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### Survey Shows Rise in U.S. Expats 'Seriously' Mulling Renouncing Their Citizenship

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By DEBRA BRUNO



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More Americans abroad just don't want to be American – and the reason is taxes, a new survey finds.

A survey conducted by Greenback Expat Tax Services, a Hong Kong-based company that specializes in tax preparation for American expats, found that 27 percent of the 1,840 Americans who responded were "seriously considering" renouncing their U.S. citizenship. That's a jump from the 18 percent who said the same thing in the company's 2014 survey.

The survey, designed by Bali-based Greenback founders David and Carrie McKeegan and conducted during the first quarter of 2015 in cooperation with the American Citizens Abroad Global Foundation, gathered responses from American expats living in 96

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countries, including 42 percent in the top destinations for U.S. expats: the U.K., Australia, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and France.

Some of the survey highlights include:

- Almost one-third – 31 percent – say the obligation to file U.S. taxes is the reason that they’re thinking of dropping their citizenship. According to data from the Treasury Department, 3,415 Americans — a record number — **gave up their citizenship in 2014**, up from 2,999 in 2013.
- Ironically, 58 percent said they either didn’t owe any taxes last year or were expecting a refund.
- 76 percent said they should not be required to file U.S. taxes while living abroad. As WSJ Expat recently reported, a surprising number of American expats **don’t even realize they do have to file taxes**. And, says Mr. McKeegan, “a big chunk are afraid to come forward. They don’t know that there are ways to catch up and avoid criminal prosecution and not pay huge fines and penalties.”
- Even though 86 percent felt they were not well-represented by the U.S. government, a full 58 percent voted in the last presidential election, a percentage that comes close to **matching the U.S. average for voting** in a presidential election year.
- According to the survey, 34 percent of the respondents said they wouldn’t be covered by Fatca rules, created in 2014 to prevent Americans living overseas from hiding large sums in offshore accounts as a way to avoid taxes. Fatca requires taxpayers to report overseas assets and also requires non-U.S. financial institutions to allow the IRS to search through their databases for any accounts owned by U.S. citizens.
- 36 percent said they would need to file additional forms because of Fatca.
- More Americans are aware of Fatca. In 2015, 83 percent said they knew of its existence, compared to 61 percent in 2014.
- The number of Americans who said they would “never” drop their citizenship declined to 29 percent, compared with 39 percent in 2014.
- Another 37 percent said that while they weren’t currently considering renouncing their citizenship, they wouldn’t rule it out in the future.
- The IRS amnesty programs for taxpayers, particularly the Streamlined Filing Procedures, were unknown to 42 percent of the respondents.

The survey, in its fourth year, drew responses through social media with help from American Citizens Abroad, according to Mr. McKeegan.

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*Debra Bruno is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance writer who recently completed a three-year stint in Beijing. She recently wrote **Repatriation Blues: Expats Struggle With the Dark Side of Coming Home**.*

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