

The Ballot Is Stronger Than the Bullet: New Voting Security Measures and the Future of American Politics

BY GABE SUS

“The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man.” These words were spoken by then-President Lyndon B. Johnson on the passing of the landmark Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965. Indeed, mighty is the power of the vote wielded by the collective citizenry of any free nation. Many a conflict has been decided at the ballot box. Now, in the turbid aftermath of the 2020 election, synonymous with January 6 and widespread allegations of election fraud, officials at every level of government have imposed new regulations aimed to protect against fraud—whether real or imagined—and restore the trust of the American people in their election system.

Whether many of these measures amount to actual progress or are merely pacifying remains to be seen. After Donald Trump unilaterally declared his victory in the 2020 election, controversy ignited nationwide as elected officials and citizens alike put the long-enduring system of under the microscope. As the 2024 election draws ever closer, the government has scrambled to enact new guidelines that protect from election fraud, in hopes of averting another 2020-esque crisis. From hand-counting ballots to securing voting machine software, public officials repeatedly reinsure the voting public that there is nothing to fear.

Arizona and Georgia have passed new guidelines that require ballots to be counted by hand at the polling place. Georgia requires three poll workers to count the ballots until all three counts are exactly the same. Wisconsin has made the use of drop boxes for ballots optional, leaving towns to decide for themselves whether or not to use them. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court also rejected a case that allows ballots with minor paperwork errors to be discounted, saying that throwing out ballots for “meaningless or inconsequential paperwork errors” violates the right to vote.

Other voter identity laws have aimed to make voting more secure. North Carolina recently allowed digital ID cards from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to qualify as photo identification under

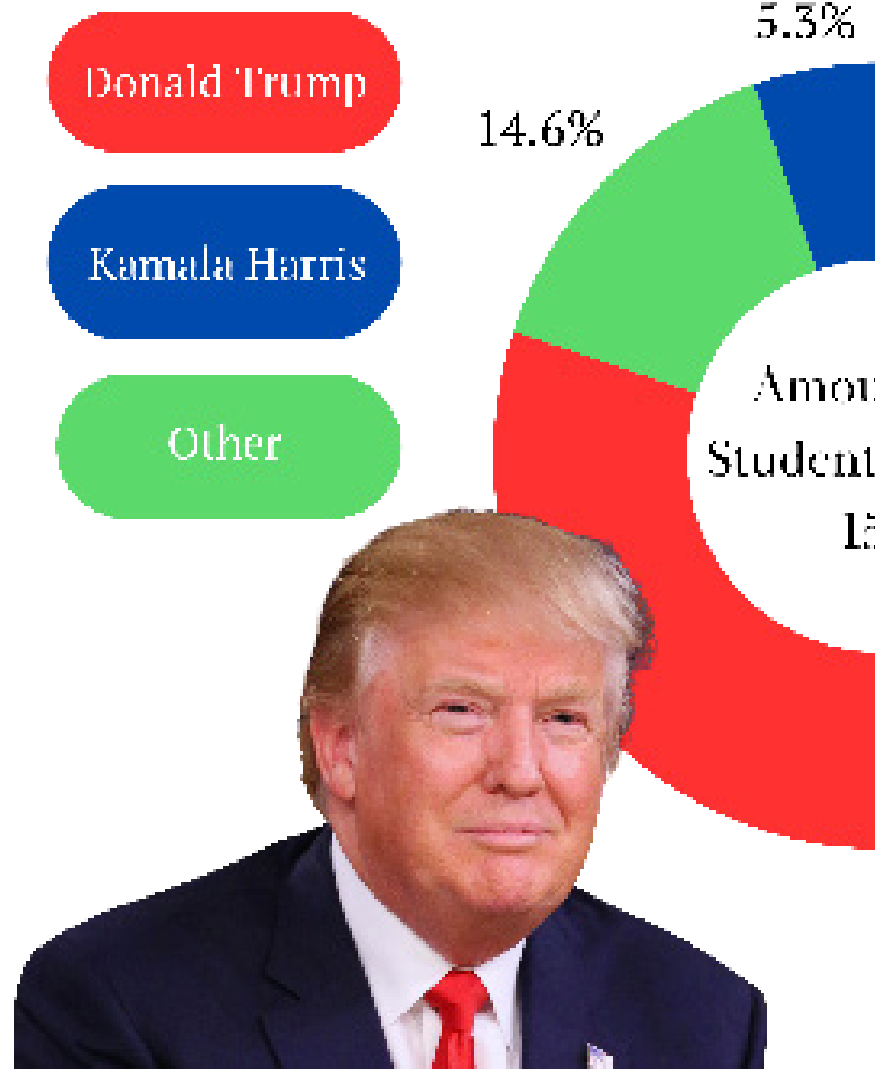
state law. An Arkansas court pointed to a clause in the state constitution recently when it banned electronic signatures for voter registration. Now, voters will have to sign their name in pen in order to register.

There are also new laws in place to cover the period after votes are in. In Georgia, a “reasonable inquiry” is required before certifying election results. New Hampshire governor Chris Sununu recently signed a law that allows the state to audit the performance of election infrastructure.

Some measures hit closer to home. Right here in Nebraska, politicians aligned with Donald Trump are urging the state to change its system of tallying votes. According to CNN, Nebraska and Maine are the only states that divide Electoral college votes, instead of statewide, by congressional district. In Nebraska, that means the winner in the state election is accorded two votes. The rest are split by the winner in each district. Anyone who has seen the “Blue Dot” signs in Omaha yards has seen this in action. Omaha is almost invariably a Democrat city, and that means Kamala Harris may win the state, per PBS. “After deep consideration, it is clear to me that right now, 43 days from Election Day, is not the moment to make this change,” Senator Mike McDonnell told PBS.

A multitude of other regulations are in place nationwide, and they vary as much as the political makeup of each state. While it is not clear how much these new rules will impact voter apathy and election turnout, it is hoped that they will show, as Abraham Lincoln said, “the ballot is stronger than the bullet.”

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AT



Graphic by Garret Fogle

The Blue Dot: A Growing Tide or a Fading Speck?

BY CONNOR SMITH

As election season approaches, and politics rise to the forefront of the public mind, our own city and state’s unique political landscape comes into the spotlight. As a state, Nebraska is consistently conservative, voting Republican in every presidential election since 1964. However, there is one consistent outlier: the city of Omaha. Because of the many different demographics within its borders, Omaha has broken the trend of Democratic Party support. In any other state in that nation, this would not have a large effect on the politics of the state; for throughout Nebraska, 47% of voting adults identify as Republican and only 36% as Democrat according to a Pew Research Center poll.

However, in 1992 the Nebraska State Legislature voted to split its electoral votes along the lines of Nebraska’s Congressional Districts. This meant that Nebraska’s 5 electoral votes would be distributed as such: 2 votes would be awarded to the overall winner of the state popular vote, and 1 vote would be awarded to the winners of the popular vote in each congressional district. Crucially, Nebraska’s 2nd Congressional District consists of only Omaha and its suburbs, resulting in an electoral vote being up for grabs in the middle of a consistently red state.

The first time that Nebraska split its votes was in the 2008 presidential election, with 4 votes going towards the GOP candidate Mitt Romney and

the 2nd Congressional District voting for Democrat Barack Obama. This was repeated in the 2020 elections, when the 2nd District voted for the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden. This has garnered the 2nd Congressional District a reputation as the “Blue Dot” on election maps amongst the sea of Republican red that engulfs the rest of the Great Plains.

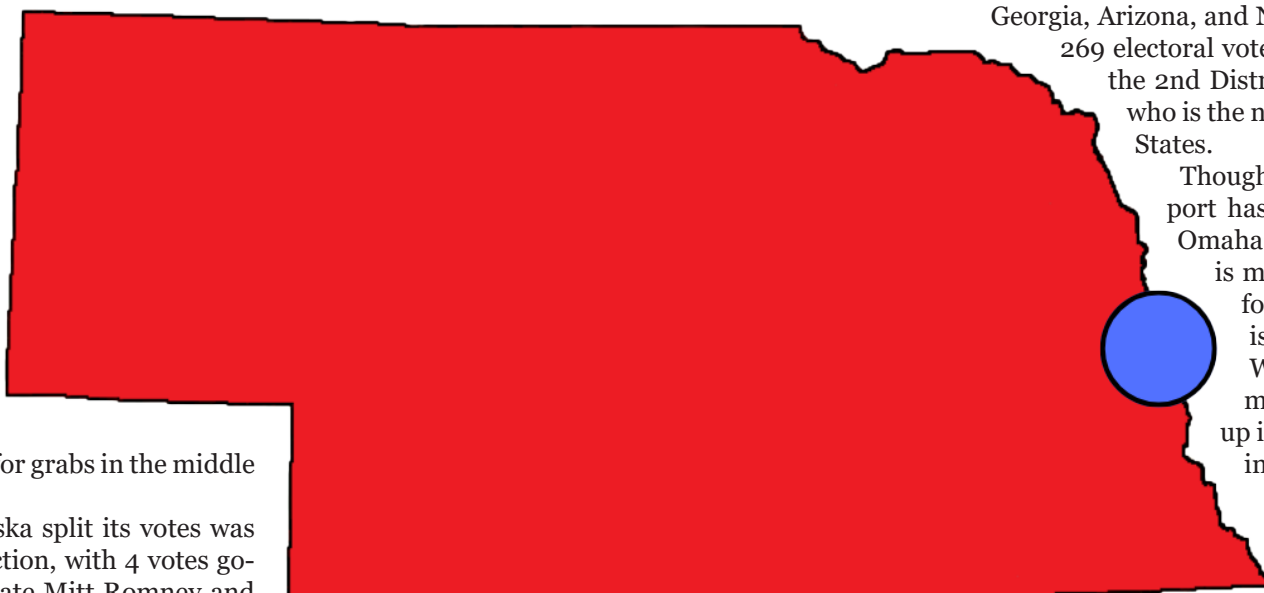
Needless to say, Nebraska Republicans are unhappy with this trend and have attempted to change Nebraska’s electoral system back to a winner-takes-all format numerous times. However, they have run out of time, and for this election, the current system will stay in place.

Though Omaha and the 2nd District as a whole has earned a reputation as the “Blue Dot,” its position as such is much less stable than Democrats would like. It is important to note that Ne-

braska’s 2nd Congressional District includes not only the left-leaning city voters, but also many suburbs and rural areas that routinely vote Republican. Kamala Harris’ campaign evidently sees this as a threat to the continuation of Omaha as a “blue dot” and has invested millions of dollars into campaigning in the area, according to CNN. The Trump campaign has been more passive in their campaign, spending less on local ads and instead focusing on larger battleground states.

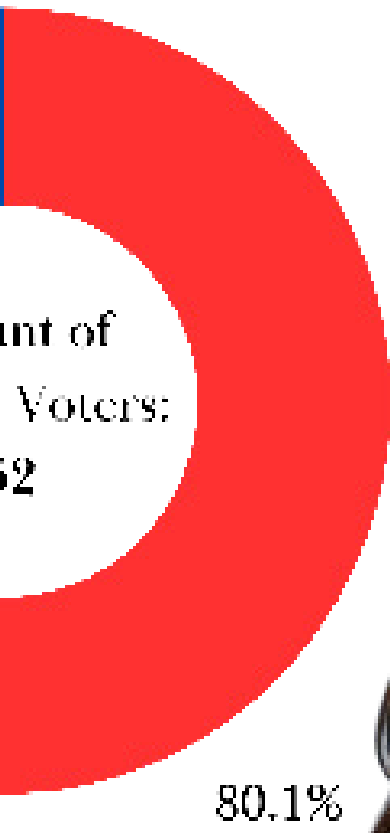
Though this seems to be a large amount of fuss for a single electoral vote, the 2nd District’s decision in November could have huge national implications. CNN political analysts have forecast a situation in which the states of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan vote blue for Kamala Harris, and Donald Trump wins the Sunbelt states of North Carolina, Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada, resulting in a 269-269 electoral vote tie. This could mean that the 2nd District’s vote could determine who is the next president of the United States.

Though Democratic Party support has been growing within the Omaha area, the rest of the state is much more rural and therefore Republican, a trend that is unlikely to change soon. Whether the “blue dot” will make another appearance is up in the air until Election Day in November.



Graphic by Connor Smith

ESSENTIAL OF THE MOUNT



New Responsibilities: Seniors Prepare for Voting Booth

BY CODY TORCZON

Turning 18 years old is a major milestone that marks a transition into adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it. One of the most significant is the civic responsibility to vote. With many of the seniors already 18 years old or turning 18 years old soon, the upcoming election will give them an opportunity to join in the democratic process that is fundamental to our nation. As they step into the voting booth for the first time, each voting senior will navigate a new experience filled with emotions of excitement and nervousness.

The first step for seniors who are voting is registering to vote. In this step of the voting process, each person will affiliate themselves with a party. Some chose to register online through the Nebraska government website, while others registered in-person at the DMV. As the election nears, it is important to make sure to register before the deadline hits.

Quinn Wamsley '25 plans to vote in the election this November. "I'm excited to help bring about the next president of the United States," Wamsley said. Wamsley also anticipates long lines at the polls and the pres-

ence of many others who share his enthusiasm for this election. Isaac Weeder '25 also plans to vote. "It is a tough first voting cycle, but I'm still excited," Weeder said. But voting involves more than just showing up to your designated polling place on election day. Each voter needs to be informed about the candidates and what each candidate supports.

Debates are a great way for voters to gather information about candidates prior to voting. Wamsley shared about how he has been actively watching all the debates are helping him to be a "well informed voter" for this election. Weeder also shared about his experiences with the presidential debates, saying, "I've been trying to form opinions about the candidates." Watching the debates not only provides uncertain voters with an opportunity to pick a candidate but also gives strong-minded voters a chance to see who they support on live television.

Elections embody the democratic principle of each person being able to form their own opinions. Various aspects contribute to and affect someone's political views, including advertisements, social media, and religious views. Additionally, parents have an impact on their children, and oftentimes influence their political views. Despite this, Weeder shared that he is trying his best to "form my own opinions," regardless of who his parents vote for.

Participation in elections is a hallmark of American democracy and the freedoms that this nation was founded upon. By stepping into the voting booth, these young men are not only exercising their right to vote but also contributing to the future of our nation. Their choice to vote represents their desire to advocate for issues that they feel are worthwhile.

Delegation on Legislation: Bills, Bills, & More Bills

BY JOHN KELLY

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* ushered in a wave of thousands of bills nationwide, referring not just to abortion rights, but also many other hot topics, like gender-affirming care, tax-policy, and gun rights.

Nebraska has found itself in a hotspot of dozens of bills being passed to restrict abortion access, most notably the ban on abortion after the first trimester, the first three months of a pregnancy. Nebraska, however, stands out from many other states in its controversial exception of this rule in cases of rape or incest, in those cases allowing up to twenty-two-week abortions. This exception also places the state among many other more moderate states, like Iowa, North Carolina, and Georgia.

Along with these abortion bills signed in May of 2023 Nebraska also signed bills banning puberty blockers for some demographics and completely banning gender altering surgery for minors. When asked about the bill Governor Jim Pillen stated, "LB574 is the most significant win for social conservatives in a generation, and is part of what has been a historic legislative session with senators voting for policies that protect our kids, cut taxes, grow agriculture, and defend our Nebraska values."

The access of transgender affirming care has especially come under attack in recent years with over six-hundred state bills being proposed in 2024 alone, with another eighty bills at the national level, an unprecedented number. These bills not only ban things like puberty blockers, gender transitioning surgery for minors, but also change the social and legal abilities of transgender people. For example, the regulation of which bathrooms transgender people may

enter, banning of the legal use of the use of the term woman to refer to someone who is biologically male, banning of non-binary option on birth certificates, and many more rights were restricted through these bills.

Trans-rights are an especially controversial topic in the modern day with members of opposing parties having extremely passionate and personal disagreements of every kind, especially when discussing the

ulating certain gun laws. This bill especially affects areas in and around Omaha which, due to their more liberal policies, had unique restrictions on gun practices compared to most of Nebraska.

These gun laws are especially a point of contention in the upcoming election season, with the Harris campaign pushing heavy restrictions or even a ban on assault weapons, while the Trump administration opposes most gun control policies. The Trump campaign declared their policy to lift the restrictions of gun access to high suicide risk individuals, and their idea to remove the Zero-Tolerance policy put in place by the Biden administration. This Zero-Tolerance policy removed the ability of a violator of gun laws to wield a firearm for a given period.

All these recent pushes in gun policy make it even more surprising to hear that no new gun laws were passed in the 2024 Nebraska legislative session, an event that shook the 30-year streak of discussion on firearms in the state.

Nebraska has been part of the national shift away from valuing gun control as one of the most significant policies. According to

Pew Research Center, gun control did not even rank among the top twenty most important policies for the election.

Controversial bills are the reason parties push for office, and following these bills being introduced in the past couple of years, there are only more bills to soon follow in the upcoming 2024 election season. Bills like LR384, examining nonprofit organizations, or even new tax bills, like in LR435, may be introduced this November.



Graphic by John Kelly

medical applications. The gender altering surgeries especially come under controversy through the emotional word choice on each side, with Republicans describing it as "mutilating" and Democrats describing it as "lifesaving."

Further controversy was also sparked with Nebraska's changes in gun laws, especially the recent bill from 2023 LB77, which allows gun owners to carry a concealed weapon without a permit, and banned individual cities, townships, or counties from reg-