

Georgia Should Restore Voting Rights to 275,000 Citizens

Georgia denies the vote to its citizens with a felony conviction at almost twice the national rate (3.8% of the state's voting age population versus 2.3% nationally). African Americans are significantly more likely to be disenfranchised than non-Blacks in the state, with 6.3% of Georgia's Black voting age population currently denied the vote. In total, over 145,000 Black Georgians and an additional 8,000 Latinx Georgians are currently denied the vote.¹ Georgia denies the vote to all people in prison, on probation or parole and is thus more prohibitive than 23 states and Washington, D.C.² In order to promote democracy and ensure all its people are represented, Georgia should extend voting rights to all people affected by the criminal legal system in the state.

Most Disenfranchised Georgians Reside in the Community

Driving Georgia's high disenfranchisement rate is its community supervision population, which is the largest in the country. Over 400,000 people in the state are currently under some form of supervision, and nearly 217,000 people are ineligible to vote under felony probation and parole statutes. Research by Reform Georgia shows that the average length of felony probation in Georgia is 6.3 years, nearly double the national average.³

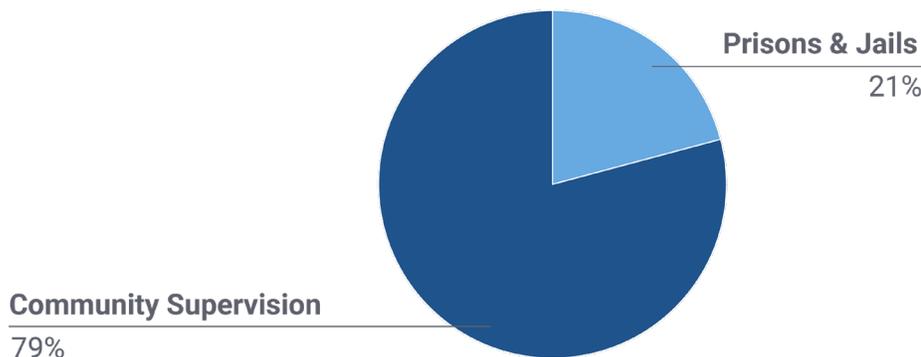
Georgia's high rate of community supervision occurs

alongside its above-average imprisonment rate (502 per 100,000)—higher than that of all of its neighboring states. The large number of residents that Georgia places under correctional control and its strict voting laws have resulted in the state disenfranchising a greater share of its citizens than neighboring North and South Carolina.

Georgia's Laws are Outdated and Confusing

Georgia's felony disenfranchisement law dates back to 1877. During the state's constitutional convention, officials added the wording, "no person who has been convicted of a felony involving moral turpitude

Georgia's Disenfranchisement of People with Felony Records, 2020



may register, remain registered, or vote except upon completion of the sentence.”⁴ The phrase ‘moral turpitude’ has never been defined by the state. In practice the phrase has included every crime classified as a felony.⁵

Racial Disparities in Criminal Justice Drive Disparities in Political Representation

Felony disenfranchisement bears unequal weight on communities of color in Georgia, largely due to disparities in the state’s criminal legal system. While Georgia’s general population is 33% African American, nearly 60% of people in the state’s prisons are Black.⁶ Racial disparities are also evident in community supervision. Over 50% of people on felony probation and parole in Georgia are African American.⁷

Supporting Voting Rights Improve Public Safety

Research suggests that re-enfranchisement can facilitate successful re-entry and reduce recidivism. 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.”⁸ By ending disenfranchisement as a collateral consequence of a felony conviction, Georgia can improve public safety.

Georgia Can Protect Democracy By Ending Disenfranchisement

State lawmakers can build on growing support for protecting voting rights and promoting democracy by pursuing universal suffrage reforms.⁹

Universal voting would ensure fair and equal representation. Some Georgia districts are drawn using prison populations, even though people in prison cannot vote, thus transferring political power from the home communities of people in prison to the predominantly rural jurisdictions where they are incarcerated.¹⁰

Voting reforms do not necessarily favor one political party, meaning support for increased voting access should garner bipartisan support. One recent survey, conducted by the *Marshall Project* and *Slate*, found

that a plurality of white people in prison supported Donald Trump. While data on the party affiliations of people in prison is limited, the survey undercuts claims that restoring the vote will universally benefit a single political party.¹¹

Everyone deserves the right to vote. State lawmakers in Georgia should [follow in the footsteps](#) of states around the country in expanding felony voting rights.¹²

Endnotes

1. It is likely that the number of Latinx individuals disenfranchised is much higher. Like most states, Georgia inconsistently tracks Latinx data through its criminal legal system. See, Sarah Eppler-Epstein, Annie Gurvis and Ryan King. 2016. "[The Alarming Lack of Data on Latinos in the Criminal Justice System.](#)" Washington: Urban Institute.
2. GA Const. art. II, § 1.
3. Reform Georgia. 2019. "[Felony Disenfranchisement in Georgia by the Numbers.](#)"
4. ACLU Georgia. 2019. "[Felony Disenfranchisement in Georgia.](#)"
5. Holloway v. Holloway, 126 Ga. 459, 460 (1906).
6. U.S. Census Bureau. 2019. [Quickfacts: Georgia](#); E. Anne Carson. 2020. "[Prisoners in 2019.](#)" Washington: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
7. Georgia Department of Community Supervision. 2020. [Annual Population.](#)
8. Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza. 2004. "Voting and Subsequent Crime and Arrest: Evidence from a Community Sample." *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 36(1), 193-216.
9. Deirdre Jonese Austin. (2020, November 2). [These Georgians Can't Vote on Tuesday. But They're Mobilizing by the Thousands.](#) *Facing South.*
10. [Fixing Prison-Based Gerrymandering After the 2010 Census: Georgia.](#) 2010. Prison Policy Initiative.
11. Nicole Lewis, Aviva Shen and Anna Flagg. (2020, March 13). [What Do We Really Know About the Politics of People Behind Bars?](#) *The Marshall Project.*
12. Morgan McLeod. 2018. "[Expanding the Vote: Two Decades of Felony Disenfranchisement Reforms.](#)" Washington: The Sentencing Project.