role these overseas voters will play in 2016 remains to be seen.

³⁹ The petition can be accessed via a link on the ROUK website. *Abolish FATCA* <<https://www.abolishfatca.com/live/>>, Last accessed January 30, 2016.

⁴⁰ Robert Goulder, “Litigating FATCA: Rand Paul and Financial Privacy,” *Forbes*, September 16, 2015, <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/taxanalysts/2015/09/16/litigating-fatca-rand-paul-and-financial-privacy/#3fc98e362817>>, last accessed January 30, 2016.

⁴¹ Warren interview

⁴² John Morgan, “US PhD Graduate Detained in UK Immigration Removal Centre,” *Times Higher Education*, January 25, 2016, <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/us-phd-graduate-detained-in-uk-immigration-removal-centre>>, last accessed January 31, 2016.

⁴³ Warren interview.

⁴⁴ Molly Ball, “Obama’s Edge: The Ground Game That Could Put Him Over the Top,” *The Atlantic*, October 24, 2012, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/10/obamas-edge-the-ground-game-that-could-put-him-over-the-top/264031/>>; Rebecca Sinderbrand, “Analysis: Obama Won With A Better Ground Game,” *CNN Politics*, November 7, 2012, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/11/07/politics/analysis-why-obama-won/>>, last accessed February 2, 2016.

⁴⁵ Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates?*, 96.

⁴⁶ At present, the House and the Senate are Republican-controlled and likely to remain so after 2016. In addition, 70% of state legislatures, over 60% of governorships, and 55% of attorneys general and secretaries of state are held by the Republicans. Matthew Yglesias, “Democrats Are In Denial. Their Party Is Actually in Deep Trouble,” *Vox*, October 19, 2015, <<http://www.vox.com/2015/10/19/9565119/democrats-in-deep-trouble>>, last accessed February 2, 2016.

⁴⁷ Barnard interview.

Further reading

Taylor Dark III, "The Rise of a Global Party? American Party Organizations Abroad," *Party Politics*, 9:2 (March 2003), 241-255

Taylor Dark III, "Americans Abroad: The Challenge of a Globalized Electorate," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 36:4 (October 2003), 733-740

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