

## Voting

From A1

While no official statewide count was recorded — provisional ballots are counted, but the reasons for their filing are not recorded, the Secretary of State's Office said — Gazette interviews with elections leaders in Iowa's most populous counties indicated that hundreds of ballots were challenged under Pate's order.

After the election, the federal government granted Pate's request to access federal immigration documents in order to verify the citizenship of those 2,176 Iowans. Pate's office determined 277 Iowans who were not U.S. citizens at the time had attempted to vote or had registered to vote in recent election cycles, and that 35 votes were cast in the 2024 election by individuals who were not full U.S. citizens.

Those 35 names were forwarded to state authorities, which conducted investigations.

Bird's office, which has exclusive authority over prosecuting elections crimes in Iowa, charged six of those 35 individuals with first-degree election misconduct, which under state law is a Class D felony, punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine between \$1,025 and \$10,245.

Nearly 1.7 million votes were cast in the 2024 general election in Iowa, according to state data.

### Not guilty verdict

Nick Sarcone of Des Moines, the lawyer for Emmanuel Gathua, one

of the six individuals charged with felony election misconduct, criticized the state's pursuit of charges after Gathua was found not guilty in Johnson County District Court earlier this month.

Sarcone said Gathua conceded in court he does not have full U.S. citizenship. But Sarcone successfully argued in court the state could not prove that Gathua was the person who signed the documents and records that the state submitted as evidence.

"From Day 1, we said the evidence didn't support these charges. After hearing the case, a jury of Iowans agreed," Sarcone said. "The state of Iowa put a man's liberty in jeopardy on the thinnest of evidence and without conducting a proper investigation. Sadly, this happens all too often. The criminal justice system is not a place for the Iowa attorney general to score political points."

Bird, in her response to The Gazette, noted Iowa's close election results — Eastern Iowa Congresswoman Mariannette Miller-Meeks' six-vote win in 2020 is perhaps the best-known recent example.

"We've seen firsthand in Iowa that elections can be determined by a very small margin, so it is crucial that every vote is a legal vote," Bird said.

"Iowans deserve safe and secure elections. They need to know their vote will not be canceled out by the illegal vote of someone prohibited from voting," Bird said. "We remain committed to prosecuting those who break the law by voting illegally, as

the Iowa Legislature has given us the authority and responsibility to do."

### Election misconduct cases in Iowa

Here is a summary of the six felony election misconduct cases filed by the state thus far:

■ Charges filed in Hancock County claimed Roque Ramirez Vasquez registered to vote in 1999 and voted in June 2022 while not having full U.S. citizenship and thus being ineligible to vote. A jury found Vasquez not guilty Sept. 10, 2025.

■ Charges filed in Palo Alto County claimed Irving Omar Ahumada Geronimo in November 2021 registered and voted in the northwest Iowa city of Graettinger's city and school elections while not having full U.S. citizenship. A jury found Ahumada Geronimo guilty in August 2025, but in December the judge granted a request for a retrial on the grounds that she erred in excluding an expert's testimony. That ruling has been appealed.

■ Charges filed in Marshall County claimed Jorge Sanchez-Vasquez in July 2024 registered and voted in a Marshalltown city primary election while not having full U.S. citizenship. On Feb. 26, the judge granted Sanchez-Vasquez a deferred judgment and three years of probation. According to court documents, the deferred judgment was issued taking into account Sanchez-Vasquez's "age, attitude, criminal history, and employment, financial and family circumstances,

as well as the nature of the offense."

■ Charges filed in Johnson County claimed Emmanuel Gathua voted in the November 2023 local school and city elections while not having full U.S. citizenship. A jury found Gathua not guilty March 11.

■ Charges filed in Johnson County claim Itzel Romero Lopez in March 2022 registered and voted or attempted to vote in Johnson County. Lopez's trial is scheduled for April 14.

■ Charges filed in Sioux County claim Jose Munoz in March 2022 registered and voted and in March 2023 voted, all while not having full U.S. citizenship. Munoz's trial is scheduled for May 5.

More charges could be brought as a result of Pate's research and state investigations.

### 'Chilling effect'

Iowa chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union and League of United Latin American Citizens, on behalf of five naturalized U.S. citizens in Iowa, sued Pate's office over his 2024 election initiative. The individuals alleged their rights were infringed when they were placed on Pate's original list even though they were full U.S. citizens.

That lawsuit was settled in February and both sides claimed victory.

While Pate and Bird celebrated the state's access to better federal immigration information, the ACLU described the settlement as favorable for Iowa voters.

"Iowans deserve elections

free from this sort of unjustified, intimidating effort by our highest state officials that targeted fully qualified voters in a discriminatory and unreliable fashion, undermining both voting rights and people's confidence in elections," ACLU of Iowa Legal Director Rita Bettis Austen said at the time.

The ACLU and LULAC did not comment on the six election misconduct cases that have been filed thus far in Iowa, but Joe Henry, LULAC Iowa's political director, spoke to the broader impact of the state's pursuit of noncitizen voters.

"I can say that our community has had to deal with false allegations of voter fraud, which has created a chilling effect amongst naturalized citizens," Henry said.

Pate has described his office's work as striking a balance between encouraging voter participation while operating secure elections that ensure all votes are cast and counted with integrity.

"Voter participation and election integrity are not mutually exclusive. Maintaining a balance — ensuring only eligible voters participate in elections and empowering all eligible voters to cast a ballot — are important pieces of election integrity," Pate said in response to The Gazette. "We did our job. We've turned over the information we received to the proper authorities, and we trust the system to do the rest."

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## Cards

From A1

"If you can play bridge and you're traveling, you can find a lot of people ... I remember when I was in nursing training in 1967 Father Leo Kelm taught us to play bridge and he said: If you know how to play bridge, it's your opening." A 2007 story from The New Yorker reported that the American Contract Bridge League estimated there were 25 million players in the United States.

More broadly, Bengtson and Wieseler said playing card games is a perfect way to be active while still being able to socialize.

"Good people," Wieseler said. The appeal of playing at the mall, she said, is that no one has to host.

"And at Perkins we felt we had to buy something before we left," she said.

Gillespie said he appreciates that if people want to they can get in a nice mall walk before they play their



JARED MCNETT PHOTOS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Before they were playing at the mall, members of the bridge group would frequently play at the Perkins restaurant on Gordon Drive in Sioux City.

game. Of course mall walking has long been another alternate use for America's malls.

Bengtson likes the fact that the Southern Hills Mall is a central location for the core group of players so

it makes the drive much easier.

"We just come and play cards," she said.

And lately more and more folks have been coming.

"Now it's getting more popular.



Pauline Kuehl said she and her fellow card players at the Southern Hills Mall in Sioux City don't have any established partners for their game.

There's one on Thursday."

Bengtson herself plays mahjong every other Tuesday at Southern Hills Mall. Wieseler comes and plays bunco.

"When you reach a certain age, it's an outlet for socializing,"

Kuehl said.

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## Iran

From A1

Sirens went off around Beer Sheba and near Israel's main nuclear research center as Iran. The Lebanon-based Hezbollah militants also fired on Israel overnight.

If the Houthis increase attacks on commercial shipping, as they have in the past, it would further push up oil prices and destabilize "all of maritime security," said Ahmed Nagi, a senior Yemen analyst at the International Crisis Group. "The impact would not be limited to the energy market."

Countries scrambled for alternative routes to the Strait of Hormuz. Bab el-Mandeb, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is

crucial for vessels heading to the Suez Canal through the Red Sea and Saudi Arabia sent millions of barrels of crude oil a day through it because the Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed.

About 12% of the world's trade typically passes through Bab el-Mandeb and about 10% of global maritime trade — including 40% of container ship traffic — passes through the Suez Canal each year.

Houthi rebels attacked more than 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels, between November 2023 and January 2025, saying it was attacking in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza during the war there between Israel and Hamas.

The Houthis' involvement also

would complicate the deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the aircraft carrier that arrived in Croatia on Saturday for repairs. Sending the carrier to the Red Sea could draw attacks similar to those experienced by the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in 2024 and the USS Harry S. Truman in 2025.

The Houthis have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014. Saudi Arabia launched a war against the Houthis on behalf of Yemen's exiled government in 2015, and the rebels stayed out of the current conflict due to their uneasy ceasefire with Saudi Arabia.

U.S. President Donald Trump gave Iran until April 6 to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran says it has not engaged in any negotiations.

Pakistan said Saturday that

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt will send top diplomats to Islamabad for two days of "in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian held "extensive discussions" on regional hostilities and efforts to end the war.

But the Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, told his Turkish counterpart by phone that Tehran was skeptical about recent diplomatic efforts. Iranian state-run media said Araghchi accused the U.S. of making "unreasonable demands" and exhibiting "contradictory actions."

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff said

Washington delivered a 15-point "action list" to Iran for a possible ceasefire, with a proposal to restrict Iran's nuclear program — the issue at the heart of tensions with the U.S. and Israel — and reopen the strait. Tehran rejected the proposal and presented a five-point proposal that included reparations and recognition of its sovereignty over the waterway.

Meanwhile, U.S. ships with about 2,500 Marines arrived in the region, and at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne, trained to land in hostile territory to secure key positions and airfields, were ordered to the Middle East.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the U.S. "can achieve all of our objectives without ground troops."

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