

## AMERICA'S OVERSEAS VOTERS: 2016'S FORGOTTEN CONSTITUENCY?

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The 2016 U.S. presidential campaign has proven one of the most unpredictable in recent decades, largely due to the unpopularity of both major party candidates, historically high levels of undecided voters, and unusually high support for third party candidates. Though Democrat Hillary Clinton appears to have opened a clear lead over her Republican opponent Donald Trump since the first presidential debate in late September, analyst Nate Silver has noted that ‘the polls have been considerably more volatile this year than in 2012.’<sup>1</sup> Indeed, while most observers now consider a Clinton victory to be highly probable, some polls indicate that the race remains tight, even after what have widely been seen as significant reverses for the Republican nominee’s campaign in the past few weeks.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, recent unexpected outcomes in elections and referenda in different parts of the world have served as a reminder that the conventional wisdom about the likelihood of a particular result can be proven wrong when the votes are counted.

In such a climate, neither party can take anything for granted. As the race enters its final weeks, and with control of not just the White House but also the Senate and the House of Representatives in contention, candidates and parties are scrambling to ensure that their supporters turn out to vote. At this critical juncture, one bloc that that may still be underestimated is also one of the largest: American voters living overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> Nate Silver, “Election Update: Where the Race Stands Heading Into the First Debate,” *FiveThirtyEight*, 25 September 2016, <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/election-update-where-the-race-stands-heading-into-the-first-debate/>, accessed 4 October 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Clement and Dan Balz, “Washington Post-ABC News poll: Clinton holds four-point lead in aftermath of Trump tape,” *Washington Post*, 16 October 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/washington-post-abc-news-poll-clinton-holds-four-point-lead-in-aftermath-of-trump-tape/2016/10/15/c31969a4-9231-11e6-9c52-0b10449e33c4\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_poll-1205am%3Ahomepage%2Fstory](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/washington-post-abc-news-poll-clinton-holds-four-point-lead-in-aftermath-of-trump-tape/2016/10/15/c31969a4-9231-11e6-9c52-0b10449e33c4_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_poll-1205am%3Ahomepage%2Fstory), accessed 16 October 2016.

By far the most dramatic instance of overseas voters influencing a presidential election came in 2000, when delayed overseas ballots gave George W. Bush a narrow 537-vote lead after the Florida recount was stopped by the Supreme Court. Had that election been decided on ballots that had arrived by the original November 26 deadline, Al Gore would have won the state, and the presidency, by 202 votes.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, overseas voters may have played a decisive role in some very close Senate races in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

Such events have led to a growing awareness of the importance of the American electorate overseas. One liberal online campaign group, Avaaz, has launched a worldwide effort to increase registration and voter turnout among Americans abroad.<sup>5</sup> Alongside social media efforts, they have used publicity stunts – such as sending a ‘Stop Trump’ battle bus filled with activists toting placards and balloons around central London. They have also embarked on a campaign in Mexico under the hashtag #GringosAVotar to encourage U.S. expatriates living there to register and vote against Trump. They argue that overseas voters constitute ‘a secret swing state’ that could decide the election.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, a recent study released by the Federal Voting Assistance Program, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Defence, concluded that the number of U.S. citizen civilians living outside the country exceeds 5.7

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<sup>3</sup> David Barstow, Don van Natta, Jr., “Examining the Vote; How Bush Took Florida: Mining the Overseas Absentee Vote,” *New York Times*, 15 July 2001, [http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/15/us/examining-the-vote-how-bush-took-florida-mining-the-overseas-absentee-vote.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/15/us/examining-the-vote-how-bush-took-florida-mining-the-overseas-absentee-vote.html?_r=0), accessed 16 October 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Sonia van Gilder Cooke, “Overseas Voters: A Virtual Swing State That Could Decide the Victor,” *Time*, 5 November 2012, <http://world.time.com/2012/11/05/overseas-voters-a-virtual-swing-state-that-could-decide-the-victor/>, accessed 16 October 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Avaaz, [https://secure.avaaz.org/en/globalvote\\_loc/?slideshow](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/globalvote_loc/?slideshow), accessed 4 October 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Alex Felton, Elizabeth Roberts, “‘Stop Trump’ Campaign Bus Tours London,” *CNN*, 23 September 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/23/politics/stop-trump-bus-london/>; “Avaaz Urges Expats to Register and Vote Against Trump,” *The Yucatan Times*, 25 September 2016, <http://www.theyucatanimes.com/2016/09/avaaz-urges-expats-to-refister-and-vote-against-trump/>, accessed 30 September 2016.

million, making the population of Americans abroad larger than that of 30 U.S. states.<sup>7</sup> Even if the FVAP's Overseas Citizen Population Analysis is accurate in estimating that only 2.6 million of these U.S. citizens abroad are eligible voters over 18 years of age, the potential for a bloc of voters of that size to make a difference in the electoral process is clear. Furthermore, considering that the FVAP study estimated that only 4% of eligible overseas voters cast ballots in mid-term elections in 2014, and that only 5% did so in the last presidential election in 2012, there is clearly much room for the impact of these voters to grow if they should begin to take up their right to participate in U.S. elections in greater numbers.

Earlier this year, the Rothermere American Institute (RAI) published a report that examined the available information about overseas voters and explored their potential as a voting bloc, particularly within the context of the presidential primaries, which were then ongoing. That report was the subject of considerable coverage in a variety of media outlets, and it was cited by Avaaz in their publicity campaign. Since the report's release in March, additional data has become available on the potential political clout of Americans abroad, and attention has turned to the impact they might have on the general election. This report therefore expands upon our original study, incorporating new information and focusing on the role overseas voters might play in November.

## **THE STATE OF THE RACE**

The first step in determining the role overseas voters may have in the presidential election is to determine those states where they may have the greatest effect. The nature of the Electoral

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<sup>7</sup> FVAP was established to administer the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986. The full Overseas Citizen Population Analysis, as well as an executive summary, can be read on the FVAP website, <https://www.fvap.gov/info/reports-surveys/overseas-citizen-population-analysis>.

College is such that national presidential polls can be misleading; what ultimately decides the outcome is the combination of states that a particular candidate wins. The ballots of overseas voters are cast in the state in which they were last resident. Inevitably, therefore, the voting power of the expatriate community is diluted by being channelled through their home states. An overseas voter from a more reliably partisan state, such as New York or Texas, has less scope to make a decisive impact on the outcome. Of course, this is also true of voters who reside in those states.

Relying on state-by-state polling averages recorded by poll aggregators *Real Clear Politics*, *FiveThirtyEight* and the *Huffington Post* (as of 10 October), we have sorted the 50 states into three categories: ‘solid’ states in which either Trump or Clinton recorded a lead of more than 10 percentage points in polling averages (represented in dark red or dark blue), ‘likely’ states in which the advantage of the leading candidate is between 5 and 10 percentage points (represented in light blue or pink), and ‘swing’ states in which neither candidate leads the other by more than 5 points (represented in grey). It is in these latter states where overseas voters have the potential to have the greatest impact.



It is clear that there are a range of states in which overseas voters could make a meaningful difference to the outcome.

To give a clearer sense of the impact that overseas voters could have on the election result, we have prepared the following projection. Using the unadjusted state polling averages provided by *FiveThirtyEight*, and the turnout figures from the 2012 presidential election, we have projected the margin by which the trailing candidate in each state would need to win the overseas vote in order to overtake his or her opponent.<sup>8</sup> This projection assumes that turnout in 2016 will be identical to that four years earlier. While it is of course highly unlikely that turnout figures will be unchanged from 2012, these projections provide a rough indication of the kind of difference that the overseas vote could make in particularly competitive states.

**Table 2: Overseas Voter Projections**

| State          | Projected % share<br>(figure for leader in bold) |             | 2012 voter turnout | Approximate margin of victory among overseas votes needed to swing the state |
|----------------|--|-------------|--------------------|--|
|                | HRC  | DJT         |                    |  |
| Ohio           | <b>42.1</b>                                      | 42.0        | 5,633,246          | 5,600  |
| Nevada         | <b>42.5</b>                                      | 41.8        | 1,016,664          | 7,100  |
| North Carolina | <b>43.1</b>                                      | 42.2        | 4,505,372          | 40,500   |
| Arizona        | 40.2   | <b>42.0</b> | 2,323,579          | 41,800   |
| Florida        | <b>44.4</b>                                      | 42.5        | 8,474,179          | 161,000  |
| Iowa           | 39.5   | <b>41.4</b> | 1,589,899          | 30,200   |
| Colorado       | <b>42.3</b>                                      | 38.5        | 2,596,173          | 98,500   |
| Georgia        | 40.4   | <b>45.1</b> | 3,900,050          | 183,300  |

<sup>8</sup> Turnout figures have been taken from the official returns provided by each state's Board of Elections or Secretary of State. Accessed between 21 September and 16 October 2016.

Whether or not overseas votes could actually deliver victory to a particular candidate of course depends on the number of votes cast from abroad in a given state. Unfortunately, few states provide comprehensive breakdowns showing the number of overseas ballots received in any given election, but one that does is Ohio. Its returns show that 15,346 overseas ballots were counted in the 2012 general election.<sup>9</sup> Clinton is currently leading by a narrow margin in Ohio, but most commentators agree that Trump would have to win the state in order to have a hope of assembling a majority in the Electoral College and winning the presidency.<sup>10</sup> Our projection suggests that, if the polls showing a very tight race in Ohio prove to be accurate, and if overall turnout and the number of overseas ballots cast in the state are the same as in 2012, Trump would need to win the total overseas vote of 15,346 by a margin of approximately 5,600 votes to have the Buckeye State swing to him. While the likelihood that either candidate could win such a large proportion of votes cast from abroad – approximately 68% – might seem remote, it is worth noting that Bernie Sanders defeated Hillary Clinton in the Democrats Abroad primary in March 2016 by an even larger margin (69% to 31%), showing that it is possible for an overseas electorate to take a position that differs significantly from that taken by the national electorate as a whole.<sup>11</sup> The fact that overseas voters could theoretically have a decisive impact on the outcome in particularly competitive states makes it important to understand better the profile of those who are casting ballots from overseas.

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<sup>9</sup> Ohio Secretary of State, “Absentee Ballot Report: November 6, 2012 General Election,” <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/upload/elections/2012/gen/absentee.xlsx>. The Ohio Secretary of State has announced that 17,300 military and overseas ballots had been requested for the 2016 general election as of 7 October, suggesting that the number of votes from abroad that will be cast in the state this year will be similar to, or perhaps slightly higher than, the number case in 2012. See Ohio Secretary of State, “Secretary Husted Announces Over 1 Million Absentee Ballot Applications Received,” 11 October 2016, <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/mediaCenter/2016/2016-10-11-a.aspx>, accessed 14 October 2016.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Alexander Burns and Maggie Haberman, “Electoral Map Gives Donald Trump Few Places To Go,” *NYT*, 30 July 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/us/politics/donald-trump-presidential-race.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/us/politics/donald-trump-presidential-race.html?_r=0), accessed 4 October 2016.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, at a national level, Clinton only won in Singapore, the Dominican Republic, and Nigeria. Full results are available from the *Democrats Abroad* website, [http://www.democratsabroad.org/global\\_presidential\\_primary\\_results](http://www.democratsabroad.org/global_presidential_primary_results), accessed 4 October 2016.

## **A PROFILE OF LIKELY OVERSEAS VOTERS IN A SWING STATE**

While collecting full information on the number of potential U.S. voters abroad and on the political preferences of American expatriates is exceedingly difficult, official absentee ballot data from North Carolina makes it possible to construct a fascinating profile of the 2016 overseas voter population in a key swing state. Examining the potential impact of votes from North Carolinians abroad is particularly relevant as the Tar Heel State will be an important prize for whichever candidate wins its 15 electoral votes. North Carolina's electorate is closely split between Democratic-leaning voters based in growing urban areas, university towns, and African-American communities on the one hand and, on the other, Republican-leaning voters concentrated in rural and suburban areas. Of the states won by Democrat Barack Obama in the 2008 election, North Carolina was the one he carried by the smallest margin (0.23 percentage points), and it was the most competitive state won by Republican Mitt Romney in 2012. With a close result expected again in 2016, both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have been frequent visitors to the state in recent months.

What do we know, then, about the North Carolinians who will be voting from abroad in 2016? Information released by the North Carolina State Board of Elections indicates that by mid-October 2016, 144,349 absentee ballots had been requested in the state for the November general election, with no U.S. state recorded as part of the ballot mailing address for 10,686 of those voters.<sup>12</sup> While that figure includes a small number of duplicate entries and inaccurately entered U.S. addresses, an examination of the data reveals that almost all of those requests came from overseas and military voters seeking to cast North Carolina ballots

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<sup>12</sup> North Carolina State Board of Elections, "Absentee Voter Files: 11/08/2016 General Election," <https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/ENRS/absentee11xx08xx2016.zip>, accessed 14 October 2016.



from abroad.<sup>13</sup> Despite the imperfections of the available data – including the fact that the profile that emerges from it will change as additional ballot requests are processed between now and Election Day – the detailed information provided by state records allows for a closer analysis of the impact that Americans abroad might have on this year’s election than is usually possible.<sup>14</sup>

Encouragingly for the Clinton campaign, the share of ballot requests that has come from registered Democrats – 42% – is slightly higher than would be the case if overseas voters reflected the profile of the electorate as a whole; statewide, only 39.2% of registered voters are Democrats. Even more striking than the overrepresentation of Democratic voters in the sample is the underrepresentation of registered Republicans, who make up 30.1% of North Carolina voters but only 19.9% of the ones seeking to vote from abroad. More ambiguously, it is unaffiliated voters who are most heavily overrepresented in the overseas voting population relative to their share of the statewide electorate, but the relatively high number of registered Democrats and the relatively low number of registered Republicans among overseas voters nonetheless points to at least a slight advantage for Democratic candidates in

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<sup>13</sup> The mailing address for the overwhelming majority of absentee ballot requesters – 114,581, or 79% of the total – was within North Carolina, and in a great many cases was the same as the voter’s home address. It is worth noting that some of these ballots will no doubt be cast from abroad by citizens who might have been able to receive their voting materials at home before leaving the country in advance of Election Day.

<sup>14</sup> Considering that 218,303 “absentee by mail” votes were cast in the 2012 presidential election in North Carolina, and that only 144,349 requests for absentee ballots have been recorded to date in the present electoral cycle, it is likely that a great many more absentee ballot requests – including some from overseas voters – will be made and processed in the final weeks before Election Day. While the possibility must be considered that the profile of those requesting ballots later will differ from that of those who have requested them through mid-October, we believe that the available data provides useful insights into the overall shape of the overseas population most likely actually to cast votes in the 2016 elections. Source for 2012 absentee by mail vote totals: <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NC/42923/123365/Web01/en/summary.html>, accessed 14 October 2016.

North Carolina's competitive statewide races for the presidency, the governorship, and a U.S. Senate seat.<sup>15</sup>

It is also notable that voters registered in urban areas that have supported Democrats in recent electoral cycles are overrepresented among North Carolina's overseas voters. More than 41.2% of overseas ballot requests have come from voters based in the counties that are home to the state's four largest cities – Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro, and Durham – even though Mecklenburg, Wake, Guilford, and Durham Counties account for only 28.2% of the state's population. Conversely, North Carolina's 70 least populous counties, which are overwhelmingly rural, and which tend to be heavily Republican (though they do include some Democratic-leaning counties with high African-American populations in the eastern coastal plain), collectively account for only 14.2% of overseas ballot requests, even though 27.6% of the state's population lives there. Perhaps not too much should be made of the likely partisan leanings of the urban North Carolinians abroad, however. While Democratic margins of victory in places like Charlotte, Durham, and Winston-Salem are often provided by the sizeable black populations in those cities, it appears that African-Americans are heavily underrepresented among North Carolinian voters abroad. While 22.3% of registered Tar Heel voters are listed in state records as African-American, only 6.9% of overseas ballot requests come from North Carolinians identified as black.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Source for population figures by county (serving as basis for computation of share of overseas ballot requests relative to share of NC population): North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, [https://ncosbm.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/demog/countygrowth\\_cert\\_2014.html](https://ncosbm.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/demog/countygrowth_cert_2014.html), accessed 14 October 2016. Source for statewide voter registration data: North Carolina State Board of Elections, [http://enr.ncsbe.gov/voter\\_stats/results.aspx?date=10-08-2016](http://enr.ncsbe.gov/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=10-08-2016), accessed 14 October 2016.

<sup>16</sup> While African-Americans must account for some additional proportion of the 15.2% of those included in absentee ballot request records whose race is listed as “undesignated,” it is clear that they are significantly underrepresented among overseas voters relative to North Carolina's overall demographic profile.

Another – perhaps unsurprising, but nonetheless noteworthy – feature of North Carolina’s overseas electorate that emerges from the data is the relatively high level of participation by voters registered in areas associated with universities and military bases. Indeed, the two counties with the highest number of overseas ballot requests relative to their share of the state’s population are Orange County (home to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and Durham County (home to Duke University), while Watagua County (home to Appalachian State University) stands out as another jurisdiction with a particularly large number of overseas voters relative to its size. At the same time, Cumberland County (home to Fort Bragg) and Onslow County (home to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune) are also the sources of disproportionately large numbers of overseas ballot requests. The information available on the apparent partisan leanings of the voters from these counties seems to confirm assumptions often made about the political preferences of students and academics on the one hand and members of the armed services on the other. In Onslow County, with its heavy military presence, overseas ballot requests from registered Republicans outnumber those from Democrats by 99 to 55, while in liberal Orange County, home to many university students, academics, and retirees from out-of-state, the number of requests from Democrats (431) dwarfs the number received from Republican voters (38).<sup>17</sup>

In sum, as is no doubt the case across the country, overseas voters from North Carolina reflect the diversity of the state’s population in many, if not all, respects. They range in age from 18 to 98, they come from many walks of life, and they are registered to vote in all parts

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<sup>17</sup> The conventional wisdom that military voters are overwhelmingly Republican appears to be confirmed this year by a survey that found Trump with a plurality of support among military personnel (37.6%), followed by Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson (36.5%), with Clinton placing a distant third (16.3%). Confined to non-officers, Clinton did even worse, with 14.1% support. Leo Shane III, George R. Altman, “This Poll of the U.S. Military Has Gary Johnson Tied With Donald Trump in the Race for President,” *Military Times*, 21 September 2016, <http://www.militarytimes.com/articles/this-poll-of-the-U.S.-military-has-gary-johnson-tied-with-donald-trump-in-the-race-for-president>, accessed 27 September 2016.

of the state (with only four of North Carolina's 100 counties reporting no requests for overseas ballots as of mid-October). Even if Democrats, urbanites, and white voters appear to be somewhat overrepresented in this group, it should not be expected that North Carolinians voting from abroad will provide a massive swing vote in one direction or another. Nonetheless, in a very close race, the ways in which the profile of this group differs from that of the statewide electorate could prove significant.

### **WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE OVERSEAS VOTERS?**

But where are these overseas voters to be found, and what is the significance of the fact that they are concentrated in particular countries and regions? Forming an accurate picture of the worldwide distribution of U.S. citizens is a difficult process. Data on the whereabouts of those Americans overseas who do vote is not always readily available from state electoral authorities, and obviously far less is known about those citizens who are not registered. Foreign data sources can be helpful, but many nations record little or no information in their censuses on the foreign citizenships of the residents. FVAP's recent study drew upon a variety of estimates and on voting records to suggest that the largest number of U.S. citizens abroad are to be found in the Americas (2.7 million) and in Europe (1.5 million), particularly in countries such as Mexico, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Their report found that the distribution of eligible U.S. voters was slightly different, with the countries with the largest number of U.S. citizens over the age of 18 ranked as follows:

**Table 4: Distribution of overseas voters**

| <b>Country</b> | <b>Voting-age population</b> |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| Canada         | 660,935                      |
| United Kingdom | 306,600                      |
| France         | 156,899                      |
| Israel         | 133,850                      |
| Japan          | 110,933                      |
| Australia      | 103,385                      |
| Germany        | 89,528                       |
| Costa Rica     | 79,469                       |
| Switzerland    | 68,322                       |
| Mexico         | 64,852                       |
| South Korea    | 54,456                       |

The FVAP analysis also concludes that the turnout rate varies by country of residence, though it remains unclear why that is the case. For instance, U.S. expatriates living in Germany had a significantly higher turnout rate in 2014 (7.5%) than the 4% average. Expatriates in Costa Rica had one of the lowest turnout rates at less than 1%.

FVAP's serious effort to determine where Americans overseas live, and the extent to which they exercise their right to vote, is to be commended, but some of these figures, and the communities to which they refer, merit a closer look. Here we offer some brief comments on the size and composition of U.S. citizen populations of three quite different countries: Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Israel.

### *Mexico*

With much of the heated rhetoric of the 2016 presidential campaign focusing on the issue of undocumented immigration from Mexico and on the economic impact of NAFTA, it is worth considering the impact that U.S. voters based in Mexico could have on the election. Among the community of American expatriates in Mexico, there are many who are mortified by Donald Trump's negative comments about their adopted country of residence and its people,

and others who share his assessment of the importance of controlling the border.<sup>18</sup> However, while businesspeople, retirees, and others who have spent most of their lives in the United States are perhaps the Americans living in Mexico most likely to participate in U.S. elections, a long history of migration between the United States and Mexico means that Mexican citizens who hold dual nationality as a result of having been born in the United States form a much larger part of the pool of potential U.S. voters in Mexico – one that might be particularly motivated to vote this year in response to the Republican nominee’s comments on Mexico and Mexicans.

Just how big is that pool of potential voters? FVAP’s recent analysis concluded that Mexico was home to more than 900,000 U.S. citizens – more than any other foreign country – but that only about 7% of that number was over the age of 18 and therefore eligible to vote.<sup>19</sup> The Mexican census of 2010 provides an alternative source of data, and while its findings tend to confirm that the country has an overwhelmingly young and rapidly growing U.S.-born population, it points to a much larger pool of potential U.S. voters in Mexico. The census found that 738,103 persons born in the United States lived in Mexico in 2010 – a figure that had more than doubled since 2000 – and that while approximately three-quarters of them were under the age of 18, nearly 200,000 of them were adults.<sup>20</sup> This is much larger than FVAP’s estimate of 64,852 eligible Mexico-based voters (and would not include a potentially significant number of naturalised U.S. citizens – not born in the United States – who live in Mexico).

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<sup>18</sup> Angela Kocherga, “Americans living in Mexico could play key role in close election,” *Dallas Morning News*, 6 October 2016, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/2016-presidential-election/2016/10/06/americans-living-mexico-play-key-role-close-election>, accessed 14 October 2016.

<sup>19</sup> FVAP, Summary of Overseas Citizen Population Analysis, <https://www.fvap.gov/info/reports-surveys/overseas-citizen-population-analysis>.

<sup>20</sup> Miguel Ángel Castillo, “Extranjeros en México, 2000-2010,” drawing upon census data released by the Mexican statistical agency INEGI, <http://www.somede.org/coyuntura-demografica/articulos/castillo-20120716.pdf>, accessed 14 October 2016.

The key to understanding the unusual demographic profile of the U.S.-born population of Mexico is the fact that there has been a very substantial trend of return migration among Mexican migrants in the United States since the start of the “Great Recession” of 2008. Many Mexican families have returned to their native land in recent years, bringing their U.S.-born – and therefore U.S. citizen – children with them. Indeed, in its analysis of U.S.-Mexico migration trends, the Pew Research Center has found that this trend has continued and accelerated since 2010, meaning that the total U.S. citizen population of Mexico will have grown further since the most recent Mexican census figures were compiled. A 2015 Pew study found that the one million Mexican migrants who returned from the United States to Mexico between 2009 and 2014 included some 100,000 U.S.-born children under the age of five.<sup>21</sup> While these particular U.S. citizens won’t be able to vote until well into the next decade at the earliest, they, and the hundreds of thousands of other young Americans now living in Mexico, will represent a sizeable potential voting bloc in the future.

### *United Kingdom*

Britain is believed to be home to the largest number of American citizens outside North America. FVAP’s analysis offered an estimate of 306,600 for the number of eligible U.S. voters in the United Kingdom, which would make the number of American citizens in Great Britain approximately equal to the population of Pittsburgh. Considering that the most recent British census found that 197,355 U.S.-born individuals were living in the four countries of the United Kingdom in 2011, the FVAP figure appears high, even if Americans who have arrived in the U.K. since 2011, naturalised U.S. citizens now living in Britain, and the qualifying foreign-born children of U.S. citizens are added to the census figures. Nonetheless,

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<sup>21</sup> Ana González-Barrera, “More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, 19 November 2015, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/11/19/chapter-1-migration-flows-between-the-u-s-and-mexico-have-slowed-and-turned-toward-mexico/>, accessed 14 October 2016.

whether the true figure is closer to 200,000 or 300,000, the United Kingdom is clearly home to an important bloc of U.S. voters, including students, professionals, service personnel stationed at U.K. bases, and individuals who have settled in Britain for family reasons.

One other interesting figure to emerge from the U.K. census relates to the “passport held” by respondents. While the census found 177,000 U.S.-born residents of England and Wales, it found only 126,000 holders of U.S. passports who did not also hold either a British or an Irish passport.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that, as is the case in many other parts of the world, a significant proportion of the U.S. citizen population (though not a majority, in the British case) also holds the nationality of the country in which they live.

### *Israel*

Another country which has received considerable attention is Israel, in part because of the particular place it occupies in U.S. politics, and in part because a large number of U.S.-born Jews have taken advantage of the “right of return” offered under Israeli law and settled there. Indeed, FVAP estimates that more than 100,000 U.S. citizens live in Tel Aviv, which would make it home to second-largest concentration of Americans abroad in the world (after Vancouver). Moreover, according to one campaign group, iVoteIsrael, a large proportion of the American citizens in Israel hail from such swing states as Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Office for National Statistics, “Detailed country of birth and nationality analysis from the 2011 Census of England and Wales,” <http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/detailedcountryofbirthandnationalityanalysisfromthe2011censusofenglandandwales/2013-05-13>, accessed 17 October 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Judy Maltz, “Jewish Swing State? Behind Trump and Clinton’s Aggressive Campaigning for Overseas Voters in Israel,” *Haaretz*, 22 September 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/u-s-election-2016/premium-1.743739>, accessed 30 September 2016.



As a country in which Republican organisers have made a particularly strong effort to rally support for their candidate, Israel also provides an instructive case study of party mobilisation in an overseas context. As of the end of September, the Trump campaign had opened five offices in Israel, mostly around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, including one in the occupied West Bank, a first for any presidential candidate. One *Politico* journalist has joked that ‘Trump’s organizing efforts [in Israel] are more extensive in the West Bank than in West Palm Beach, Fla.’<sup>24</sup> By contrast, Democrats Abroad Israel currently has no call for volunteers and no events listed on its website, though it does have five chapters.<sup>25</sup> Republicans Overseas Israel has suggested that they may be able to convince 200,000 U.S. voters living there to cast a ballot for Trump. Democrats Abroad have cautioned that such numbers should be viewed with scepticism.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, given the fact that ROI’s estimate is more than 1.5 times the size of FVAP’s estimate of the number of eligible U.S. voters in Israel, those figures are likely to be unrealistic. Nonetheless, given the extent to which U.S. policy is seen as a key strategic concern for Israel, it is likely that interest, and participation, in the election by U.S. citizens living there will be exceptionally high.

## CONCLUSION

As both our analysis of the population of North Carolinians voting from abroad and our brief discussion of the U.S. citizen population in Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Israel have made clear, overseas voters are not a homogenous or uniform community, making it difficult to generalise about their partisan leanings or political preferences. Nonetheless, they bring a

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<sup>24</sup> Katie Glueck, “Trump’s Israel Ground Game,” *Politico*, 20 September 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/donald-trump-israel-228394>, accessed 30 September 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Information correct as of 17 October 2016. *Democrats Abroad Israel*, <http://www.democratsabroad.org/il>.

<sup>26</sup> “Democrats Abroad Doubt Figures Cited by Trump Supporters in Israel,” *Europe Online Magazine*, 6 September 2016 [http://en.europeonline-magazine.eu/democrats-abroad-doubt-figures-cited-by-trump-supporters-in-israel\\_483023.html](http://en.europeonline-magazine.eu/democrats-abroad-doubt-figures-cited-by-trump-supporters-in-israel_483023.html), accessed 28 September 2016.

particular set of perspectives to the U.S. political process, and – given the large numbers of them who do not now regularly cast ballots – they have the potential to exercise much greater influence on election results than they now do. And as is confirmed by our estimates of the potential for overseas voters to swing the results in especially competitive states, they can already make a difference when the rest of the electorate is very closely divided.

While deadlines for voter registration have now passed, overseas voters already on the electoral rolls in their home states are no doubt continuing to request and complete absentee ballots. Given the amount of international attention that the Clinton-Trump duel has attracted, and the lengths that both sides have gone to dramatise the stakes, it would be reasonable to expect that participation in the election by Americans abroad will be higher than in previous years. However, given the historically very low levels of voting from overseas, it would be astonishing if turnout were even to break 20%. Certainly, neither presidential candidate has made issues important to overseas citizens a particular focus of their campaign. It is possible that if expatriate voters had more formalised representation within the U.S. political system – modelled perhaps on the *députés* who represent overseas constituencies in France’s National Assembly – they would feel a greater sense of connection to the nation’s politics.

While the dynamics of the presidential race appear to have shifted decisively in Clinton’s favour since the beginning of October, analysts and politicians should be wary of dismissing the possibility that overseas voters might play a key part in determining the outcome of the 2016 elections, at least in the hardest-fought swing states. As the U.K.’s 2015 general election, and the more recent referendum on membership in the European Union have underscored, polls can be mistaken and expectations confounded. If, as several commentators have suggested, 2016 ends up as close and contested an election as 2000,

overseas voters may find themselves playing as decisive a role as they did in Florida sixteen years ago.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Matthew Goodwin, “Why Trump Could Still Pull Off a Surprise,” *Politico*, 16 October 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/10/trump-win-election-brexite-right-wing-214359>, accessed 17 October 2016; and Ed Kilgore, “Be Prepared for a Contested Election,” *New York*, 9 September 2016, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/09/brace-yourself-for-a-repeat-of-the-contested-2000-election.html>, accessed 2 October 2016.