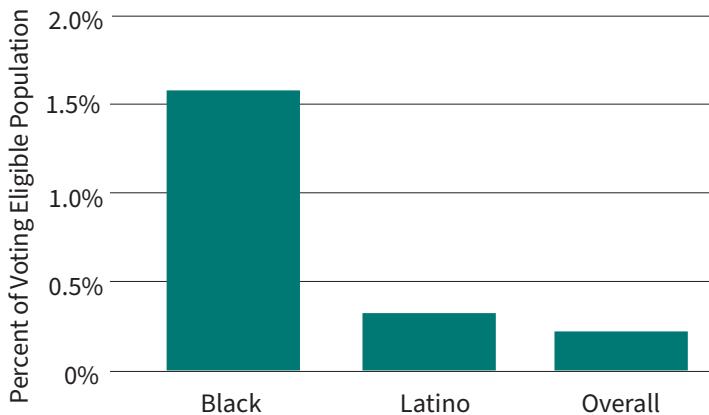


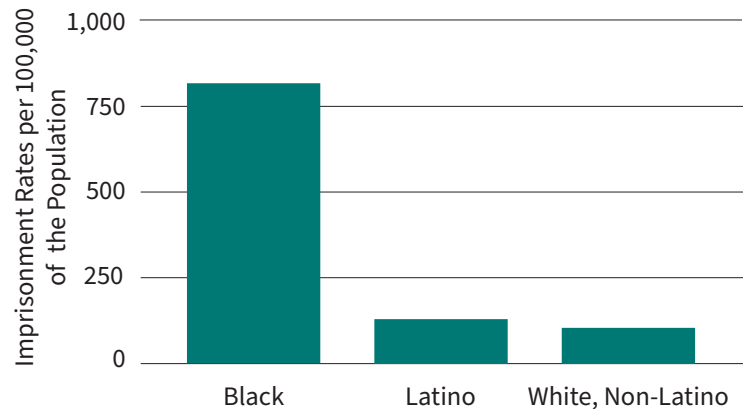
Minnesota Should Restore Voting Rights to Over 9,500 Citizens

Over 9,500 Minnesotans are currently locked out of our democracy who are completing a felony sentence in a prison or jail.¹ This voter ban disproportionately affects people of color. Historically, Jim Crow felony disenfranchisement laws were used to dilute the power and voice of the Black community.² Today, Black Minnesotans are excluded from voting at over ten times the rate when compared to non-Black Minnesotans. Latino Minnesotans are disenfranchised at over 1.5 times the rate when compared to non-Latino Minnesotans.³

**Voter Exclusion Rates in Minnesota
by Race and Ethnicity, 2024**



**Imprisonment Rates in Minnesota
by Race and Ethnicity, 2024**



Source: Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S., Stewart, R., & Hauf, M. (2024). *Locked out 2024: Four million denied voting rights due to a felony conviction*. The Sentencing Project.

To ameliorate this racial injustice and protect its democratic values, Minnesota lawmakers should extend voting rights to all citizens with felony-level convictions, including persons completing felony sentences in prisons or jails.

Expanding Voting Rights in Minnesota is a Racial Justice Issue

Minnesota's voting laws disproportionately disenfranchise people of color who are overrepresented in the state's criminal legal system. For example, Black Minnesotans make up about 7% of Minnesota's population, but comprise 39% of the state's prison population. They are imprisoned at almost 9 times the rate of white Minnesotans.⁴

Source: Minnesota Department of Corrections. (2024). *Adult Prison Population Summary as at July 1st, 2024*. Minnesota Department of Corrections; U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *American Community Survey, ACS 5-year estimates detailed tables - table B03002*. U.S. Census Bureau.

High felony disenfranchisement rates among communities of color dilutes representation in the state's political system. Minnesota should safeguard democratic rights and not allow a racially disparate criminal legal system to restrict voting rights.

Research shows that racial disparities are driven, at least in part, by biased sentencing. A 2016 study in the *American Journal of Sociology* found that differences in Minnesotans' race, skin color, and Afrocentric features influence their likelihood of being sentenced to prison, as opposed to being placed on probation or having their charge adjusted to a misdemeanor.⁵ Restoring the vote would help to dismantle the legacy of Jim Crow laws by

ensuring that people who have experienced imprisonment and criminalization are guaranteed a voice in our democracy.

Supporting Voting Rights Improves Public Safety

Research shows that an opportunity to participate in democracy has the potential to reduce one's perceived status as an "outsider." The act of voting can have a meaningful and sustaining positive influence on justice-impacted citizens by making them feel they belong to a community.⁶ Having a say and a stake in the life and well-being of your community is at the heart of our democracy.

Re-enfranchisement can facilitate successful re-entry and reduce recidivism. The University of Minnesota's Christopher Uggen and New York University's Jeff Manza find that among people with a prior arrest, there are "consistent differences between voters and non-voters in rates of subsequent arrest, incarceration, and self-reported criminal behavior."⁷ Research also suggests having the right to vote immediately after incarceration matters for public safety. Individuals in states which continued to restrict the right to vote after incarceration were found to have a higher likelihood of experiencing a subsequent arrest compared to individuals in states who had their voting rights restored post-incarceration.⁸ Given re-enfranchisement misinformation and obstacles facing justice-impacted citizens upon re-entry into our communities, one path to bolster public safety and promote prosocial identities is to preserve voting rights during incarceration.

Allowing people to vote, including persons completing felony sentences in prisons or jails, prepares them for more successful reentry and bolsters a civic identity. By ending disenfranchisement as a consequence of incarceration, Minnesota can improve public safety while also promoting reintegrative prosocial behaviors.

Minnesota Can Strengthen its Democracy by Restoring the Right to Vote

In 2023, Governor Walz signed legislation that restores an individual's voting rights automatically once they are released from prison.⁹ Minnesota should continue this momentum and restore voting rights to all Minnesotans who are completing a sentence in a prison or jail for a felony-level conviction. The right to vote should not be denied due to incarceration. Minnesota should join Maine, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC in ensuring all of their citizens can participate in our democratic process. This would demonstrate Minnesota's commitment to the state constitution's provision that "government is instituted for the security, benefit and protection of the people, in whom all political power is inherent."¹⁰ Lawmakers should continue their work to strengthen democracy and promote community safety by guaranteeing voting rights for all.

Endnotes

¹ Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S., Stewart, R., & Hauf, M. (2024). *Locked out 2024: Four million denied voting rights due to a felony conviction*. The Sentencing Project.

² ACLU. (n.d.). *ACLU history: Felon disenfranchisement: A relic of Jim Crow*. ACLU.

³ Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S., Stewart, R., & Hauf, M. (2024). *Locked out 2024: Four million denied voting rights due to a felony conviction*. The Sentencing Project.

⁴ Minnesota Department of Corrections. (2024). *Adult prison population summary as at July 1st, 2024*. Minnesota Department of Corrections; U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *American Community Survey, ACS 5-year estimates detailed tables - table B03002*. U.S. Census Bureau.

⁵ King, R., & Johnson, B. (2016). A punishing look: Skin tone and Afrocentric features. *American Journal of Sociology*, 122(1). <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/686941>

⁶ Budd, K. M., & Monazzam, N. (2023). *Increasing public safety by restoring voting rights*. The Sentencing Project; Aviram, H., Bragg, A., & Lewis, C. (2017). Felon disenfranchisement. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 13, 295-311. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110316-113558>.

⁷ Uggen, C., & Manza, J. (2004). Voting and subsequent crime and arrest: Evidence from a community sample. *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 36(1), 193-216.

⁸ Budd, K. M., & Monazzam, N. (2023). *Increasing public safety by restoring voting rights*. The Sentencing Project.

⁹ Funk, J. (2024, August 7). *Minnesota supreme court upholds law restoring right to vote to people with felony convictions*. AP News.

¹⁰ MN Const. Art. 1 § 1.



This factsheet was updated by Research Fellow Dinesh Napal and Senior Research Analyst Kristen M. Budd. Originally created by former Research Fellow Kevin Muhitch.

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The Sentencing Project advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice.