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## ABSENTEE VOTING

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Absentee voting is the term that describes casting a ballot by some means other than in the polling booth on election day. The procedure is also referred to as early voting, which involves two main types of voter choice: early in-person and voting by mail. Both are intended to allow a voter who cannot be at a voting booth on election day to cast a ballot that can be verified as legitimate.

Absentee voting began during the Civil War when Union soldiers were caught up in the political struggle and, with President Abraham Lincoln's encouragement, wanted to participate in the elections back home. But until quite recently, the practice of absentee voting was quite limited in the United States.

Seeking in many cases to maintain the tradition of a single voting day and concerned about the possibility of fraud in ballots marked without oversight by election officials, many states required voters to explain why they would be unable to get to the polls on election day—excuses could include business travel, illness, military duty, and vacation—and some even required voters to sign affidavits.

Such requirements no longer exist in most states. With many states and voting participation advocates seeking ways to reverse a long-term decline in turnout, there has been a major expansion and liberalization of absentee voting, in which voters mail in their marked ballots or drop them off with state election officials by a designated date, and early voting, in which states and localities set up designated sites where voters can cast their votes in the weeks before Election Day.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of fall 2020, two-thirds of the states allowed no-excuse absentee voting, four-fifths offered early in-person voting, and several states automatically mailed ballots to all eligible voters.

The 2020 election saw an expansion of absentee and mail-in voting. The COVID pandemic was raging across the country, and many voters did not feel comfortable with the idea of going to a crowded polling place on election day. As a result,

numerous states relaxed their rules about absentee voting. At the same time, Republican president Donald Trump, who was seeking reelection, repeatedly criticized mail-in voting—although he sent in an absentee ballot himself—arguing that it would lead to fraud and abuse. Another factor affecting the 2020 election was the U.S. Postal Service itself, which was under fire for remarkably slow service. Many voters opted to bring their mail-in ballots to drop boxes rather than risk sending them through the mail.

According to a Pew Research Center study, 54 percent of voters opted to cast their ballots in person in the 2020 election, while 46 percent chose to use absentee or mail-in ballots. Twenty-seven percent voted in person on Election Day, while another 27 percent voted in person early. Republicans tended to vote in person more often than Democrats, with two-thirds of Trump supporters doing so as compared to 41 percent of Biden supporters. Thirty-seven percent of Trump supporters voted in person on Election Day; 17 percent of Biden supporters did so.

A study by the MIT Election Lab showed that 46 percent of voters chose to use mail-in or absentee voting in the 2020 election, compared with 21 percent in the 2016 election. Election Day voting dropped to 28 percent, from 60 percent in 2016. And early in-person voting rose to 26 percent from 19 percent four years earlier.

Absentee voting has long been helpful to Americans living outside the United States. Both major political parties have overseas organizations of absentee voters, Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and later amendments interpreted the right to vote broadly, encompassing the polling place, voters' physical disabilities, language barriers, and other aspects of the elections process that might deny a person or groups of people access to the ballot box or voting booth. The act also directed the Justice Department to determine if state election laws were depriving military personnel of voting rights. Some politicians and election watchdog groups expressed concern about this trend. The following were among their stated qualms:

- Early and absentee balloting raises the risk of fraud. Critics say these practices offer those seeking to corrupt the election process more opportunities to “stuff the ballot box” or coerce individual voters into voting for candidates they would not have backed otherwise. Advocates say this risk is greatly exaggerated.
- Large numbers of absentee ballots can complicate vote counting and delay the outcome of very close elections. Critics point out that disputes over counting of absentee ballots were involved in two of the most controversial elections of recent times—the 2000 presidential vote in Florida that Republican George W. Bush eventually won, giving him the electoral votes needed to defeat Democrat Al Gore, and the 2004 election for governor in the state of Washington, in which Democrat Christine Gregoire was declared the winner over Republican Dino Rossi weeks after election day. The large number of absentee ballots also delayed the outcome of the

2020 presidential election between Democrat Joseph R. Biden—the eventual victor—and Republican incumbent Donald Trump for several days.

- Early voting skews the candidates' campaigns. Candidates traditionally have planned their strategies to build momentum and make a big final push just before election day. In early voting states, candidates must allocate resources to reach voters who might be casting ballots days or even weeks before election day. Some observers also worry that voters casting early ballots might regret their votes if the closing days and weeks of the campaigns bring new information or revelations that change their minds about the candidates.
- Early voting does not have a significantly positive impact on voter turnout. Curtis Gans, an influential academic analyst of voter turnout, strongly contends that his data analysis shows little gain in overall participation in states that have introduced early voting.

Yet, supporters of absentee and early voting say these concerns are greatly overstated. As with so many things in recent years, the issue has taken on increased political overtones, with Trump and his supporters railing against the practice. In the wake of the 2020 election, which Trump never conceded and continued to argue was fraudulent, Republican-controlled states around the country enacted laws to cut back on voter access. Backers of the new laws, which often made mail-in voting more difficult, cited fraud as a reason for clamping down. Opponents of the laws argued that it would especially harm minority and other marginalized communities' ability to vote. In addition, information came to light in early 2022 indicating that minority voters' mail-in ballots in Washington State were being thrown out at a higher rate than those of white voters. Washington is a state where all voters get mail-in ballots, so observers were concerned by this finding. The data was consistent with earlier studies in several other states.

### **Vote by Mail**

Given the success of absentee voting, various groups in recent decades advocated vote-by-mail plans to encourage wider participation in the electoral process, which in the United States was characterized by a voter turnout much lower than in many other industrialized countries. In 1995 and 1996, the vote-by-mail concept was put to the test in two states, Nevada and Oregon, which conducted several elections entirely by mail.

The largest test took place in Oregon, which used mail-in votes to choose a successor to Republican senator Bob Packwood, who had resigned under allegations of sexual harassment. The winner was Democrat Ron Wyden, the first senator elected by mail.

For the special election, both the primaries in 1995 and the general election in early 1996 were conducted by mail. Oregon officials were pleased with the “turnout”—about 57 percent of the eligible 1.8 million voters. The primaries to select contenders for the House seat vacated by Wyden also were conducted by mail, but the special election itself was a conventional voting-booth affair held in conjunction with the Oregon presidential primaries.

Oregon subsequently became the first state to decide to hold all elections by mail. In the 1998 midterm elections, Oregon voters approved Ballot Measure 60 requiring vote by mail in biennial primary and general elections. The measure eliminated polling places, but it did not affect current law allowing absentee ballots or voting at the elections office. The rate of voter participation in Oregon in 2000 was reported to be in the neighborhood of 80 percent, which was significantly higher than the national average.

A potential for abuse of the vote-by-mail system surfaced in Oregon when candidates were able to obtain from election officials the names of voters who had not yet returned their ballots. Critics said this information left voters open to undue solicitation or even harassment by candidates.

An argument against use of the mail to provide a longer voting period is that it could invite fraud, and indeed, there have been instances where the number of votes cast in an election, including absentee ballots, exceeded the number of people living in the community. Another problem with mail-in votes is that the wrong persons could cast duplicate or undelivered ballots. But the chances of this particular type of fraud being successful are reduced by the standard requirement that the voter’s signature be on the envelope.

Changes in the status of candidates’ campaigns may also cause complications. In Nevada, the 1996 Republican presidential primary was held by mail-in vote. The party’s eventual nominee, Bob Dole, won, but many votes had been mailed in before another leading candidate, Malcolm S. “Steve” Forbes, Jr., dropped out of the race on March 14.

Proponents argue that the benefits of voting by mail—including convenience, speed, and lower costs—outweigh the disadvantages, which include the lost sociability of gathering at the polls, the easing of the procedure to accommodate less civic-minded voters, and the possible abuse of the system or delay in the certification of a winner.

In an Oregon survey, 76.5 percent of those polled said they preferred voting by mail over going to a polling place. Women and older voters were strongest in favor of mail voting.

Mail elections were estimated to cost one-third to one-half less than conventional elections. The U.S. Postal Service in promotional advertising estimated that the cost

of postal voting “can be as much as \$1 million lower, because there are no polling personnel to pay, no space to rent, no polling equipment to transport and set up.”

Although mail voting may be cheaper than a regular election, absentee voting in conjunction with a voting-booth election was more expensive per vote than the polling place balloting. Election officials estimated that absentee ballots require three to four times more labor to process.

Because absentee ballots are assumed to be ripe for fraud, election workers devote considerable time to ensuring that they are legitimate. When the ballot is received, a worker usually checks the name on the envelope to verify that the person is a qualified absentee voter and that the signatures match those on file from the voters’ registration records. The worker also must verify that the person has not already voted.

Because many absentee voters mail or drop off their ballots at the last minute, election workers already may be swamped with regular returns when the last batches of time-consuming absentee ballots come in. The absentee ballots have often been set aside, sometimes by law, to be dealt with the day after the election—or as long as it takes to verify that they are not fraudulent. If the election is close, it may be days, weeks, or even months before the winner is known. In the 2020 presidential election, it took several days for Democratic candidate Biden to be declared the winner because of the large number of votes cast by mail or early in person. Different state rules resulted in some states counting the Election Day ballots first and some counting the early ballots first, leading to shifting outcomes in some close contests.

Postal voting is part of a larger trend since the 1980s toward easier voting, including steps to increase voter registration, such as the federal Motor Voter Act of 1993, which allows voters to sign up when they obtain or renew their driver’s license. Many states have also made absentee ballots available to all. For example, Colorado instituted an automatic vote-by-mail system giving all voters the choice of voting by mail, drop box, or in person on Election Day. Since 2013, all people registered to vote in Colorado have received mail-in ballots.

*See also* Election Day; Motor Voter Act; Special Elections; Voter Turnout; Voting Rights Act

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## ABSOLUTE MAJORITY

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In electoral or legislative voting, an absolute majority is more than 50 percent of all those eligible to vote, regardless of how many actually voted. A simple majority, by contrast, consists of a majority of those voting, not of the whole eligible pool. Nearly all electoral politics and legislative procedures in the United States are based on the principle of a simple majority.

The U.S. Senate is often used as an example to illustrate these terms because it has exactly 100 members. Therefore, an absolute majority of the Senate is fifty-one or more votes. But not all senators vote on every motion or bill, and most bills or motions carry if they receive most of the votes that were cast—even if this is short of the absolute majority of fifty-one.

For instance, if only sixty-six senators vote on a bill, it passes if there are at least thirty-four “ayes,” because that is more than half of the total vote. But it would be only 34 percent of the Senate membership and therefore a simple majority, not an absolute majority.

The same principle applies to most American elections. Even in states, districts, and other jurisdictions typically marked by high turnout, the number of actual participants always falls well short of 100 percent; therefore, in almost any election, the winner—even if he or she takes a majority of votes cast—will receive votes from less than a majority of all eligible voters. In jurisdictions marked by low voter turnout, winners of elections are typically chosen by smaller fractions of the total electorate.

There is, however, a huge exception to this rule: the election for president of the United States, in which the winner is determined not by the nationwide popular vote but by the sum of electoral votes won by the candidates on a state-by-state basis.

To be elected president or vice president, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the 538 votes in the Electoral College, or at least 270 votes. A presidential

candidate with an electoral vote majority is deemed elected even if that candidate receives less than a majority of the votes cast—something that has happened eighteen times—or even fewer popular votes than an opponent.

The latter has happened five times in U.S. history, most recently in 2016. Republican Donald Trump trailed Democrat Hillary Clinton by 2.1 percentage points in the national popular vote, but he was elected president with 304 electoral votes.

There have been three instances when no presidential candidate received the required electoral vote majority. In 1800 and 1824 the presidents—Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams, respectively—were elected by the House of Representatives as provided by the Constitution. In 1876, when the electoral vote total was in dispute, a fifteen-member commission, consisting of five senators, five representatives, and five Supreme Court justices, decided the outcome in favor of Republican Rutherford B. Hayes.

While many critics of the electoral vote system advocate converting to a system in which the candidate with the most popular votes wins, there is little support for requiring the winning candidate to receive votes from an absolute majority of the entire voting-age population of U.S. citizens. That is because such an absolute majority would be nearly impossible to achieve under current U.S. voting practices.

The hard-fought 2020 presidential election, for example, between incumbent Republican candidate Trump and Democratic challenger Joseph R. Biden, was considered a high-turnout contest, with more than 66 percent of eligible voters participating, despite difficulties posed by a raging pandemic. But even in that race, which many observers saw as the most important presidential choice in decades, one-third of the country's eligible voters opted not to participate.

*See also* Contested Elections; Electoral Anomalies; Electoral College and Votes

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## **AMERICAN INDEPENDENT PARTY (1968–) AND AMERICAN PARTY (1972–)**

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Both the American Party and the American Independent Party descended from the original American Independent Party that served as the vehicle for George C. Wallace's third-party presidential candidacy in 1968.

Wallace, the governor of Alabama from 1963 to 1967 and from 1971 to 1979, emerged in the early 1960s as a fiery defender of the racial segregation then common in the South. He burst onto the national scene in 1964 as a Democratic presidential candidate opposed to the Civil Rights Act that would be enacted that year.

Expected to make an impact largely in the South, Wallace entered three primaries in northern states—Wisconsin, Indiana, and Maryland—and surprised political

observers by winning between 30 percent and 43 percent of the popular vote in these contests. His unexpectedly strong showing brought the term “white backlash” into the political vocabulary as a description of the racial undertone of the Wallace vote, even as Lyndon B. Johnson, the incumbent president, brushed aside the challenge to claim the Democratic nomination.

In 1968, Wallace broke with the Democrats and launched his second presidential bid under the label of the newly established American Independent Party. His candidacy capitalized on the bitter reactions of millions of voters, especially whites and blue-collar workers, to the upheavals of the mid-1960s, including civil rights activism, urban riots, demonstrations against the Vietnam War, and the heavy federal spending on “Great Society” programs by Johnson’s administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress. With the help of volunteer groups, Wallace was able to get on the ballot in all fifty states.

Wallace did not hold a convention for his party, but in October, he announced his vice-presidential running mate—Curtis LeMay, a retired Air Force general—and released an issues platform. That November, the Wallace-LeMay ticket made one of the strongest third-party showings of the twentieth century: 9,906,473 votes or 13.5 percent of the popular vote. Wallace and LeMay carried five southern states and won forty-six electoral votes, the last time, through the 2020 election, that an alternative-party candidate carried any states.

Wallace, however, did not sustain an interest in building the American Independent Party. He entered the 1972 Democratic presidential nominating contest and had some strong early showings, but his campaign was cut short when he was severely wounded in an assassination attempt. Wallace also entered the 1976 primary field but made less of an impact.

The American Independent Party remained active in the 1972 race—appearing in many states as the American Party—and united behind John G. Schmitz, a Republican U.S. representative from California (1970–1973), as its presidential nominee. Thomas J. Anderson, a farm magazine and syndicated news features publisher from Tennessee, was the party’s vice-presidential candidate. In the November election, the Schmitz-Anderson ticket won 1,099,482 votes (1.4 percent of the popular vote) but failed to win any electoral votes.

An internal split subsequently ended the party’s national influence. By 1976, there were two distinct entities: the American Party, headed by Anderson, and the American Independent Party, headed by William K. Shearer, who had been chair of the party’s California affiliate.

The American Party, with Anderson as its 1976 nominee, stressed “permanent principles” of the party, including opposition to foreign aid, U.S. withdrawal from the United Nations, and an end to trade with or recognition of communist nations. The platform included planks opposing abortion, gun control, the Equal Rights Amendment, and government-sponsored health care and welfare programs.



But the party was on the ballot in only eighteen states, including eight where the American Independent Party—which had a similar issues agenda—also appeared. The American Independent Party nominated former Georgia governor Lester Maddox (1967–1971), a Democrat known for his segregationist views, as its presidential nominee and former Madison, Wisconsin mayor William Dyke, a Republican, as its vice-presidential candidate.

At the party's convention in Chicago, a group of nationally prominent conservatives made a bid to take over the party and use it as a vehicle to build a new conservative coalition. Richard Viguerie, a fundraiser for Wallace and a nationally known direct mail expert, was the leader of the group. He was joined at the convention by two leading conservatives—William Rusher, publisher of the *National Review*, and Howard Phillips, the former head of the Office of Economic Opportunity (1973) and leader of the Conservative Caucus, an activist group.

Viguerie, Phillips, and Rusher all argued that the American Independent Party should be overhauled, changed from a fringe group to a philosophical home for believers in free enterprise and traditional moral values. They also hoped they could attract North Carolina senator Jesse Helms, New Hampshire governor Meldrim Thomson, or Illinois representative Philip M. Crane—all Republican conservative stalwarts—to run for president. The gambit failed; Phillips went on to found the Constitution Party, which later claimed a remnant of the American Independent Party as its California affiliate.

Neither fragment of Wallace's original party made much of a ripple in 1976, with Maddox receiving only 170,531 votes (0.2 percent of the national total) and Anderson slightly behind with 160,773 votes.

The parties fielded candidates in several subsequent elections but received minuscule vote totals. The American Party last appeared on a presidential ballot in 1996, with candidate Diane Beall Templin receiving 1,847 total votes.

*See also* Know Nothing (American) Party (1856)

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## ANTI-FEDERALISTS (1789–1796)

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Never a formal party, the Anti-Federalists were a loosely organized group opposed to ratification of the Constitution. Thwarted in that goal, they nonetheless played a significant role in the history of the nation by pressing for what became known as the Bill of Rights. With the adoption of the Constitution in 1788, the Anti-Federalists served as the opposition to the Federalists in the early years of Congress.

Anti-Federalists were primarily rural, agrarian men from inland regions who favored individual freedom and states' rights, which they felt would be jeopardized

by the new Constitution. After ratification, the efforts of the Anti-Federalists led to adoption of the first ten amendments, the Bill of Rights, which spelled out the major limitations of federal power.

As the opposition faction in Congress during the formative years of the Republic, the Anti-Federalists basically held to a strict interpretation of the Constitution, particularly in regard to the various economic proposals of Treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton to centralize more power in the federal government.

Although never the majority faction in Congress, the Anti-Federalists were a forerunner of Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party, which came into existence in the 1790s and dominated American politics for the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

*See also* Democratic-Republican Party (1796–1828)

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## ANTI-MASONIC PARTY (1832–1836)

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Born in the late 1820s in upstate New York, the Anti-Masonic Party focused the strong, anti-elitist mood of the period on a conspicuous symbol of privilege, the Masons. The Masons were a secret fraternal organization with membership drawn largely from the upper class. Conversely, the appeal of the Anti-Masonic movement was to the common man—poor farmers and laborers especially—who resented the secrecy and privilege of the Masons.

The spark that created the party came in 1826. William Morgan, a dissident Mason from Batavia, New York, was allegedly on the verge of exposing the inner workings of the order when he mysteriously disappeared and never was seen again. Masonic leaders' refusal to cooperate in the inconclusive investigation of Morgan's disappearance led to suspicions that Masons had kidnapped and murdered him and were suppressing the inquiry.

From 1828 through 1831, the new Anti-Masonic Party spread through New England and the Middle Atlantic states, in many places establishing itself as the primary opposition to the Democrats. In addition to its appeal to the working classes, particularly in northern rural areas, and its opposition to Masonry, the Anti-Masons displayed a fervor against immorality, as seen not only in secret societies but also in slavery, intemperance, and urban life.

In September 1831, the party held the first national nominating convention of any party in American history. One hundred and sixteen delegates from thirteen states gathered in Baltimore, Maryland, and nominated former attorney general William Wirt of Maryland for the presidency. While Wirt received only 100,715 votes (7.8 percent of the popular vote) and carried only Vermont, the Anti-Masons did reasonably well at other levels, winning two governorships and fifty-three House seats.

But the 1832 election was the high point for the Anti-Masons as a national party. The decline of the Masons, especially in New York, where the number of lodges dropped from 507 in 1826 to forty-eight six years later, robbed the Anti-Masons of an emotional issue and hastened their decline. In the 1836 campaign, the party endorsed Whig candidate William Henry Harrison. Subsequently, the bulk of the Anti-Masonic constituency moved into the Whig Party.

*See also* Whig Party (1834–1856)

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## ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER CANDIDATES

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On January 20, 2021, Kamala D. Harris took the oath of office as vice president of the United States, marking several milestones: She was the country's first woman vice president, first Asian American vice president, and first Black vice president. Democratic presidential nominee Joseph R. Biden, Jr. chose Harris as his running mate after the two were rivals for the party's nomination. Harris was born in 1964 in Oakland, California, the daughter of a mother from India and a father from Jamaica. A graduate of Howard University and the University of California, Hastings College of Law, she was elected California's attorney general in 2010 and was elected to the U.S. Senate from California in 2016.

Among the candidates in the 2020 Democratic presidential field, Harris was seen as coming more from the traditional wing of the party than the progressive wing. With a background as a prosecutor, she was met with some skepticism by some progressives, who thought she was inclined to side with police. But she did speak up about racial issues, clashing with Biden at one Democratic debate where she recounted her experiences being bused to school.

In addition to Harris, another Asian American candidate, Andrew Yang, a businessman, also sought the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020. He later ran unsuccessfully for mayor of New York City in 2021 and later that year left the Democratic Party to become a political independent. In his presidential bid, Yang was known for his plan to give all Americans over 18 \$1,000 a month—a type of universal basic income.

Harris may have been the highest-ranking Asian American politician, but as of 2021, there were two Asian Americans in the Senate and more than a dozen in the House, as well as one governor. Harris's departure from the Senate left Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) and Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) as the two remaining Asian Americans in the chamber. Duckworth, a veteran who served in the Iraq War, lost both legs in combat. Before serving in Congress, she was an assistant secretary of Veterans Affairs. Hirono previously served as lieutenant governor of Hawaii; she lost a bid for governor in 2002.

Eight Asian Americans have served in the U.S. Senate. Five of them were from Hawaii, including the first Asian American senator, Hiram Fong, a Republican who served from 1959 to 1977. Other Asian American senators from Hawaii were Daniel Inouye, a Democrat who served in the House from 1959 to 1963 and the Senate from 1963 to 2012; Democrat Spark Matsunaga, who was elected to the House in 1962 and reelected six times before winning election to the Senate, where he served from 1977 to 1990; Democrat Daniel Akaka, who served in the House from 1977 to 1990 and the Senate from 1990 to 2013; and Hirono, who served in the House from 2007 to 2013 and subsequently served in the Senate.

In addition, Republican Samuel I. Hayakawa won election to the Senate from California in 1976 and served until 1983. Harris was the second Asian American senator from California.

Senator Duckworth served in the House from 2013 to 2017 and began her Senate service in 2017.

Overall, since 1900, sixty-seven Asian Pacific Americans have served as senators, representatives, delegates, or resident commissioners.

On the House side, the first Asian American was Robert M. Wilcox of Hawaii, a delegate from 1900 to 1903. He belonged to the Home Rule Party and did not have the right to vote on the House floor. The first Asian American member to be elected to a House seat was Dalip Singh Saund, a Democrat representing a California district from 1957 to 1963. As of 2021, there were nineteen Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the House, including sixteen representatives and three delegates, according to the Congressional Research Service. Of the nineteen, sixteen were Democrats and three were Republicans. The numbers had increased since the 99th Congress (1985–1986), when five Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders served in the House and two in the Senate.

The first Asian American governor was George Ariyoshi, a Democrat of Hawaii, who served from 1973 to 1986. Other Asian American governors include Ben Cayetano (D-Hawaii) (1994–2002), Gary Locke (D-Wash) (1997–2005), Bobby Jindal (R-La.) (2008–2016), and Nikki Haley (R-S.C.) (2011–2017). As of 2021, there was one Asian American governor, David Ige of Hawaii, a Democrat sworn into office in 2014 and reelected in 2018.

*See also* Black Candidates; Latino Candidates; LGBTQ Candidates; Native American Candidates; Women Candidates

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## ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER VOTERS

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In the 2020 election, non-Hispanic Asian American voters were the group that saw the biggest increase in participation from the 2016 election, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Fifty-nine percent of eligible Asian Americans voted in 2020; in contrast, only 49 percent did so four years earlier. And non-Hispanic Asian voter registration increased from 56 percent in 2016 to 64 percent in 2020.

The 2020 U.S. Census showed a growing Asian American and Pacific Islander population. The census found 24 million Asian Americans, including those of mixed race, as well as 1.6 million Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, including those of mixed race. About 19.9 million people, or 6 percent of respondents, identified as solely Asian, an increase of 35.5 percent since the 2010 Census. Another 4.1 million identified as Asian plus another race, an increase of 55.5 percent since 2010. Almost 690,000 identified as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, up 27.8 percent since 2010, while about 896,000 identified as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander plus another race, up 30.8 percent.

A *New York Times* analysis found that in 2020, 176 counties had an Asian population of more than 5 percent, up from 39 counties in 1990. The largest groups

represented were Chinese Americans, 4.1 million; Indian Americans, 4 million; and Filipino Americans, 2.9 million. Almost 60 percent of Asian Americans were born outside the United States. The majority became naturalized citizens.

In 2020, Kamala D. Harris, a Democratic senator from California, was elected vice president of the United States, a milestone. The daughter of a mother from India and a father from Jamaica, she became the first Asian American, African American, and female vice president in U.S. history. Harris had sought her party's presidential nomination that year against eventual winner Joseph R. Biden and joined him on the ticket. In addition, another Asian American, businessman Andrew Yang, was among the field of Democratic presidential hopefuls.

The Biden-Harris ticket narrowly won several states, including Arizona and Georgia, that led to their electoral college victory. An analysis by TargetSmart, a Democratic election data provider, found that the Democratic margin of victory in those two states was less than the surge in the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) vote. That vote trended Democratic, and the analysis indicated that the AAPI vote could have been decisive in helping Biden and Harris win.

According to 2020 U.S. Census figures, Asian Americans, including those of mixed race, make up 7.2 percent of the U.S. population. In addition, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, including those of mixed race, make up 0.5 percent of the U.S. population.

As a group, Asian Americans are extremely diverse, and that is reflected in their political viewpoints. While Asian Americans as a group tend to vote Democratic, that varies by subgroup. For example, a 2018 study conducted by the group APIA Vote found that overall, 58 percent of Asian Americans had a favorable view of the Democratic Party and 28 percent an unfavorable view. Conversely, 52 percent had an unfavorable view of the Republican Party and 34 percent a favorable view. The study indicated that Indian Americans had the strongest affiliation with the Democratic Party and Vietnamese Americans the weakest. Vietnamese Americans had the strongest identification with the Republican Party among the various groups.

The 2020 election was held during a global pandemic that began in China, and Asian Americans were subject to increased racial abuse during that year. Indeed, over many decades, Asian Americans have faced discrimination, including in their efforts to win citizenship and voting rights. For example, in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, designed to keep Chinese immigrants out of the country. This act was updated, and its provisions affected Chinese immigration well into the 20th century. The exclusion acts were only repealed during World War II, in 1943; Chinese Americans were at that point allowed to become naturalized citizens. Also, during World War II, many Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps;

Japanese Americans and some other Asian American groups were only allowed to become naturalized Americans beginning in 1952.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 sought to eliminate racial discrimination in voting rights, assisting Asian Americans as well as Black Americans and other groups to exercise their right to the franchise. But in more recent years, the Voting Rights Act has become frayed due to Supreme Court decisions and other factors.

*See also* Black Voters; Latino Voters; LGBTQ Voters; Native American Voters; Voting Rights Act; Women Voters

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## AT-LARGE

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An official elected by an entire jurisdiction rather than a subdivision of it is said to be elected at-large. United States senators, two for each state, run statewide and therefore are elected at-large; so are the governors and other constitutional officers in each of the fifty states.

Nearly all U.S. representatives, however, are elected from congressional districts that are smaller than an entire state; they generally do not run at-large. The only current exceptions are the representatives from the six states—Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming—that have the constitutional minimum of one House seat because of their small populations. In these cases, the entire state is the district, and the House member effectively is a statewide officeholder.

States also are divided into districts for the purpose of electing members of their own legislatures. These state legislative districts are similar to congressional districts, only smaller in most cases.

Under the Supreme Court's *Baker v. Carr* ruling in 1962, both houses of a state legislature must be apportioned according to population. In many states, the house is twice as large as the senate, and a senate district may comprise two house districts. Unlike Congress, some state legislatures still have multimember districts.

City council districts are often known as wards. Frequently, a city council will be made up of some members elected at-large and others elected by the ward he or she represents.

Racial and ethnic minorities tend to oppose at-large election because it makes them less likely to gain representation in the legislative body in question. Many have favored the creation of minority-majority districts, in which minority-group voters make up most of the local population and thus have a stronger opportunity to elect a member of their group to office. At-large elections place minority-group

candidates in competition with members of the majority group, making it more difficult for them to win elections, especially in areas where voting tends to be racially or ethnically polarized.

*See also* Congressional District; Minority-Majority District; Reapportionment and Redistricting; Single-Member Districts; Unicameral

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