

# Goodbye, U.S.A!

Im Vorfeld der Präsidentschaftswahlen ist die Stimmung angespannt – und immer mehr US-Bürger ziehen eine Auswanderung nach Kanada oder Europa in Erwägung. ALLISON MEAKEM über Beweggründe und Hoffnungen.

ADVANCED US

In the summer of 2018, after graduating from college, Katie Connell moved from Ohio to France. They had found work as a nanny in Paris and figured the job would be a cool way to see Europe before someday returning to the U.S. But it soon became clear to Connell that they would not be going home anytime soon. They had been closeted in the bubble where they grew up – and only after leaving Ohio did Connell feel safe coming out as nonbinary and using the pronouns “they”/“them”.

## No looking back

Following their stay in France, Connell moved to Greece, and then later to England, where they attended circus school. Today, Connell, 28, lives in Bristol and works at a charity. In March, they got married to a British transgender man. The couple isn’t sure where life will take them, but Connell is certain they won’t end up in America.

“Being out, being queer, being non-binary... There’s plenty of reasons not to go back,” says Connell. “At the start, it felt like I was being pulled elsewhere. And now it feels like, if I wanted to go back, there are doors that have closed.”

Homophobia and transphobia are everywhere in the U.S. – and have become cornerstones of the Republican Party’s platform under former President Donald Trump. As of mid-August, GOP-led states have passed a combined

45 bills targeting transgender people in this calendar year alone. Many of those states – including Ohio – have also refused to implement President Joe Biden’s new civil rights protections for LGBTQ+ students.

Connell is part of a growing group of Americans who are either interested in emigrating – or have already done so. The trend is especially noticeable among younger generations, who are frustrated with the polarized political climate in the U.S.

## The “Trump effect”

A 2019 Gallup study found that 30 percent of Americans under 30 were interested in moving abroad; for women of the same age, the figure stood at 40 percent. Both were record highs. Young Americans – and young women in particular – are considered to be overwhelmingly left-leaning voters. Gallup cited the “Trump effect” as the main driver of the surge in interest.

A 2022 Economist/YouGov survey demonstrated that Biden’s inauguration in 2021 did not lead to a noticeable decline in these numbers. Even with a new president, U.S. politics remained divisive. According to the poll, 38 percent of overall respondents and 45 percent of those under 30 had considered “moving permanently to a different country.”

These figures were considerably higher among Democrats, whose most frequently cited reason for potential

**closeted** [ˈkloʊzətəd]  
• gefangen

**nonbinary**  
[ˌnɑːnˈbaɪnəri]  
• non-binär, divers

**homophobia**  
[ˌhoʊməˈfoʊbiə]  
• Homophobie, Feindseligkeit gegenüber Homosexuellen

**transphobia**  
[ˌtrænzˈfoʊbiə]  
• Transfeindlichkeit

**cornerstone**  
• Eckpfeiler

**GOP-led (Grand Old Party)**  
• republikanisch

**implement sth.**  
[ˈɪmplɪment]  
• etw. einführen, umsetzen

**overwhelmingly**  
[ˌoʊvərˈwelmtɪŋli]  
• überwiegend

**cite sth.**  
• etw. nennen, angeben

**surge** [sɜːdʒ]  
• Anstieg

**inauguration**  
[ˌɪˌnɔːɡjəˈreɪʃən]  
• Amtseinführung

**divisive** [dɪˈvaɪsɪv]  
• polarisierend



emigration was a second Trump **term**. That **prospect** now appears increasingly likely as he prepares to **face off** against Vice President Kamala Harris in the November 5 presidential election.

But thinking about moving abroad is very different from doing it, says Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, who researches the American diaspora at the University of Kent's Brussels campus. Although Google searches for "move to Canada" **spiked** after Trump won the 2016 election, Klekowski von Koppenfels says there is no evidence to suggest that any statistically notable number of Americans actually emigrated to Canada – or anywhere else, for that matter – after Trump became president.

Still, a **bleak news cycle** means that a lot of Americans are making escape plans.

"It's not that everyone is rushing to leave, but I do feel as if people are thinking about putting a plan in place," says Jennifer Stevens, the **editor-in-chief** of *International Living* magazine. In June 2022 – after the U.S. **Supreme Court** **overturned** *Roe vs. Wade*, which had guaranteed Americans' right to an **abortion** – an *International Living* article entitled "How to Move Out of the U.S." saw a 1,000 percent increase in its **web traffic** for more than two straight weeks, according to Stevens.

### Migration is multicausal

Americans' escape plans can take many forms. Education, job opportunities, and family **reunification** are the most common pathways to move abroad. **Golden visas** in places such as Portugal are popular, too. And, with desirable new visa programs in place, a growing number of countries are seeking to attract digital nomads.

More Americans also appear to be trying to secure a second passport. "I think there is some awareness in the U.S. that, if you have access to a second nationality, it might not be a bad idea to get it," says Klekowski von Koppenfels, "just in case." Connell, who obtained a British passport via a family member, is an example.

"The biggest thing is the guns, not having guns"



People in Boston protest the COVID-19 vaccine mandate in 2022

In a statement to *Spotlight*, the German **Ministry of the Interior** confirmed that the number of Americans who became **naturalized** German citizens has risen significantly over the past decade – particularly after Trump's election in 2016. Earlier this year, the Bundestag passed a law that relaxed the process of becoming a German citizen, which could lead to a further increase.

But whether Americans who are **dual citizens** take advantage of their second passport to **relocate** is a separate question. "Migration is always multicausal," says Klekowski von Koppenfels. "Politics is going to play a role in that, and it always has," she says – but for most Americans, it's not the leading factor.

From her research, Klekowski von Koppenfels has concluded that, among Americans, the expression "I'm going to leave the country!" is usually "more of a form of protest than it is an actual intention of migration." That's especially true when Canada is involved.

She says "The idea of moving to Canada is something that **resonates**" for Americans. "Enslaved people fled to Canada for freedom. People fleeing the Vietnam War – either to flee the **draft** or flee the politics – moved to Canada... It's a place of freedom in the U.S. imagination."

### Accidental migrants

Most Americans abroad are what Klekowski von Koppenfels calls "accidental migrants" – a term she also uses to describe herself. Klekowski von Koppenfels was born in the U.S. and met a German man while writing her **doctoral dissertation** in Berlin in the 1990s. They fell in love, and she never went home. She's deeply frustrated with U.S. politics and is active with Democrats Abroad from her Belgian **perch**.

Stevens has observed similar trends with her readers. Most Americans who move abroad have a **preexisting** international background, whether through travel or **ancestry**; "the political environment tends to light a little bit of a fire under them," she says.

#### term

• Amtszeit

**prospect** ['pra:spekt]

• Aussicht

**face off against sb.**

• gegen jmdn. antreten

**spike**

• sprunghaft ansteigen

**bleak**

• düster

**news cycle** ['saɪkəl]

• Nachrichtenlage

**editor-in-chief**

• Chefredakteur(in)

**Supreme Court**

• Oberster Gerichtshof

**overturn sth.**

• etw. kippen, aufheben

**Roe vs. Wade** ['vɔ:isəs]

• Grundsatzurteil von 1973, das Abtreibung zum verfassungsmäßigen Recht der Frau erklärte

**abortion**

• Abtreibung

**web traffic**

• hier: Klickzahlen

**multicausal**

• mehrere Ursachen habend

**reunification**

• Zusammenführung

**Ministry of the Interior**

• Innenministerium

#### naturalized

['nætʃrəlaɪzd]

• eingebürgert

**dual citizen** ['du:əl]

• Bürger(in) mit doppelter Staatsbürgerschaft

**relocate**

• umziehen, übersiedeln

**resonate**

• Anklang finden

**draft** (US)

• Einberufung (zum Wehrdienst)

**doctoral dissertation**

• Doktorarbeit

**perch**

• Standort; hier: von ... aus

**preexisting**

['pri:ɪg'zɪstɪŋ]

• vorgegeben

**ancestry** ['ænsɛstri]

• Abstammung

**expats**

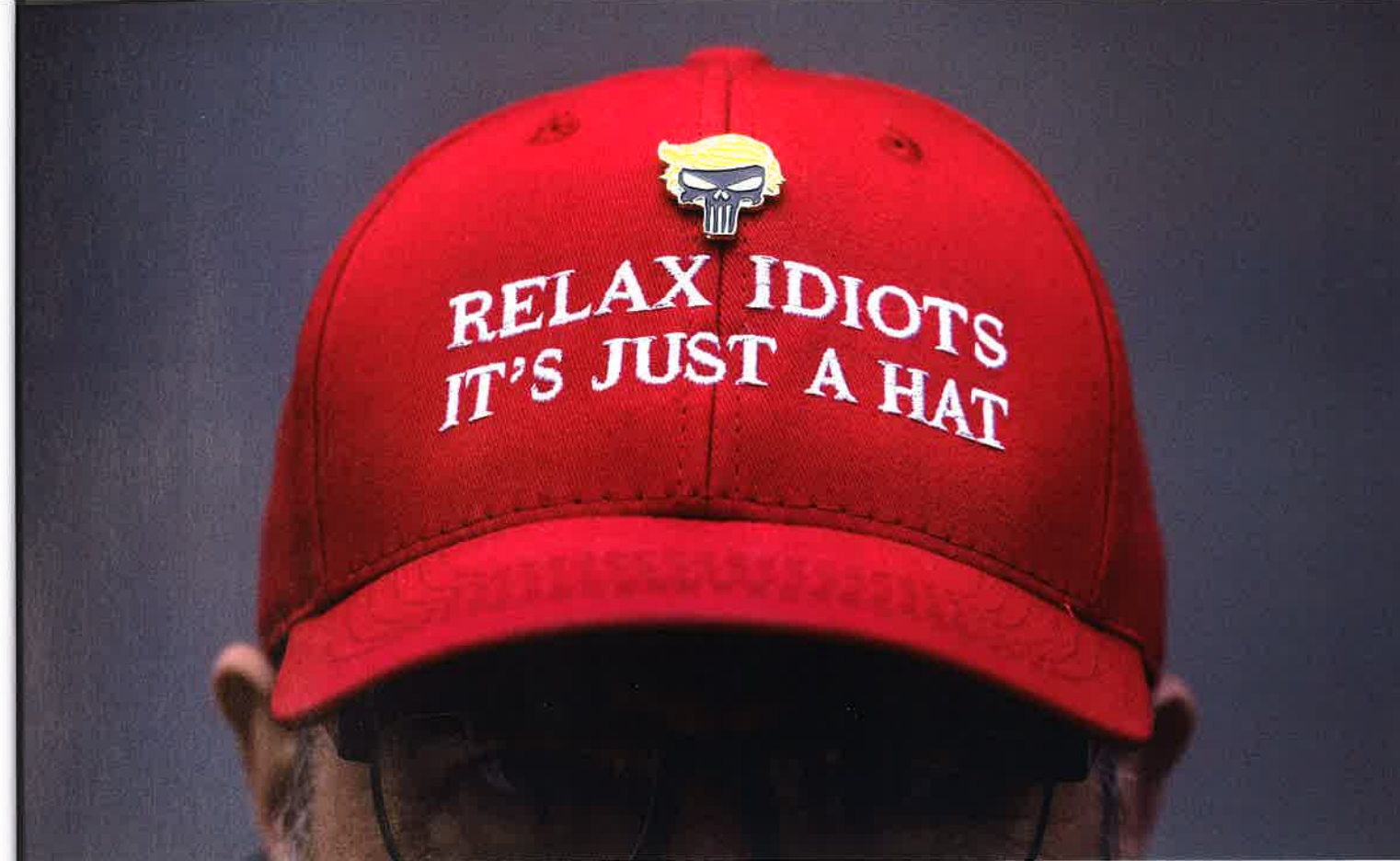
• im Ausland lebende Person

**residence permit**

• Aufenthaltserlaubnis

### PHRASE TO GO

A "golden visa" enables **expats** to invest in a country's economy in exchange for a **residence permit**.



A parody of Trump's iconic "MAGA" cap

One such fire was the 2020 police killing of George Floyd, a Black man from Minneapolis. "**Anecdotal reports** suggest that **post-Black Lives Matter** African Americans are leaving the United States at higher numbers," says Klekowski von Koppenfels. She **recalls** a Black friend who told her that, while racism exists everywhere on Earth, "it's a lot less deadly" than in America.

Ashley Simpson knows that feeling. Simpson, 29, was born in Jamaica and moved to North Carolina at the age of 10. She has since become a U.S. citizen. After working an intense job in Washington, D.C., for two years after college, Simpson moved to Europe in 2018 for an Erasmus master's program. Life on the old continent was easier, Simpson says. The **cost of living** – especially the cost of food – was much lower, and most places were **walkable**, unlike in car-centric America.

As a Black woman based in Washington, D.C., during the Trump years, Simpson says she was **overwhelmed** by the "intense race relations" – a feeling she compared to "burnout." After briefly returning to the U.S. during the pandemic, she moved to London,

where she now lives and works on a **creative visa**.

"I just feel so much safer in the U.K.," says Simpson. There's not only less racism and police violence: "The biggest thing is the guns, not having guns." In London, Simpson says, she doesn't constantly have to worry about mass shootings. She no longer feels the need to **scope out** potential escape routes wherever she goes.

America's gun problem is also one of Connell's main concerns, especially as a queer person. More than 40,000 people died as a result of **firearms** in 2023, according to the Gun Violence Archive. (The **tally** includes suicides.) Guns are now the leading cause of death among American children and teens, **advocacy group** Everytown for Gun Safety concluded from 2022 government data.

Connell and their husband still aren't sure about a long-term plan. Transphobia is on the rise in the U.K., too, and the cost-of-living crisis in the country is a "ticking time bomb," according to Connell, who also misses being near family in Ohio.

A possible compromise for the couple? "We're thinking about moving to Canada," Connell says.

#### anecdotal report

['ænik'dəʊtəl]

• Einzelbericht

**post-Black Lives Matter**

• nach den „Black Lives Matter“-Demonstrationen

**recall sth./sb.**

• sich an etw./jmdn. erinnern

**cost of living**

• Lebenshaltungskosten

**walkable**

['wɔ:kəbəl]

• zu Fuß erreichbar

#### overwhelmed

['əʊvə'r'welmd]

• überwältigt

**creative visa**

['vɪzə] (UK)

• Visum für Kultur- und Kreativschaffende

**scope sth. out**

• etw. erkunden

**firearm** ['faɪəɑ:rm]

• Schusswaffe

**tally**

• Anzahl, Zählung

**advocacy group**

['ædvəkeɪsɪ]

• Interessenvertretung