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AARO 2020 Advocacy Survey Results

Article 5: Voting from Overseas

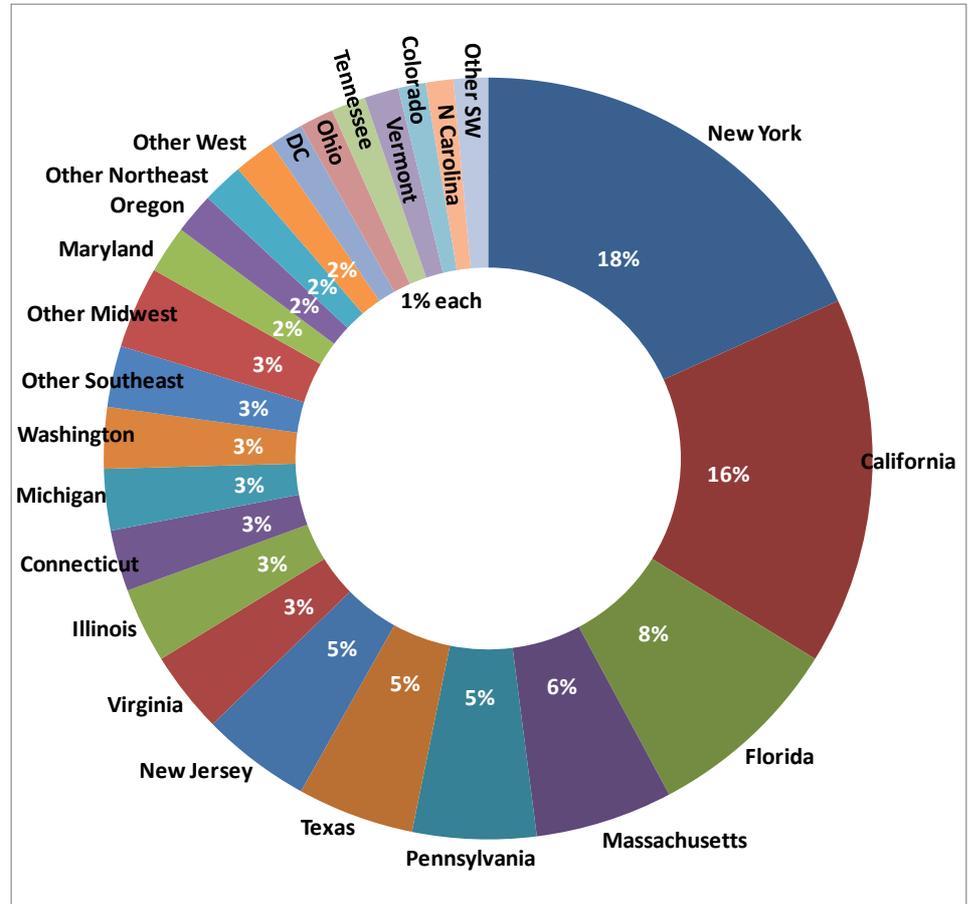
In this article we focus on aspects of overseas voting: The States where our survey respondents vote; the importance of our overseas vote – does it count, does it matter; and, finally, the overseas voting process – is it complex for you? Which States make it easy, make it difficult?

Where do we vote?

Our survey respondents vote in 40 States, plus Washington D.C. As you can see by the chart below, our vote is greatly dispersed amongst these 41 jurisdictions. Other than New York (18%) and California (16%), all other States have fewer than 10% of our respondents voting there, where our votes are cast among their many residents.

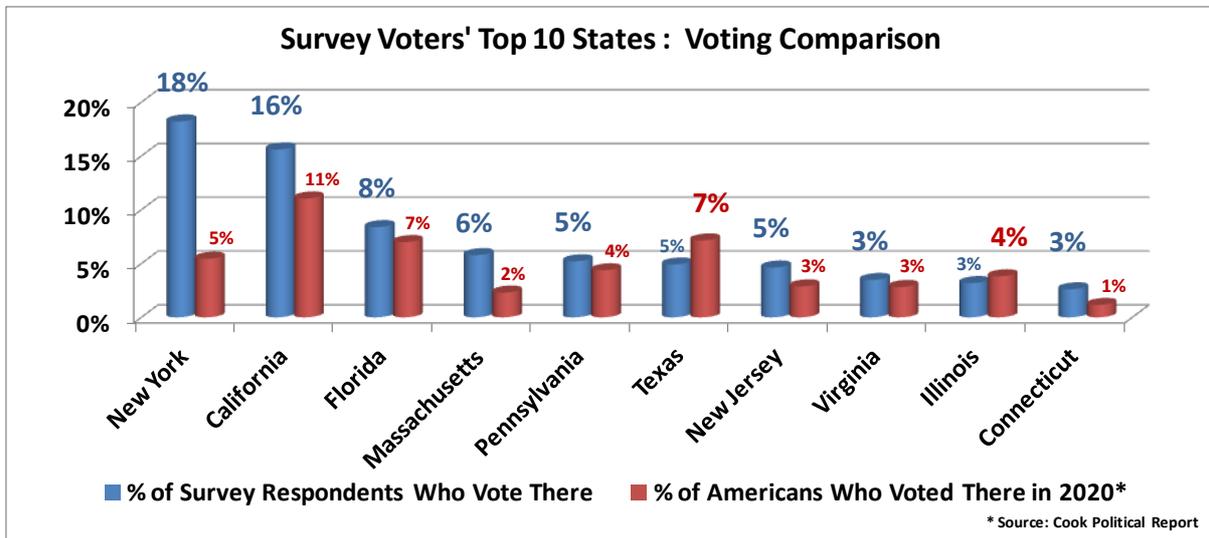
Not being able to vote as a “bloc” was one of the complaints frequently noted in our survey.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) estimates that overseas Americans represent 3+% of all votes cast.



Our vote is more concentrated

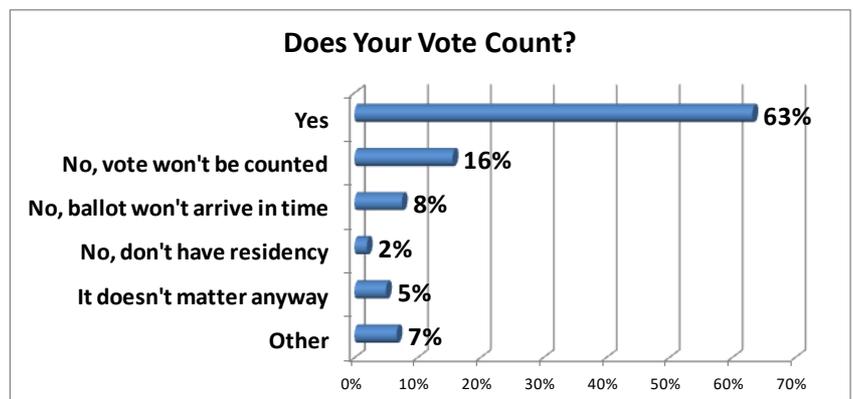
The chart below shows the “top 10” States where survey respondents vote. In 8 of these States, there is a higher percentage of you voting than that State’s share of the 2020 popular vote.



For example, 18% of respondents vote in New York, although New Yorkers represented only 5% of the total US popular vote in the 2020 election. You are also “proportionally overrepresented” in California (by 5%) and Massachusetts (by 4%), and in several other States to a lesser extent. Lawmakers in these States should take note of the higher potential for votes and, therefore, give attention to our issues.

Do we believe our vote counts?

Yes, 63% of respondents believe that their vote counts. *“Of course! Everyone’s vote counts.”* Of those who do not so believe (31%), your comments bemoaning overseas Americans’ lack of representation in Congress led us to create a new category of “no’s,” which we have captioned in the chart as “It doesn’t matter anyway.” You say: *“does it make a difference ... we are forgotten anyway.”* This is a real concern for you: *“my vote is diluted with homeland Americans and therefore I am not represented.”* In Article 1 in the Survey Series, addressing a different survey question, we addressed the fact that 93% of you believe that you are not fairly represented in Congress.



Many of you in the “Other” category were somewhat hopeful your vote would count, but “*not sure,*” “*I have no way of confirming.*” In fact, a large number of you would like confirmation that your vote was physically received and actually counted.

Our vote matters more than you think

Some of you may think that your vote doesn’t matter because of the Electoral College: “*In California, I am just one more Democrat,*” “*I feel disenfranchised due to the electoral college*” and “*intrinsic structural problems with the US Constitution.*” But, being overseas doesn’t affect the weight of your vote, which is the same as the vote of a resident American. In fact, the focus on overseas ballots is greater than ever. We saw this vividly in the days and weeks following the November 3, 2020 election. Candidates have woken up to our existence.

But not enough of us vote. The FVAP estimated that, in 2016, the ratio of resident Americans who voted to overseas Americans who voted was 10 to 1 (approximately 70% of resident Americans versus 7% of overseas Americans)! We cannot control our not being a voting “bloc,” but we can control our being a silent “bloc.” Elections have become closer than ever, with many having had a margin of victory well below the actual number of overseas votes, so we have already had an impact. But, increased voting would reveal the strength of our numbers; we could tip the balance in close races and be a potent political force. We should encourage our fellow overseas Americans that, rather than despairing over the perceived non-significance of our votes, it would be better for them to focus their energy on the voting power we do have.

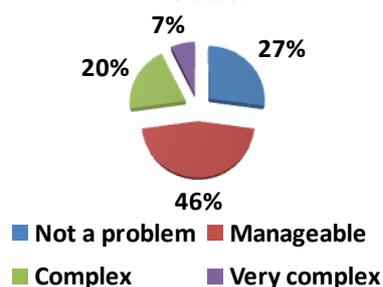
The FVAP estimates that as few as half of the ballots requested overseas are actually returned and counted. This is partly due to obstacles to the overseas voting process (mail speed, complex rules and the perfection required of a returned ballot).

How do we find the overseas voting process?

It is encouraging that 73% of you do find the overseas voting process to be either not a problem or manageable. Nine states were given very high marks; several of you cited California (“*excellent overseas permanent absentee voter service*” and “*well organized and reliable*”) and Washington State (“*very well developed system*” and “*OUTSTANDING service for overseas voters*”). Colorado was “*fantastic in all ways.*”

But “*some states make it difficult if not hostile for overseas voters.*” New York, “*a nightmare this year,*” whose paper ballots were “*ludicrous,*” received scathing

How do you Find the Overseas Voting Process?



reviews, as well as other States. Many of you also complained about the cost of sending ballots via FedEx or other couriers due to mail process issues, especially this year.

There were even some tax concerns: *“Now we have to register every year and the questions are linked to last time you paid taxes in the US (Witch Hunt).”* Another told us that, after having registered, *“they chased me for back taxes!”*

Finally, one of you summed up well the overseas process as *“cumbersome, lack of clear and consistent rules, inability to email ballot back, worrying about mailing/tracking, etc.”* AARO takes note that one of you said *“We are bombarded by various overseas organizations, all saying different things. There should be more coordination in messaging.”*

AARO’s advocacy

AARO considers it a moral obligation of our government to facilitate absentee voting for overseas voters; our goal is to ensure that all overseas Americans can readily obtain an absentee ballot for federal and applicable state elections. AARO continues to work with Congress and the Administration to find all appropriate and economically feasible ways to enhance the ability of overseas Americans to register and vote absentee in US elections.

The Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO) researches issues that significantly affect the lives of overseas Americans and keeps its members informed on these issues. Founded in 1973 and headquartered in Paris, AARO is an international, non-partisan association with members in 46 countries. For more information please email us at contact@aaro.org.

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