

**Article:** "Americans Abroad: The Challenge of a Globalized Electorate"  
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**Issue:** Oct. 2003  
**Journal:** *PS: Political Science & Politics*



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# Americans Abroad: The Challenge of a Globalized Electorate

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No nation today can be seen as a people living just within the boundaries of a state—all nations, instead, are global in the sense that, even though they have a homeland, many of their members live scattered around the globe.

—Fred Riggs (2000)

Although few political scientists would care to dispute this proposition, almost none have considered it relevant for understanding the situation of the *American* nation, which is usually seen as snugly contained within the formal territory of the U.S.A. It is only the fate of more unfortunate nations, most political scientists would concur, to see their members dispersed across one or more states that are not their own; possessing their own large homeland, American citizens abroad do not and cannot form a “diaspora” in this sense.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, some estimates put the number of Americans living abroad at more than six million—a quantity that would make the overseas population larger than that of any of the 24 smallest states. Call it a diaspora or not, there is no doubt that a very large number of U.S. citizens, most of whom have voting rights in U.S. elections, are now living outside the legal boundaries of the country for long periods of time. The existence of this constituency poses a novel empirical, theoretical, and normative challenge for the study of U.S. politics; one that is likely to grow in importance in the years ahead.

For many observers, the potential importance of the overseas vote was first revealed on the evening of November 7, 2000, as the results of that day’s presidential election were announced. It soon became evident that the late overseas absentee ballots in Florida (those which would be arriving over the next 10 days),

could potentially swing the state, and the election as a whole, to either of the two presidential candidates. As the days slowly ticked by until November 17, spokesmen for the overseas branches of the Democratic and the Republican parties each maintained that the late ballots would tilt the election in their direction. “We’re the party’s secret weapon,” said the executive director of Republicans Abroad, who claimed the overseas vote was composed largely of military personnel and affluent business people (Gay 2000). Democrats, in contrast, foresaw a more liberal tilt produced by students, teachers, and retirees (not to mention the large number of Floridian Jews living in Israel). “There is no way that the overseas vote is predominantly military,” said the executive director of Democrats Abroad, and the group’s chairperson surmised that “the overseas population is pretty much a mirror image of the population back home in the United States” (Fina 2000a; CNN 2000). But when the final election results came in, Republican nominee George W. Bush secured a solid majority of the late-arriving overseas ballots (or at least those which were accepted by county election authorities), thus putting him over the top both in the state’s tally and in the national contest for an electoral vote majority (Table 1). In the aftermath of this apparently decisive result, speculation about the nature of the overseas community was put aside by the media, and further discussion of the demographics of the population, as well as the various issues raised by the nature of its political involvement, was again postponed.

For the scholarly community, however, some fascinating questions were left unanswered. Just how many Americans live overseas, and what are the key characteristics of this population? How many of these citizens vote, and whom do they vote for? Does the electoral behavior of these voters reflect their residency in foreign lands and, if so, does this constitute a threat to U.S. sovereignty? And what is the impact of the rise of a “globalized electorate” on our existing legal frameworks for absentee voting and campaign finance? Unfortunately, the aim here cannot be to definitively resolve these issues, for that task

remains impossible given the limitations of current data. Rather, the goal is to identify the boundaries of current knowledge and lay out the research challenges this subject now poses for students of American electoral politics. Ultimately, the dispersion of U.S. citizens across many nation-states, from which they continue to participate in American politics, raises profound questions about the relationship of territoriality and citizenship in a rapidly globalizing world (Pickus 1998). Such questions have usually been considered the domain of specialists in comparative politics, but the evidence here shows they now have a growing and inescapable relevance to the study of American domestic politics as well.

## The First Challenge: Counting Americans Abroad

Ascertaining the true size and demographic characteristics of the overseas population has proven to be an exceptionally difficult task; in truth, no one has any unimpeachable data on this population as a whole. The biggest obstacle in this quest is that no agency of the United States government currently takes responsibility for counting the overseas population or even recording how many Americans formally emigrate to other countries. At the same time, few foreign countries accurately monitor or report the national origins of visitors who are not formal immigrants (Mills 1993). While there have been sporadic attempts by both the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of State to develop a tally of Americans overseas, these efforts are universally recognized as inadequate. The one group of overseas Americans that the Census Bureau does reliably count is military personnel and other federal employees (Mills 1993). These individuals are easy to find and their overseas status can be effectively verified using existing government records, in marked contrast to civilians abroad, who are under no legal requirement to report their whereabouts to either the State Department or census authorities.<sup>2</sup> If Americans abroad cannot be found, they certainly cannot be counted. *The first challenge for political science*

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**Table 1**  
**Florida Presidential Vote, November 7, 2000**

	George W. Bush	Albert Gore
Domestic votes and on-time overseas votes	2,911,215	2,911,417
Late overseas votes	1,575	836
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,912,790</b>	<b>2,912,253</b>

Note: Final Results as Certified by Florida Secretary of State, November 26, 2000.

Source: Florida Secretary of State.

research, therefore, is to achieve a better count of the overseas population, either in cooperation with government agencies or through private initiatives.

Despite the obstacles, the Census Bureau has on two occasions tried to count overseas Americans. In the 1960 and 1970 censuses, the bureau sought to enumerate private U.S. citizens living abroad for “an extended period,” but relied on overseas Americans voluntarily making a trip to a local U.S. embassy or consulate to fill out census forms. Although the bureau asked foreign service personnel to use all means possible to contact overseas Americans, reports indicate that few citizens abroad even heard of the census and even fewer bothered to complete the requisite forms (Mills 1993). In the aftermath of this failure, the bureau made no further efforts to count private U.S. citizens abroad, citing “serious concerns about our inability to validate responses and the operational complexity of such a worldwide enumeration” (Prewitt 1999). An accurate tally of overseas Americans, bureau officials contended, would require specific funding, major technological and administrative preparations, and extensive field trials.

In the absence of the above requirements, the only overseas Americans officially recorded in the last three censuses (1980–2000) were federal employees (including military personnel) and their dependents. In 2000, active duty military personnel serving abroad numbered 263,072, along with 194,521 family members and 86,673 Department of Defense civilian employees—a total of 544,266 (U.S. Department of Defense 2000). In addition, 31,171 individuals abroad were civilian employees (and their dependents) of the State Department and other federal agencies (including the Peace Corps) (U.S. Department of State 2001). In total, nearly 576,000 citizens were abroad in 2000 as federal employees or their dependents (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

The State Department has also tried to count the overseas population, preparing

estimates on a country-by-country basis of the number of Americans resident abroad. These figures are deeply flawed, however, because they are based on the number of Americans who voluntarily register at a consulate or embassy, and most citizens have little incentive to do so, especially in advanced industrial countries. Due to the unscientific nature of the State Department procedures, estimates of the number of civilians overseas have varied wildly, jumping from 2.2 million in 1989 to 6.3 million in 1992, and then down to 2.6 million in 1993 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989; 1992; 1993). In 1999, the State Department released figures indicating that 3.8 million Americans were living abroad (see Table 2 for a partial breakdown by country) (U.S. Department of State 2001). Perhaps a better measure of the size and growth of the long-term overseas population could be found in a different State Department indicator: the number of passports issued to citizens already located abroad. Remarkably, this figure has nearly doubled in the last decade, from 3.6 million to more than seven million (Nadeau 2003).

Despite their many problems, currently available statistics do allow two conclusions. First, the total size of the overseas population is far from negligible, probably numbering somewhere between three and as many as seven million if we take the State Department figures as starting points. Since it is evident that the department’s methods of enumeration err toward underestimating the total population,

the true figure is likely to be closer to the upper end of the range. Second, despite suggestions to the contrary during the controversy over the Florida election returns, those affiliated with the military are, at 544,000, only a small percentage of the total U.S. population overseas. However, in the absence of hard data on who votes from abroad, or even the total size of the overseas electorate, we can only guess what percentage of the overseas vote comes from citizens with a military affiliation. Democratic activists have speculated that such “military” votes compose less than 10% of the total, while Republican spokesmen have suggested that they may constitute 40% or more (Fina 2000b; Jones 2000).

If we are to say anything more definitive about this population, political scientists and other scholars will need help from government agencies. The most important reform would be the inclusion of overseas residents in the 2010 census. Both of the overseas party organizations, Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad, have endorsed such a change, as have other groups of U.S. citizens abroad. In response, the Census Bureau has announced that it will conduct test censuses in France, Kuwait, and Mexico in 2004 as the first step toward determining the feasibility of counting all Americans in the 2010 Census. This decision raises another thorny issue, however, which is whether a tally of Americans abroad should be used for purposes of legislative apportionment

**Table 2**  
**Private U.S. Citizens Residing Abroad (Estimated) in Top 15 Countries by American Population, July 1999**

1. Mexico	1,036,300
2. Canada	687,700
3. United Kingdom	224,000
4. Germany	210,880
5. Italy	168,967
6. Philippines	105,000
7. Australia	102,800
8. France	101,750
9. Spain	94,513
10. Israel	94,195
11. Dominican Republic	82,000
12. Greece	72,500
13. Japan	70,350
14. China	65,157
15. Ireland	46,984
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,163,006</b>

Note: This list does not include U.S. government (military and nonmilitary) employees and their dependents, nor does it provide a full count of all U.S. citizens living in each country.

Source: Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State.

and redistricting. The issue was brought into the federal courts in 2000, when Utah filed suit against the Census Bureau charging that the bureau's calculation of state populations was erroneous because it did not include Mormon missionaries living abroad, yet did include federal employees overseas. The result of the bureau's method, Utah claimed, was the loss of a seat in Congress that was rightfully its own. As an alternative, the state proposed any one of three procedures: count all Americans temporarily residing abroad; count none; or count those who, like Mormon missionaries, had retained their ties to their home states and could readily be traced through administrative records. In April 2001, Utah's case was rejected by a special three-judge federal district court which held that there was no constitutional or statutory basis for the challenge, and the following November the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed the lower-court decision without opinion. For its part, the bureau is unlikely to endorse the use of overseas census results for apportionment purposes unless it can be confident that the count is sufficiently accurate to withstand legal challenge. For the social science community, however, even a count that is not legally binding will prove vastly superior to the data that we now possess.

### The Second Challenge: Measuring the Voting Behavior of Overseas Americans

Given the difficulty in determining the exact size of the overseas community, it should come as no surprise that the voting behavior of this group also remains mysterious. No one has undertaken surveys of the millions of Americans scattered around the world, and no one knows how many absentee ballots are sent overseas at a national or even state level, as the few records collected are kept only at the county level, rarely

compiled statewide, and virtually never published. Moreover, most counties do not distinguish in their record-keeping between absentee ballots sent abroad and those sent to domestic addresses. There are simply no accurate figures—at any level—of the aggregate voting

behavior was collected *only* for those overseas ballots that arrived in the 10 days following the November 7 election. The state's acceptance of these late-arriving ballots was the product of a 1982 consent decree between Florida and the U.S. Justice Department, which had brought suit against the state charging it with unduly burdening overseas voters because the state mailed its ballots out too late (often in mid-October) to allow them to be returned to the U.S. by Election Day. While Florida's late ballots in 2000 were thus tallied separately, all those overseas ballots that arrived *before Election Day*—numbering 14,415 according to state officials—were thrown into the larger pool of domestic absentee and regular ballots and counted on November 7 (La Corte 2000). Thus, no one has any accurate figures on how those ballots—the vast majority of those cast from abroad—were distributed among the candidates. The only figures we have left, for 2000 as well as for earlier elections in Florida, are for those notorious late ballots, which we cannot assume are a representative sample of the larger pool of overseas votes.

Nevertheless, the Florida data does suggest probabilities, and these probabilities suggest bad news for Democrats. Since 1980, Democrats have never won a majority of the late overseas ballots (Golden 2000). Even in 1996, as Bill Clinton coasted to a statewide victory, the late ballots favored the Republicans, as Bob Dole won 54% of these votes while gaining only 42% of the total in the state. In 2000, the state was split in a "perfect tie" between Bush and Gore, yet Bush swept the late-arriving overseas vote in a landslide, securing 63% of the total (Table 1). Indeed, when the final results in Florida were certified, it was clear that the late overseas vote had been crucial: based purely on the domestic and "on-time" overseas votes as counted by Sunday, November 26,



**Stand up and Be Counted.** The only overseas Americans officially tallied in the last three censuses (1980–2000) were federal employees (including military personnel) and their dependents. Poster: Library of Congress.

behavior of overseas voters, or even of how many ballots arrive from abroad. *The second challenge for political scientists, then, is to engage in research to determine the voting behavior of the overseas population.*

The ballots from abroad tabulated in the 2000 presidential election in Florida might appear to serve as a reliable source of data about overseas voters, but there is good reason to view this source as far from definitive. Most important, the voting behavior of the total pool of overseas votes was never separately recorded. Rather, data on voting

**Table 3**  
**Broward County Overseas Absentee Ballot Requests (with percentages as read across)**

	Democratic	Republican	Independent	Total
Military addresses	114 (26%)	209 (47%)	119 (27%)	442
Non-military addresses	461 (39%)	387 (32%)	333 (28%)	1181
Total	575 (35%)	596 (37%)	452 (28%)	1623

Source: Paul Brinkley-Rogers and Tim Henderson, "State Awaits Thousands of Overseas Votes," *Miami Herald*, November 11, 2000.

George W. Bush would have lost to Albert Gore by 202 votes. In contrast to the first counting of the late-arriving overseas ballots on November 17, when it seemed that they just extended George Bush's lead, the revised November 26 total—including the results of yet more local recounts—revealed that the late-arriving overseas votes were essential for Bush's victory. If all the late overseas ballots had been put aside, Al Gore would now be president.

While the final tally of the ballots in 2000 may have been distorted by GOP efforts to count as many ballots from military addresses as possible, thus giving the total a more conservative bias, we are still left with a need to account for the persistent evidence of a pro-Republican tilt among Florida's overseas voters (Boehlert 2000; Barstow and Van Natta 2001). The most obvious explanation can indeed be found in data on the percentage of overseas voters in that state who are attached to the U.S. military—a constituency that, on the whole, seems more likely to produce Republican votes than Democratic ones (especially given the likelihood that officers are more likely to register and vote than enlisted personnel). In Broward County, a large and economically diverse county not unusually dependent on military employment, election officials reported that of 1,623 ballots mailed overseas, 27% (442) were sent to military addresses and 73% (1181) to nonmilitary or "civilian" addresses (Brinkley-Rogers and Henderson 2000). Election officials also broke down the overseas ballot requests by party, as Table 3 indicates, and discovered that voters with a military address were significantly more likely to register as Republican than nonmilitary voters.

But why would so many votes be from the military in the first place? Given the reasonable expectation that most overseas Americans are civilians, the most plausible explanation is a higher rate of voter participation by military personnel in comparison to the rest of the overseas population. A higher

military turnout may reflect the efforts by groups such as Republicans Abroad to help boost the registration of military personnel, or greater civic-mindedness by members of the armed services (Jones 2000). Even more important, however, may be the activities of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) in the Department of Defense (DOD), an agency charged with helping both military personnel and civilians abroad exercise their right to vote. With its location in DOD, and the fact that military personnel are much easier to locate and contact through authoritative military channels, it is highly likely that FVAP increases registration and turnout among military personnel to a greater degree than it does for the civilian population (Brunelli 2000). The Department of Defense reports that 72% of overseas military personnel voted in 2000—a far higher percentage than among domestic civilian voters (although the source and accuracy of the DOD data was impossible to independently verify) (Garamone 2001). Given the evident propensity of such personnel to vote Republican, the partisan impact of such differential turnout is obvious.

What does this outcome tell us about the overseas vote at the national level? Obviously, the percentage of military personnel in the total overseas electorate is likely to be smaller than in the Florida sample, if only because that state has an unusually large number of military personnel to begin with (many of whom claim residence there to take advantage of the state's lack of an income tax). Thus, it is entirely possible that overseas voters in other states may have quite different affiliations and voting patterns. Still, it would not be surprising if a proper national survey revealed that overseas voters are disproportionately drawn from military personnel and are correspondingly more Republican. This is, however, mere speculation; the only reliable conclusion is that the political orientation of this population remains shadowy, and its actual impact is likely to be strongly af-

fectured by the success of each party in mobilizing its supporters abroad to vote in homeland elections.

Fortunately, there is some reason to hope that federal legislation enacted in 2002 will lead to a major improvement in the quality of data collection in this area by state governments. The Help America Vote Act of 2002, passed with the input and support of groups of overseas Americans, will for the first time require each state to collect and publish statistics on the number of overseas ballots transmitted and received. While this requirement will provide far better data on the total number of voters abroad, it hardly resolves the larger issues of how these voters behave in the electoral marketplace. For that, political scientists will have to explicitly confront the second challenge and devise new ways of undertaking independent surveys of the overseas electorate.

### **The Third Challenge: To Forge a Coherent Public Policy Response**

In response to the increased numbers of U.S. soldiers stationed abroad during the Cold War, Congress in 1955 passed the first legislation specifically intended to help overseas citizens vote in federal elections. Although the Federal Voting Assistance Act encouraged states to allow federal employees, members of the armed forces, and private citizens abroad to vote by absentee ballot, it did not establish an enforceable right under federal law, and the states retained exclusive responsibility for the registration of overseas voters and the mailing of absentee ballots. In this legal environment, many states simply ignored overseas voters, resulting in the effective disenfranchisement of large numbers of overseas Americans. To overcome this deficiency, a movement of Americans abroad emerged in the early 1970s, demanding that their right to vote be codified and that new procedures be implemented to make the voting process simpler and less time-consuming. The result of their activism was the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act (OCVR), which guaranteed all Americans abroad the right to vote via absentee ballot in *federal* elections in the state and congressional district in which they last resided. A coalition of overseas groups, including both Democrats Abroad and Republican party activists (Republicans Abroad itself was not to be formed until 1978), successfully lobbied Congress in support of the legislation which was signed into law by President Ford in 1976 (Dark 2003;

Michaux 1996). In addition to providing a formal guarantee that all overseas citizens can vote in federal elections, the act also encouraged the states to use a common Federal Post Card Application (now accepted in 45 states) that can be sent to local authorities to simultaneously register to vote and request an absentee ballot.

In accordance with this legislation, the federal government has long provided assistance to overseas absentee voters, but in a manner that mainly focuses upon members of the armed forces. As previously noted, the main agency for such assistance is the Federal Voting Assistance Program, located within the Department of Defense, with a budget in 2000 of \$5.1 million and a staff of 13. With the passage of the OCVR in 1975 and a set of minor amendments in 1986, the FVAP was given the responsibility for designing the Federal Post Card Application and for encouraging registration and voting by all Americans overseas, including civilians. Although FVAP is institutionally embedded in the Defense Department, it also works with the State Department, Democrats Abroad, Republicans Abroad, and other overseas organizations to encourage voting by private citizens (Federal Voting Assistance Program 2001). Despite such outreach, a review of FVAP materials, an interview with its director, and interviews with American voters living overseas all confirm that the program is more successful in reaching military personnel and their dependents than other citizens abroad. For this reason, Democrats Abroad has called for the creation of a parallel organization based in the State Department and aimed exclusively at the private overseas population (Democrats Abroad 2001).

In the aftermath of the 2000 Florida controversy, in which debates over the validity of overseas ballots figured prominently, groups of overseas Americans again mobilized to endorse changes in federal law. Most prominent was Democrats Abroad, which established an Emergency Committee to Reform Overseas Voting. The committee drew up its own set of reforms, subsequently endorsed by 16 non-partisan organizations representing overseas Americans, that called for the adoption of a standardized federal overseas absentee election system and ballot with permanent voter registration—essentially a major federalization of the procedures for overseas registration and voting (Democrats Abroad 2001). The committee also endorsed earlier and speedier transmission of ballots to overseas resi-

dents, the elimination of notarization provisions and foreign postmark and date stamp requirements, and the publication by state governments of complete and timely statistics on overseas voting. Crucially, the Democrats also argued that states should be required to notify each voter of the approval or rejection of their registration application and mailed-in absentee ballot. Republicans Abroad, evidently more comfortable with results under the current system, issued only a vaguer statement calling for Congress to “standardize and improve the entire absentee-voting process for Federal elections” (American Citizens Abroad 2001).

In response to these (and other) pressures, in 2002 Congress passed and President George W. Bush signed the Help America Vote Act (PL 107-252), a measure mainly aimed at domestic electoral flaws but which also included several new provisions relating to overseas voting (although considerably fewer than Democrats Abroad had sought). In addition to the requirement that states collect and publish statistics on overseas voting, each state is now also required to set up a new central office to provide information to overseas voters on how to register and vote from abroad. Congress also *recommended* that this same office accept registration applications, absentee ballot applications, and the returned ballots themselves—a change that would eliminate the need for overseas voters to hunt down county addresses in order to return their applications and ballots to the correct location. States will, in addition, be required to maintain the registration of overseas voters for at least two regularly scheduled federal election cycles (four years), and to notify overseas voters if either their registration application or absentee ballot request is rejected, and why. To address problems with the acceptance of ballots from overseas military personnel, all ballots sent in by members of the armed forces will now bear a postmark and all states will have to accept voter registration and absentee ballots applications from military voters even if they arrive early (e.g., before the onset of a formal acceptance period). The latter provision is intended to help military voters who may need to send their applications very early if they are to send them in at all (due, for example, to service on a submarine or remote military base). As with the activities of FVAP, provisions specifically focused on military voters seem more likely to benefit Republican candidates and conservatives.

Despite these changes, the citizen seeking to vote from abroad must still

run a gauntlet that can deter even the most determined of voters (General Accounting Office 2001; U.S. Department of State 2001). Gathering the necessary information to register and vote properly remains a formidable task, one that will only be partially offset by the planned creation of new state offices to help provide information to overseas voters. At present, most foreign residents are never exposed to State Department or FVAP information on how to vote and frequently find it difficult to obtain the proper information on their own initiative. Moreover, consulates and embassies often lack updated information and forms and their facilities are frequently geographically distant from where Americans live. Major problems also remain in regard to the timely postal delivery of materials. A registration application sent from abroad will often arrive in the U.S. after state deadlines, and ballots sent from the U.S. may arrive at the voter's foreign residence too late to be returned to the U.S. by Election Day. And although voting in *federal* elections cannot be used to establish tax liability by state governments, voting in *state and local elections* can, and fear of this possibility remains a major concern for overseas citizens who are already taxed by both foreign governments as well as the U.S. federal government.

In response to these persisting problems, many overseas party activists and others have advocated allowing registration and voting to take place entirely through the Internet or some other electronic system. In the 2000 election FVAP collaborated in a small pilot project with five counties in Florida, Texas, Utah, and South Carolina in which 84 registered voters (mainly overseas military personnel) who would normally vote via absentee ballot were instead provided with a password and allowed to vote on a secure web site (Brunelli 2000). More ambitiously, for 2004 FVAP plans to expand this experiment to as many as 100,000 overseas voters from the states of Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, and Washington. This program, called the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment (SERVE), will allow voters to register and cast their vote from any Windows-based computer with Internet access, and will include such security measures as “digital signatures,” centralized servers, and encryption (Hoffman 2003). At the conclusion of the SERVE program, FVAP will report to Congress on the reliability, affordability, and security of Internet registration and voting on a large scale. If successful, the 2004

experiment may go far in assuaging the persistent security concerns raised by critics of Internet voting, and encourage the more general use of Internet voting by domestic voters (Internet Policy Institute 2001).

Paradoxically, while the current regime for overseas voting presents many obstacles to the citizen abroad, it also eases the way for those determined to commit voter fraud. Under current law, states are obligated to register citizens who may not have resided in the state for decades. Yet, there is virtually no way to check that registrants from abroad actually resided in a state that long ago (in some cases, the claimed address may not even physically exist any longer, having been replaced by free-ways or shopping malls). This system makes it relatively easy for unscrupulous citizens abroad to vote anywhere in the U.S. they so desire, regardless of previous residence, or to vote multiple times in different states. The provision in some states that late ballots be accepted also creates opportunities for ballots to be mailed and accepted after Election Day. In the 2000 Florida presidential election, a systematic study by the *New York Times* revealed that due to efforts by the Bush campaign, at least 680 ballots were accepted by county election officials even though they lacked proper evidence, such as postmarks or signing and dating, that demonstrated they were sent on or before Election Day (Barstow and Natta 2001). Had these ballots been rejected, George W. Bush's margin of victory might have shrunk to as little as 245 votes—or less.

The rise of global political activity by U.S. citizens also presents challenges to the current system of domestic campaign finance regulation. American party organizations abroad operate under the same rules as their stateside counterparts, but they are much further away from the watchful eye of regulatory authorities. There is an obvious potential for evading U.S. law. Who is there to regulate, or even observe, campaign expenditures overseas? When money is both raised and spent overseas by local chapters of Democrats Abroad or Republicans Abroad, it is next to impossible for either party authorities or federal election regulators to monitor the situation. It would also be quite easy for foreign contributors to influence elections this way,

with few in the U.S. even aware of the situation. Indeed, in 1997 the *Washington Post* reported unconfirmed accusations that Republicans Abroad had solicited and accepted foreign donations, particularly from Middle East and East Asian sources (Morgan 1997). Although both Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad file reports with the Federal Election Commission, the full scale of financial involvement by local chapters is

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a gray zone containing many opportunities for unrecorded activities.

To conclude, *the third challenge for political science is to consider adjustments to existing legal frameworks that take into account the realities of a globalized American electorate.* Existing laws frequently hinder voting by overseas citizens, yet at the same time allow unsettling opportunities for voter fraud and campaign finance violations. A systematic account of existing problems and creative thinking about solutions would be a service the profession could render to the millions of Americans overseas and those at home concerned about protecting the sanctity of the electoral process. That the most prominent report produced by political scientists and other scholars after the 2000 election, that of the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, did not even acknowledge the existence of the millions of overseas voters is not reassuring (Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project 2001). Of course, some political scientists may wish to take a different tack and develop clearer theoretical criteria

for determining which Americans abroad should be allowed to vote, and in which elections. There may be reasonable arguments for restricting the franchise in some respects, while enlarging or strengthening it in others. The Canadian government, for example, allows overseas citizens to vote from abroad, but only for five consecutive years; Germany sets a time limit of 25 years before overseas suffrage expires, while

Britain caps it at fifteen. Denmark innovates in a different way, limiting overseas voting mainly to those who are employed by the Danish government or Danish companies, students, and those who live abroad for health reasons. A thorough cross-national review will reveal an even wider menu of choices (including the possibility of voting in embassies and consulates), some of which may helpfully inform U.S. policy-making in the “post-Florida” electoral environment.

## Conclusion

Until recently, few in political science had cause to recognize that Americans abroad constitute a distinct constituency of potential significance in domestic politics.

Yet, as long ago as 1975 it was clear that the dispersion of large numbers of U.S. citizens abroad was bringing substantial changes in federal and state election laws, most notably in new provisions for registering and voting from abroad. These changes have, in turn, fostered new forms of party organization and the proliferation of partisan campaigning among overseas American populations in at least 30 different countries (Dark 2003). In addition, new interest groups have emerged to represent the interest of the overseas population, including the Association of Americans Resident Overseas, American Citizens Abroad, the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, as well as the ubiquitous American Chambers of Commerce found in most foreign countries (Michaux 1996). Since the 1970s, such groups have frequently worked together to lobby Congress on such issues as voting rights, citizenship transmission, taxation of overseas Americans, and State Department services and funding. Although the impact of all this activity is felt largely at the margins of American politics, there is

no question that we are witnessing a partial globalization of American electoral law and political involvement; one that bears interesting similarities to the political activity of diaspora populations (such as Mexican-Americans) within the United States. An analysis of American electoral politics that overlooks the overseas component will necessarily be incomplete, perhaps just as incomplete as studies of Latin American countries that ignore the ways in which their growing diasporas affect homeland politics (Shain 1999).

As the process of globalization unfolds, it clearly raises perplexing questions of representation and sovereignty (Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer 2000). As the law stands now, Americans who have lived abroad for decades and who may have little or no intention of ever returning to the United States can still

vote in federal elections; in most states, they can also vote in local elections. Some overseas Americans may also have a legal status, such as long-term permanent residence or dual citizenship, that allows them to vote in foreign countries even as they still vote by absentee ballot in the U.S. All of which leads to a provocative, but empirically tractable, question: Do American voters abroad come to reflect the concerns—and interests—of their host countries more than their own nominal country of citizenship? Although the forgoing is a possibility, it seems more likely based on available evidence that Americans abroad, especially those who choose to exercise their right to suffrage, are a distinctly patriotic community, “much nearer to being American ‘cultural missionaries’” than “alienated expatriates” (Dashefsky, et al. 1992, 150). If this is

true, we might ask: Does the presence of large numbers of U.S. citizens overseas, many of whom may fail to learn local languages or to assimilate to host cultures, represent a threat to the domestic political sovereignty of foreign states? Some Americans have expressed considerable anxiety over proposals that millions of Mexican citizens residing long-term in the U.S. (some of whom are also U.S. citizens) be allowed to vote by absentee ballot in Mexican elections. Might the presence of unassimilated Americans abroad, increasingly settling in for long stays in their host countries, yet prove equally controversial? Such questions are far beyond the empirical scope of this essay. They are not, however, beyond the scope of the study of American politics, properly conceived for a new age of globalization.

## Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, “overseas” has the same meaning as “abroad,” i.e., outside the territory of the United States. Although use of the term appears illogical for Americans living in Canada and Mexico, this usage has been

employed by the Census Bureau and other government agencies to designate all Americans outside the U.S.

2. The Internal Revenue Service does have information on U.S. citizens who file tax

returns from abroad, but this data is not available to either the Census Bureau or the State Department, and is far from comprehensive in any case.

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