



## **As More Americans Move Abroad, Overseas Voting Can Make or Break Tight Races**

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November 7, 2022

WASHINGTON — With so much hanging in the balance during this year's midterm elections, every vote will be crucial. And there is a growing movement to recruit voters who aren't even living in the US anymore.

Republicans and Democrats are “getting out the vote” outside the country.

“What we’ve seen is a steady progression in terms of our group's growth,” said Candice Kerestan, International Chair of “Democrats Abroad,” the official arm of the Democratic Party outside the US.

Speaking via zoom from her home in Munich, Germany, Kerestan said “We’re no longer just in London and Paris. We have official groups in 50 countries around the world.”

Democrats Abroad is trying to recruit millions of eligible American voters living overseas. A group called Republicans Overseas, which is not an official arm of the Republican Party and does not have a voice at the Convention, is in the midst of a similar get-out-the-vote campaign for ex-pats on its website.

The uptick in voting in US Elections from abroad comes as the number of Americans who say they want to leave the United States for good is on the rise. They are sometimes motivated by political reasons.

Becky Gommell traveled from Marble Falls, Texas to a “How to Retire Abroad” Bootcamp in Atlanta in October.

“As a joke (my husband) had said if President Biden got elected, we’re gone. We’re outta here. And it happened,” Gommell said. “And we’re outta here.”

All of this is possible because of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986 giving active military and American’s living abroad voting rights in federal elections.

The majority of states also give Americans living abroad the right to vote in local elections although that process varies from state to state. For instance, in Virginia, your overseas ballot has to be signed by a witness. In Maryland and DC, it does not.

In Maryland, people living abroad can only vote in state and local elections in addition to federal elections if they plan to return to Maryland at some point in the future. Virginia and DC don't have that requirement.

Andy Craig is an adjunct scholar and elections expert at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C.

“When elections get closer, which has been the trend we have, and every vote counts,” Craig said. “So there's more incentive to go out and chase those marginal voters who might be overseas.”

The state department has stopped giving estimates on how many Americans are currently living abroad, but Democrats Abroad put the number at around 6.5 million eligible voters. Votes that could once again be a deciding factor in hotly contested races in Virginia, Maryland and across the country.

“I would say to that every single U.S. citizen, whether they're in the United States, or outside of the United States, has a very unique connection to their country,” Kerestan said. “And one that is worth a voice that is worth having the democratic process.”

The overwhelming majority of Americans currently living abroad are still paying taxes in the U.S. which is why there is bi-partisan support right now to allow them to vote in elections.