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# Trends

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## ELECTIONS 2019

# Flipped Seats, Narrow Margins Mark Off-Year Results

Democrats in the Old Dominion took control of both legislative chambers and, along with a Democratic governor, have gained full control of the state's government for the first time since 1993.

Going into the election, Virginia Republicans held a 21-19 seat advantage in the Senate and a 51-49 lead in the House of Delegates. (Control of the House rested on a single seat decided by a random drawing in 2017.) Democrats, capitalizing on an invigorated electorate as indicated by relatively high voter turnout, now hold advantages of 21-19 in the Senate and 55-45 in the House.

Democrats also celebrated the victory of Kentucky Attorney General Andy Beshear (D), son of former Governor Steve Beshear (D), over incumbent Governor Matt Bevin (R) in a race separated by only 5,300 votes. Beshear becomes the state's 35th Democratic governor.

Democrats didn't win everywhere, however. Republicans in Mississippi expanded their comfortable majority in the Senate by two, while maintaining their large mar-

gin in the House. And although the race between Mississippi Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves (R) and Attorney General Jim Hood (D) was tapped by some analysts as an opportunity for Democrats to gain control of the governor's mansion for the first time since 2004, it was obvious when the polls closed that Reeves would succeed in keeping Mississippi red.

In New Jersey, Republicans flipped five Democratic seats—four in the Assembly, one in the Senate—though Democrats still hold commanding leads in both chambers.

### Ballot Measures

Voters in seven states also weighed in on 20 ballot measures, bringing the total number of measures decided this year to 25. (In recent months, Louisianans voted on four, and U.S. Virgin Islanders on one.) Of the total, three were citizen initiatives and 22 were referred by legislatures.

Successful measures included a change in how Kansas counts students and military service members for redistricting. The

state will no longer adjust counts based on where their "permanent" homes are, since for thousands of them, that's outside of Kansas. Colorado voters narrowly agreed to allow sports betting to pay for the state's water plan. Louisianans voted to increase education funding. Mainers elected to let people with disabilities use alternative methods to sign a citizen initiative or people's veto. And Texans just said "no" to a state income tax, going so far as putting the prohibition into their state constitution.

Although voters approved most of November's ballot measures, Coloradans rejected a change to their Taxpayer Bill of Rights that would have allowed the state to keep surplus general fund revenue to spend on transportation and education. And Washington voters appeared to have rejected an attempt to reverse the current ban on affirmative action, in place for more than two decades, though the outcome wasn't clear at press time.

—John Mahoney and Amanda Zoch

## PENSIONS

# Invest or Divest? Public Pensions Face Tough Questions

Many Americans try to put their money where their values are. It's called "socially responsible investing" because investors consider social and environmental impact along with an investment's potential financial return. Such investments account for \$12 trillion—or \$1 in \$4—of the \$46.6 trillion in total assets under professional management in the United States.

State legislators, too, have protested certain environmental, social and political practices—from fossil fuels to firearms to foreign affairs—by divesting public pension funds from industries and countries they disagree with.

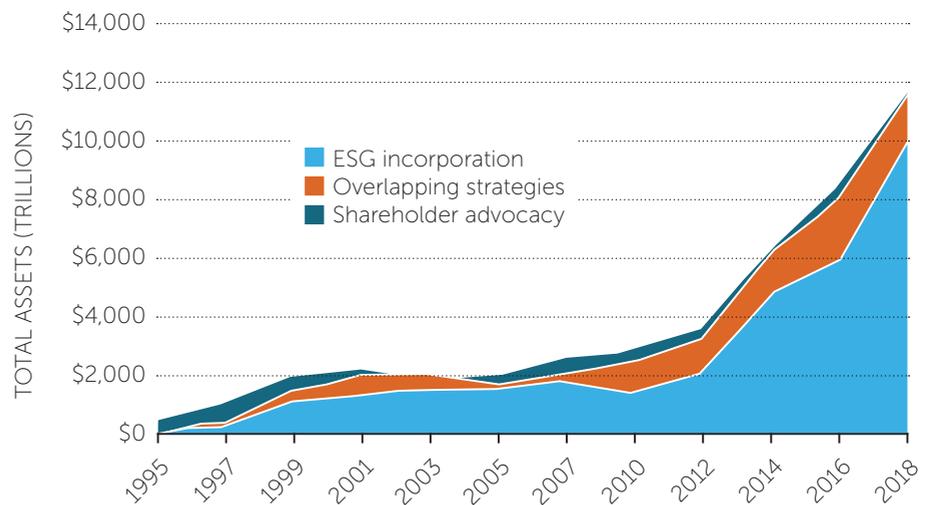
Critics argue that pension fund managers' first responsibility is to protect their obligations to retirees, not necessarily to be socially responsible with their investments. They warn of a host of possible problems, including lower returns.

California's \$381 billion public pension fund, CalPERS, is the country's largest. It may have missed out on nearly \$3.6 billion in investment gains over a 17-year period by dumping its tobacco stocks, according to a 2018 report. (The report also notes that, although tobacco divestment has had a negative effect overall on the CalPERS portfolio, other divestments have helped.) Other critics say that keeping a seat at the table and encouraging change from within is more effective than divesting.

Nevertheless, the California Legislature took a major step in 2015 by calling for the divestment of public funds in the thermal coal industry. Legislators in Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York and Vermont considered proposals this year to direct public pensions to study or abandon certain types of fossil fuel investments. Other bills introduced this year targeted makers of firearms and nuclear

## Sustainable Investing in the United States, 1995-2018

Institutional investors, including public pension funds, now account for \$8.6 trillion of the total assets shown here.



**ESG incorporation:** Investments considered environmental, social and corporate governance factors.  
**Shareholder advocacy:** Investment driven by shareholders exercising rights as partial owners.  
**Overlapping strategies:** Investments resulting from both ESG and shareholder advocacy.

Source: *The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment*

## Known by Many Names

Socially responsible investing—also known as social investment, or sustainable, socially conscious, "green," impact or ethical investing—generally considers both financial return and social/environmental impact in all investment decisions.

weapons, companies building the border wall and those shifting business operations outside the U.S. to lower their taxes. None of these measures passed.

Still other efforts targeted companies doing business in or with certain countries or the investments issued or owned by certain countries. Lawmakers in California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York

and Pennsylvania debated divesting from Brunei, Cuba, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Turkey to protest those countries' links to terrorism or genocide. All of the measures failed, except California's, which is contingent on federal action.

Even more states—at least 27 since 2015—have adopted measures that prohibit state contractors from boycotting Israel or that require pension boards to divest from companies that boycott the country.

Federal courts have struck down some state divestment legislation on constitutional grounds. State divestment efforts also may conflict with national foreign policy objectives, fueling debates on the proper role of states in foreign affairs.

—Anna Petrini



## KIDS' HEALTH

# Little-Known PANDAS Syndrome Getting Attention

A debilitating neuroimmune disorder associated with the common strep bacterium grabbed the attention of legislators in 16 states this year.

After a bout of strep throat, some children suddenly experience symptoms such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, tics and irritability, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. The condition is known as PANDAS, which stands for pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections. Other symptoms include difficulty sleeping, loss of handwriting and math skills, and severe separation anxiety. The symptoms may be so severe that parents hardly recognize their child.

According to the nonprofit PANDAS Network, the condition affects an estimated 1 in 200 kids in the United States. Prompt treatment for the often-misdiagnosed condition may ease the most severe symptoms. But antibiotics, psychiatric care and other

prescribed treatments can be costly. Intravenous immunoglobulin therapy, for example, which can help patients fight infection, can cost between \$5,000 and \$17,000 per dose, the Foundation for Children with Neuroimmune Disorders estimates.

### States Take Action

In 2019, policymakers in Georgia, Illinois, New York and Oregon adopted measures to raise awareness about PANDAS and other pediatric neuropsychiatric syndromes, called PANS, that come on quickly and can be quite serious.

As Illinois lawmakers debated their legislation, they discovered a potential obstacle: The disorder lacked a medical diagnosis code. So that medical professionals could be reimbursed for their services, lawmakers allowed a PANDAS/PANS diagnosis to be coded the same as autoimmune encephalitis until the American Medical Association and the Centers for Medicare and Medic-

aid Services assign a specific code. Lawmakers in Arkansas, Minnesota and New Hampshire joined Delaware and Illinois in requiring insurance plans to cover PANDAS/PANS treatment. Arkansas legislators formed an interdisciplinary team to recommend diagnostic criteria by December this year to speed up the establishment of coverage requirements.

Texas lawmakers created the Pediatric Acute-Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome Advisory Council to advise the health commission and Legislature on research, diagnosis, treatment and education. The advisory council presented its first report in September and will continue meeting until 2031.

Preparing for PANDAS may well become a focus in many communities as word spreads of its sometimes devastating consequences.

—Alissa Johnson

## EDUCATION

# Non-Degree Credentials Lift Career, Earnings Potential

As many as 65% of all the jobs in the United States will soon require education beyond a high school diploma, according to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. But only 47.6% of working-age Americans are educated beyond that level, according to the Lumina Foundation.

To help close this gap, one option is to offer short-term postsecondary credentials. They can cover a range of skills—from health care to manufacturing—and are offered by community and technical colleges, both on campus and online.

Stackable credentials, which are bite-sized courses that build toward a higher level certificate or degree, are popular, especially among busy adult learners who have limited time to complete a full-time

degree program. A one-year credential program in computer science, for example, can qualify students for entry-level programming positions and can give them credits they can use to complete a formal degree program later. In 2018, nine states passed bills that referred to stackable credentials.

Schools are also offering microcredentials, brief programs on narrow topics for workers or students in specific professions. They are typically offered online and on demand. Nine states have incorporated them into professional development and education programs for teachers.

Advocates hope microcredentials can eventually be used to renew licenses and satisfy continuing education requirements, offering teachers a convenient

alternative to professional development programs.

Recent data from the Lumina Foundation and Strada Education Network show that adults who earned a credential or certificate, even those without a college degree, have higher full-time employment rates and higher median annual incomes than those without a credential. Income gains, however, vary drastically by profession and gender. IT credentials, for example, more often lead to higher earnings than manufacturing credentials.

Roughly 60% of those who earn a certificate say it is valuable, and a little more than two-thirds say they would recommend it as a path for others.

—Andrew Smalley

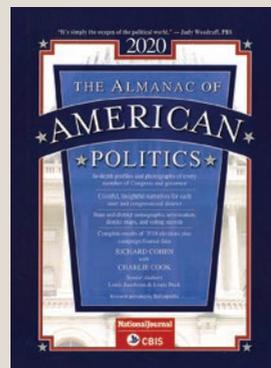
## BOOK REVIEW

# 'Bible of American Politics'

For those with a penchant for all things political, the 2020 edition of *The Almanac of American Politics* is a must-have. It's 2,043 numbered pages long, weighs in at 3 pounds and is produced in rather tiny type, but it's a fantastic resource on the people who are reshaping American politics.

Called "the bible of American politics" by columnist George Will and now in its 25th edition, it remains the gold standard for extensive, accurate, accessible, useful information on every congressional district, state, governor and member of Congress.

Articles in the front profile President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence; discuss what happened to American politics in 2016 and why; and look forward to what may happen in 2020—from the states that could become battlegrounds to those the next president needs to capture to win the election. The almanac offers analysis, insight and candor, without ignoring the controversial issues facing our democracy, such as political gerrymandering in our redistricting process and the ever-growing polarization between the two major parties.



## THE ALMANAC OF AMERICAN POLITICS 2020 EDITION

Compiled by Richard Cohen and Charlie Cook

2,100 pages. Columbia Books Inc.  
\$125 hardcover; \$89 paperback;  
\$59 e-book.

[thealmanacofamericanpolitics.com](http://thealmanacofamericanpolitics.com)

The bulk of the book consists of state-by-state-by-territory facts and information, including economic, occupational, social, geographic and voter registration data for every state and congressional district along with the voting tendencies of their populations.

Tapping into the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the almanac also offers updated veteran status data and health insurance coverage rates by congressional district.

—Julie Lays

## KIDS' HEALTH

# Handful of Cities, States See Drop in Childhood Obesity

The national obesity rate for children has leveled off but remains a serious health issue.

On average, obesity affects 18.5% of children from 2 to 19 years old. The National Institutes of Health reports that childhood obesity rates have doubled in the past 30 years among kids ages 2 to 5 and have nearly tripled among those over age 6.

Despite these broader trends, a few cities, counties and states have experienced declines. Mississippi, for example, reported an 11.6% decrease in obesity rates in 2013 among children in kindergarten through fifth grade following the creation of nutritional standards for food sold in school vending machines and the passage of the Healthy Students Act in 2007, among other efforts. Lincoln, Neb., achieved an 8% decline in childhood obesity rates after launching the public service campaign “Rethink Your Drink,” which promoted healthy beverage options, and other citywide programs.

## Complicated Condition

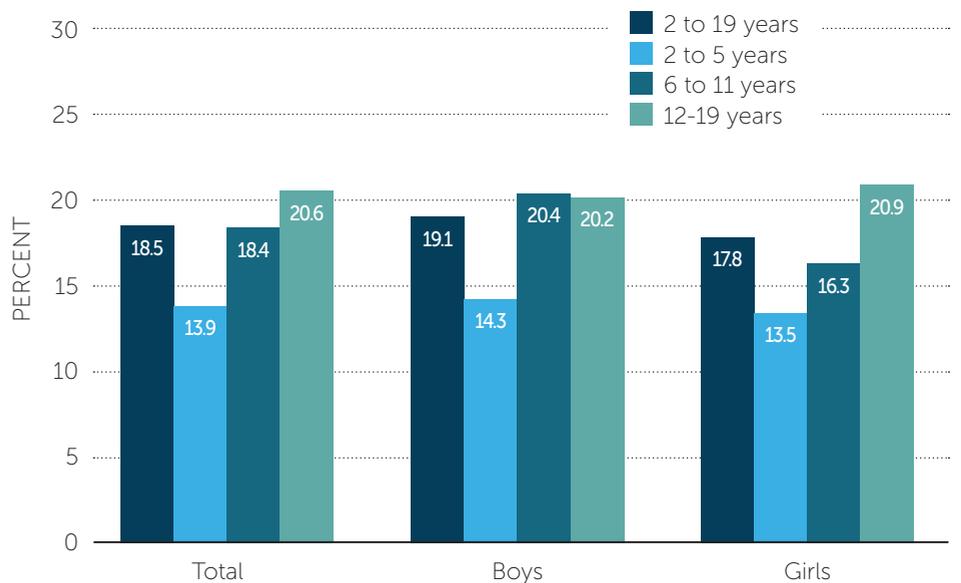
Many factors contribute to obesity, including genetics, metabolism, neighborhood design, sleep behaviors, adverse childhood experiences, and eating and physical activity habits, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Obesity-related conditions are among the leading causes of preventable premature death.

Obesity is linked to a variety of diseases and conditions, including certain types of cancers, anxiety and depression, low self-esteem and social problems. Overweight or obese schoolkids also are more likely to be bullied.

Schools are a natural setting for improving physical health, and lawmakers in a

## Prevalence of Obesity in the United States, 2015-2016

Youth, ages 2 to 19.



Source: National Health and Nutrition Survey, 2015-2016

## 1 in 5

The portion of school-age children and young people (6 to 19 years) in the United States who are obese.

## A Worldwide Problem

Childhood obesity is expected to increase in developing countries where traditional diets are being Westernized.

The current estimated number of obese children worldwide, 158 million, is expected to climb to 206 million by 2025 and to 254 million by 2030.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Statista

handful of states have passed school-related laws in the last two years. Colorado, Michigan and New York created school health programs to increase opportunities for physical education, while Louisiana and Tennessee require certain reporting measures on the status of health and physical education in public schools.

Other states have drawn attention to the issue through public education campaigns that designate certain weeks or months every year to focus on it. In the last two years, at least six states passed resolutions promoting healthy lifestyles, including Florida's Every Kid Healthy Week, California's Physical Education Week and Wisconsin's Health and Wellness Month.

—Kate Bradford