

Felon disenfranchisement



Felon disenfranchisement laws are constitutional or statutory restrictions on the right to vote after a person has been convicted of felony. Today there are over 5.4 million that are denied their right to vote because they have been convicted of a felony. Based on estimates of the felon population in Florida and the voting tendencies of blacks and whites, if only eight-tenths of one percent of adult male felons in Florida had participated in the presidential election of 2000, Vice President Gore would have gained enough votes necessary to win the state and thus the presidency.

Right to vote is fundamental right that should never be taken away. There are many reasons that disenfranchisement of felons should be outlawed. It has been historically used as a tool for racism, poor are disproportionately affected, and threatens the health of American democracy. Disenfranchisement of ex-convicts has a deep history steeped in racism. After the Civil War, Southern states designed their laws to have maximum impact on African-Americans while minimizing their effects on the white population. The purpose of this was to keep the African-Americans from voting and gaining power in politics.

I am a naturalized citizen and a minority in the United States. I don't want to ever see a time when the disenfranchisement can be used a weapon to enhance the power of the majority by taking it away from the minorities. Having your right to vote taken away by the type or level of conviction will affect the poor much more than acutely than the rich. Many convicted felons come from poor or working-class urban districts, with low incomes, and low levels of formal education. The way United States judicial system is setup; if

you are rich you can get away with much lesser conviction than if you are poor.

The person can do this because they can afford a much better defense lawyer. I do not believe that it is fair that a person can have his right to vote taken away because they are unable to provide adequate defense due to monetary restraints. A person's right to vote should not be dependent on the amount of wealth you have and quality of lawyer you can afford to hire. The only way to do away with this obvious bias towards the rich is to have unrestricted voting rights for every citizen of the United States regardless of their criminal records.

Right to vote is inseparable from the right to participate in a representative democracy. By taking away the vote from a large block of population we are undermining the democracy. Also the voting characteristics of parents are indicators of future generation's participation in the political process. To put in simple terms, if your parents vote, you will vote. It is reasonable to expect that in states that impose lifetime ban on voting, number of citizens that can but will not participate in the political system will increase.

This ever increasing number of people disengaged from the political system does not bode well for the future of representative democracy in the United States. In a series of cases, the United States Supreme Court held that state legislative districts and U. S. House of Representatives districts must have equal populations. The logic was that each vote should have approximately equal weight in determining the overall composition of the legislature. The unintended consequence of disenfranchisement of the large number of people is that remaining people have more weight for their vote.

To follow the spirit of the ruling you need to include all the citizens of the country in voting. Excluding citizens from the most basic right of a representative democracy and weakens our democracy. There are many reasons given by the proponents of the disenfranchisement policy. Advocates of the disenfranchisement policy point to the fact that they don't want politicians pondering for the vote of a felon, that there has to be minimum standards in order to keep the right to vote, and having your right taken away is part of the punishment.

Opponents say that felons should have no right to vote because they do not meet the "minimum moral standards" in order to keep their right to vote. The government lets ex-convicts marry, reproduce, buy beer, own property, drive, and almost anything else they wish to do. They do not lose any of their rights that are guaranteed to them by the Bill of Rights. They are even allowed to help in political fund raising, give campaign contributions, and attend and participate in political events. Furthermore, what constitutes "minimum moral standards"?

The definition of that term is arbitrary and ever changing. Prostitution is immoral in many states yet is legal in Nevada. Having segregated schools is immoral now but was endorsed by the United States Supreme Court before 1965. You cannot justify taking away person's rights under such inconsistent standards. The ex-convicts have the same concern as the person living next door. They are law abiding citizens who pay taxes, work, and raise families who should have the same say as their neighbors as to who represents them.

Many people believe that disenfranchisement of the ex-convicts is part of punishment. They believe that barring felons from voting is one way that society sends message that committing a crime has serious consequences. I think this is a flawed reasoning. There is method in place to deter somebody from doing the crime again. There is in escalation in punishment if you a convicted of committing a crime again. If the criminal is not deterred by the threat of long incarceration for repeat offense, I doubt that he is going to be swayed by the prospect of losing his right to vote.

The idea of disenfranchisement after the person has served the sentence is punitive, discriminatory, and smacks of retribution. Right to vote is the bedrock of any democracy. United States models itself as being the greatest democracy in the world, yet is the democratic country with one of the largest percentage of its population that are systematically disenfranchised. This goes against everything the United States stands for. A person has a fundamental right to elect representatives to government who are there to make laws that he must follow. If he can't do that, than he is not living in a democracy.