



Voter's Rights

Felony Disenfranchisement

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The Importance of Our Topic



Why voter rights are so important :

- citizens have a say on how the government is being run, and voting is the way to achieve that.
 - It also makes citizens feel as if they can contribute to their country's government
- Voting is the primary way for citizens to participate in government.

Why Felony Disenfranchisement is important:

- "...disenfranchised can be a large proportion of a state's potential voting population."*(Kozłowska)*
- Racial impact plays a role
 - "Because the US disproportionately convicts people of color, this sort of disenfranchisement can have crucial political and social consequences....the history of felony disenfranchisement has been closely tied to racial oppression and discrimination."
 - Felony disenfranchisement has its roots in Jim Crow Laws
- In only two states do felons not lose the ability to vote at any time

Felony Disenfranchisement Laws

Millions of Americans have had their constitutional rights stripped away from them because of their prior criminal records. As millions of former felons return to their communities with the knowledge that they do not obtain the right to do something as simple as vote for America's next leader, they lose all hope of assimilating into society once again.



Felony Disenfranchisement Laws (cont.)

Most states allow former felons to vote after their release from incarceration. However, in states such as Iowa, Kentucky, and Virginia, felons are permanently disenfranchised from voting, even while on probation. Once somebody has paid their debt to society, they should be able to have their human rights immediately restored. Anything less than that is unjust, and America cannot truly be great with the existence of felony disenfranchisement laws.



Why Change the Law to Allow Felons to Vote?

Those who have completed their sentence and paid their debt to society should be granted the right to vote.

Disenfranchising them creates a class of people still subject to the laws of the United States (they were, after all, punished under that law) but without a voice in the way they're governed—not unlike taxation without representation.

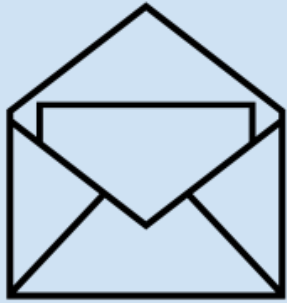
Considerations

- Should there be a waiting period where individual demonstrates no further criminal activity as they reintegrate into society?
- Should the right to vote be afforded to all ex-felons or only those who were convicted of non-violent crimes?

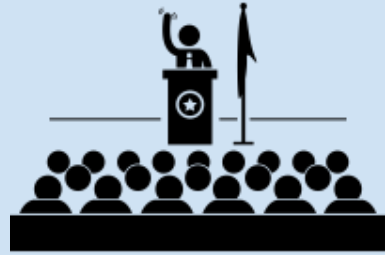
Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws

- Disenfranchisement laws disproportionately hurt minority groups
 - “Given the high rates of disenfranchisement in African American communities, it is plausible that disenfranchisement weakens the political influence of minority communities, thereby contributing to racial health disparities because public policy decisions do not fully reflect minority interests.” (Purtle 2013)

This widens the gap between people of color and white Americans.



How You Can Help



If you want to help these felons get access to one of the most fundamental parts of the American democratic process, these are some of the things that you can do!

- **Correspond with the members of your state legislature.**
 - This includes the governor of your state and your state's senators and representatives. Persuading them into supporting the enfranchisement of felons could mean that the disenfranchisement laws in your state could change.
- **Support presidential candidates that support ending the disenfranchisement of felons.**
 - Though disenfranchisement laws are made by states, the president wields a lot of influence and may be able to entice states into changing their laws. Additionally, if they are publically against disenfranchisement laws, they will be able to persuade and stress the importance of enfranchising felons to the uninformed.

How You Can Help

- **Support groups that fight to end felony disenfranchisement.**
 - These groups include the Brennan Centre for Justice and the Sentencing Project. Supporting and donating to these groups means that they'll have additional resources to educate the public and fight for disenfranchisement laws to change.



Overall, if you want felons to be able to vote, the best way to get that to happen is to get out there and fight for your beliefs!

Works Cited

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“ What would happen if 6.1 million felons could vote in the US?” *Quartz, Hanna Kozłowska*
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"Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States: A Health Equity Perspective." *PubMed Central (PMC)*,
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3673242/. (Slide 5)