

Following the US elections from London: an expat's view

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2am quarrels, anxiety, doubt, ambivalence, feeling disconnected, refreshing the phone for updates. No, this is not a long-distance relationship on the rocks, it is the life of an American expat following the U.S. presidential elections from London. Two weeks ahead of Election Day, U.S. voters living in London cannot escape the soundbites, “[bad hombres](#),” [hot mics](#), and [rehearsed economic taglines](#) that have become the defining moments of the 2016 race to the White House.



I would say that prior to the election, I followed the U.S. news semi-daily, but after I moved to London I follow the news semi-religiously, especially concerning the election. I would say that my anxiety about [Republican presidential candidate, Donald] Trump and desire to understand why people would vote for him is a reason for that. So, probably hourly at this point,

Laurel, an American graduate student in London

The twenty-four hour news cycle and social media have made it easier than ever to keep up with elections back home (or harder to avoid, depending on who you ask). “U.S. news and the election are not mutually exclusive at the moment,” noted Pam, a graduate student. For many of the expats living in London, the [fourth largest community](#) of Americans living outside the U.S., how and how often they follow the news has shifted. “It has changed dramatically due to the terrifying nature of this election. In previous elections, I cannot say that I have followed so closely. Perhaps this is because I have moved to London and want to remain cognizant of what is on-going in my country, but I believe it is largely due to my fears surrounding this election,” said Laurel.



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For others, being away from their routines back home has made things more difficult, “I think I’m less involved because I’m not surrounded by more media coverage, for example I don’t have U.S. radio to listen to when driving a car, I don’t have all the U.S. cable news channels,” said Lindsay, an American expat living in London for work. The time difference makes it difficult to keep up with live debates, “I watched the second debate because I had easier access to TV and internet, and quite honestly it was a drain on energy – not only because of the time difference – but because it was so unsettling to see the nature of political discourse in the U.S. right now,” said Amna, another American graduate student, adding that “the memes that did follow (albeit briefly) were entertaining, and I was glad to be ‘a part of it’ afterwards.”

Keeping up with the news isn’t the only challenge for Americans trying to engage with Election 2016 from across the Atlantic. According to the U.S. Vote Foundation, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that provides voter services for Americans living overseas, [just five percent of eligible voters](#) living abroad (those aged 18 or older), voted in the 2012 presidential elections. The Foundation estimates that there are 2.6 million eligible voters living abroad, including 51,000 living in London. Laurel, one of the American students interviewed, voted early using an absentee ballot:

I had not originally planning on voting due to my understanding of how ballots are counted from abroad, and the thought that my [home] state would likely vote democratically. I would also feel horrible after the election if I had not voted, as in the event that my preferred candidate does not win, I would want to know that I did what I could to prevent that [from] happening.

Others are concerned about their ballots being counted, Amna intends to vote “If I can get the absentee info in time. I don’t want to be a bystander, but unfortunately, with absentee ballots they may not be counted unless there’s a tie.”

Some American expats recall the [2000 presidential elections](#) when then-Democratic candidate Al Gore would have won the state of Florida, and thus the presidency, by 202 votes but for the 2,490 overseas ballots counted after Election Day. “I personally do not want to vote but I realize that I must consider that my vote truly counts this year,” said David, a student living in London.

Regardless of how distant Americans feel from the highs and lows of this presidential race, living abroad provides a new perspective on what’s at stake beyond U.S. borders. “Hearing about the election from non-Americans has definitely changed the way I see it. It makes the global impact of it much more real and changes my perspective when I read news stories,” observed Shannon, an American student.

Note: I personally enjoy the horror in Londoners’ faces when I jokingly (but with a straight face), mention that I will be voting for a certain coifed real estate mogul.

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