



AMERICAN CITIZEN NEWS

A Primer on Overseas Voting

Voting. There is possibly no civil right Americans cherish more than their right to vote; there have been five separate amendments to the U.S. Constitution enhancing voting rights. And, as the most recent presidential elections have shown, every vote counts. Americans living overseas have an equal right to vote in federal elections, but it requires a few extra steps. Since, by some estimates, as many as 20% of absentee ballots are rejected, it's vital that expatriates understand those steps.

Register to Vote: Each state has its own rules and policies for voter registration, with special requirements for Americans living overseas. There are different rules for members of the uniformed services, and for civilians in some states. The simplest way to find out what your state's specific requirements are is to go to www.fvap.gov and find the link for your state. Many states now offer on-line voter registration verification, so you can check to see if a previous registration is still valid. Federal law requires states keep voters on the registration roles for two federal election cycles (four years), but it's never wise to assume that you're still registered.

The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) can be used to register **and/or** request an absentee ballot. Every state now accepts the on-line version of the form, or has its own version available on line. You may also request the postcard version of the form from the Embassy or Consulate in your district.

An informal poll conducted by the Overseas Vote Foundation showed that problems with voter registration were the largest contributor to ballots being received too late, or not at all. The critical elements to using the on-line or federal post card registration form:

- Follow your state's specific instructions, and provide all the information requested.
- Write legibly.
- Sign and date the form.
- Mail it to the correct address.
- Include your current mailing address.

Request an Absentee Ballot: Another faulty assumption is that, just because you're registered, you'll automatically receive absentee ballots. Most states require a request to the voter's local Supervisor of Elections. In some states, all this takes is a phone call or email request if you're already registered; others require a written, notarized document. The Consular staff at the Berlin Embassy, the Consulates in Munich and Frankfurt, and the Consular Agent in Bremen can notarize these requests for free – normal Consular fees are waived for election materials.

Voting by Citizens Who Have Never Lived in the United States: Many states have provisions for this contingency, and allow voters to register if a parent or a spouse is eligible to vote in the state. Some of those states restrict voter registration to only federal elections. Again, the www.fvap.gov website has a special section concerning this topic, with links to the states with that provision.

Vote: When you receive your balloting materials, read the instructions carefully to make sure your ballot isn't discarded on a technicality. Return the ballot by mail, by your state's deadlines.

Worst case: **If** you've registered **and** requested balloting materials within your state's time limits, but haven't received your balloting materials within 30 days of the election, you may still vote in federal



elections, using the “Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot for General Elections.” This form is also available on line, or from the Embassy or Consulates. Complete instructions are on the form.

Mail Your Ballot: You may mail your ballot from your home here in Germany, using the international postal system, or at no cost through the Embassy or Consulate’s postal system. Again, it’s important to check your state’s individual deadline requirements, and to make sure you mail your ballot to arrive in time. You can even enclose your completed, sealed ballot in a German envelope with appropriate in-country postage and send it to us (see the last page for our address); we’ll put it in the U.S. postal system for you. If the ballot envelope is not marked ‘postage paid’, please make sure you have the appropriate U.S. stamp on the envelope.

Consular Officers’ Role: As previously mentioned, we’ll notarize your documents for you for free, if your state requires it. If you don’t have access to a printer or you’re a resident of American Samoa or Guam (these two territories don’t accept the on-line form), please call or email your district’s Consular staff. We’ll be happy to mail you the Federal Post Card Application for Registration and Absentee Ballot Request. And, we can send your ballots to the United States, using our postal system.

Other Expatriate Resources in Germany and on-line: For Americans who like to be active in party politics at the grass root level, there are branches of the Republican and Democratic parties in Germany. You can find more information at www.republicansabroad.org and/or www.democratsabroad.org. Younger voters and older teens might find the information at www.RocktheVote.com appealing and informative.

Test Your Knowledge

If we were playing Jeopardy, these questions would be in the “Tough Election Trivia” category. Good luck!

1. The keynote Speakers at the Republican and Democratic Party conventions are generally considered to be political heavyweights of the future. Which one of the following Presidents was also a Key Note Speaker at a party convention?

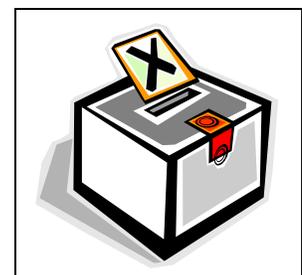
- a. Harry S. Truman
- b. Warren G. Harding
- c. Teddy Roosevelt
- d. Lyndon Johnson

2. Which of the following was *not* a Keynote Speaker at a party convention?

- a. John Glenn
- b. Adlai Stevenson
- c. Douglas MacArthur
- d. Earl Warren

3. How many times in our history have presidential nominees won the popular vote, but lost the election because of the electoral college?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4





4. In the event that none of the candidates wins a majority of the electoral college vote, how is the President selected?

- a. The winner is selected by the House of Representatives.
- b. The winner is selected by the Supreme Court.
- c. The winner is selected by the Senate.
- d. The winner is selected by a flip of a coin.

5. That actually happened once in our history. Which of the following presidents was selected, not elected?

- a. John Q. Adams
- b. Martin Van Buren
- c. Andrew Jackson
- d. Thomas Jefferson

6. George W. Bush won the 2000 election by five electoral college votes. But, it was not the closest race. Which of the following president was elected by a closer Electoral College margin?

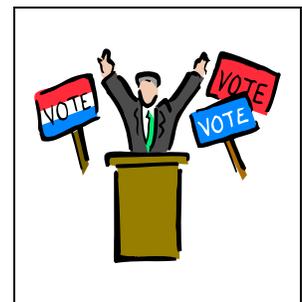
- a. John F. Kennedy in 1960.
- b. Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876.
- c. Harry Truman in 1948.
- d. Woodrow Wilson in 1916.

7. State-level primaries and caucuses are relatively new in our election history. Which state was the first state to adopt the primary as a means of choosing Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates in 1904?

- a. Virginia
- b. North Carolina
- c. Florida
- d. New Hampshire

8. Even though primaries and caucuses have existed for some time, they still represented the party leaders' wishes more than the people's for many elections. What major event led to a complete overhaul of the primary system, and formed the basis for today's system?

- a. JFK's razor-thin margin of victory over Nixon in the presidential election that caused party leaders to reexamine the nomination process.
- b. The nomination of Taft over Teddy Roosevelt in 1912, even though Roosevelt won 9 of 13 primaries, and Taft only won 1.
- c. Adlai Stevens two consecutive nominations – and losses – as the Democratic Party's nominee.
- d. The violence surrounding the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention.





9. According to most sources, where did the term “caucus” originate from?
- The Tammany Hall political machine, which liked to use Indian terms, adapted it from the Algonquin word for “counsel.
 - It evolved from the medieval word for “drinking vessel”, and was first used by the Caucus Club of colonial Boston.
 - It’s derived from the word “caulker”, which at one time was synonymous with “meeting”.
 - No one is sure which of the above is correct.
10. How many states hold caucuses instead of primaries?
- 10
 - 11
 - 12
 - 13

The answers are on the last page.

Avian Influenza Information

Avian Influenza, or Bird Flu, has been a concern of world travelers for several years. Diseased birds have been found in many Asian countries, and the virus has spread to 13 countries in the European Union. German authorities have confirmed outbreaks of Bird Flu in southern and eastern parts of the country over the past several months, and are actively working to contain the problem. No human cases of Bird Flu have been reported in the EU, but caution is still warranted, since it’s a very virulent form of influenza, and the mortality rate is quite high. And, of course, since many people living in Germany often travel to countries with widespread outbreaks, it’s important to be aware of the risks, and the best ways to avoid becoming infected.



According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other government agencies, the virus is primarily transmitted through direct contact with diseased birds, or poor hygiene or cooking methods by individuals who handled diseased poultry. To date, no cases of Bird Flu have been caused by properly cooked poultry and only a very few from close proximity to an infected person. Neither the State Department nor the WHO have issued travel alerts or warnings because of Bird Flu in any specific country or area, however, health authorities do advise travelers to be careful when traveling to countries with outbreaks in general, and to be particularly cautious of food containing raw eggs in countries with Bird Flu outbreaks in domestic poultry flocks.

It’s relatively simple to minimize your risk of exposure. Simply put, don’t physically handle wild birds, and pay particular attention to good hygiene and proper handling while cooking any poultry products.

The State Department has published a comprehensive “Avian Flu Fact Sheet”, which can be found [here](#).



Driving in Germany

One of the most obvious differences between living in the United States and Germany is driving – it's simply *different* here. The only difference isn't just the speed on the autobahns. Many of the traffic rules and practices – particularly the right of way! – vary considerably from U.S. norms. The laws are also different – for example, driving with an expired license can land you in jail. Traffic accidents are the single biggest health hazard Americans encounter overseas, so it pays to understand the differences. Do you, for example, know the answers to these two questions?

- A driver wants to leave a private driveway and turn right onto a public road. At the same time, a bicyclist is approaching from the left. Who has to wait?
- When a streetcar comes up behind a driver's vehicle while the driver is waiting to make a left turn, what must the driver do?

It also pays to understand the signs, since violating them can earn you an expensive ticket or repair bill! Examples:

- What sign indicates the beginning of a 50 kilometer speed zone in a city?
- True or false: In the city where no priority signs are posted, the driver on the widest street has the right-of-way.

If you're uncertain of the answers to any of these questions, there are several web sites that can help you. Click [Driving in Germany](#) to connect to the U.S. Embassy – Germany's web page that addresses general driving tips and differences, as well as insurance, inspection and registration requirements. For a more comprehensive guide, complete with pictures of all the road signs and their meanings and a quiz to test your own knowledge, take a look at the publication issued by the U.S. military forces in Europe for the service and family members. The first section of the pamphlet discusses military-specific concerns, but the second section provides a thorough explanation of the legal and practical differences in the two systems. The test section includes graphic "who has the right of way" questions that we think are particularly helpful in clearing up many very confusing situations. To find the publication on line, click [Army in Europe Pamphlet 190-34](#). Alternatively, if you're just curious about what some of those signs mean, simply type "German road signs" into your favorite search engine on line to find the answers.



Intercountry Adoption

We often receive inquiries from American citizens living in Germany who wish to adopt a child, either here in Germany or farther abroad, in places as far as Russia, Kazakhstan, and China. The best place to start for Americans interested in adopting a foreign-born child is www.travel.state.gov. The Office of Children's Issues maintains a web page with a wealth of information on intercountry adoption and provides links to the other U.S. Government agencies that also assist adoptive parents. Click [here](#) for the State Department's Intercountry Adoption web page for a general overview on the issue and links that will take you to the detailed country information pages. If you're interested in adopting a child in Germany, click [here](#) for the German Intercountry Adoption Information page. If you've adopted a foreign-born child (or are planning to in the near future) and you're returning to the United States with your new family member, click [here](#) for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's information page on intercountry adoptions, and immigration requirements.



Answers to Election Trivia

1. B: Warren G. Harding
2. B: Adlai Stevenson
3. D: 4
4. A: The winner is selected by the house of representatives.
5. A: John Q. Adams
6. B: Rutherford B. Hays in 1862.
7. C: Florida
8. D: The violence that surrounded the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago.
9. D: No one is sure which answer is correct.
- 10.D: 13