



Criminal Disenfranchisement

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In the United States, 4.7 million citizens were denied the right to vote in the last election due to their status as felons or ex-felons. In some states, felons are disenfranchised for life, while in others they are only banned from voting for a set period of time. In a few states felons are re-enfranchised once they have completed their sentence or made parole. The United States is lagging far behind the rest of the free world on the issue of felon and ex-felon disenfranchisement. Some have even suggested that the current U.S. policy is a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

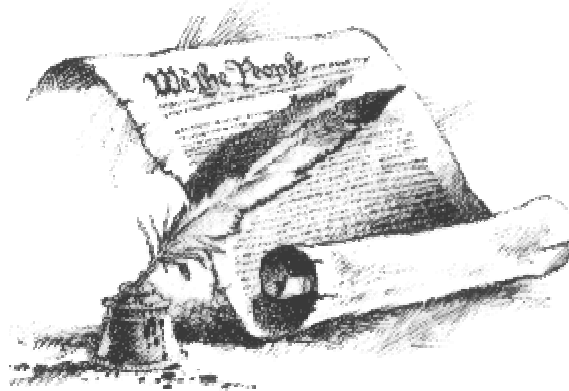
The United States

Permanent Disenfranchisement.

Alabama, Florida, Kentucky and Virginia deny the right to vote to people with felony convictions even after they have completed their sentences. The ban is life-long, regardless of the nature of the crime. The four states alone currently disenfranchise 1.5 million citizens, 1/3 of whom are African American.

Conditional Disenfranchisement. Arizona, Delaware, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, Tennessee, Washington, and Wyoming also permanently prohibit felons from voting, but only if they have been convicted of certain types of felonies or convicted a certain number of times. 750,000 citizens are disenfranchised in these states, half of whom are African American.

Re-enfranchisement. In the other thirty-eight states the right to vote is restored to citizens convicted of felonies once they are released from prison or a short period later. The maximum restriction occurs in Nebraska where citizens convicted of felonies must wait a 2 year period after their release before they can regain the right to vote. Currently incarcerated felons can only vote in two states, Maine and Vermont.



The Rest of the World

Everyone votes. In countries as diverse as Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Israel, Kenya, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Romania, and Sweden prisoners are allowed to vote. In Germany, not only are prisoners allowed to vote, the law states that prison authorities must encourage prisoners to vote and facilitate voting procedures for the inmates.

Restoring Voting Rights. In nations such as Armenia, Austria, Bahamas, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Mexico, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom citizens convicted of felonies are prohibited from voting during their incarceration, but their voting rights are restored to them after they have completed their sentence.

Temporary Restrictions.

Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mozambique,

the Netherlands, and Zimbabwe are among the non-United States democracies to prohibit ex-felons from voting. However, in these democracies the ban is only for a short period of time after the completion of the felon's prison sentence. In many cases these prohibitions only apply to felons convicted of specific crimes, often electoral crimes, whose court sentence specifically included a restriction on voting rights.

Make it Happen!

- Ask your U.S. Representative to join more than 55 cosponsors in supporting H.J. Res. 28, the Right to Vote Amendment
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper voicing support for electoral reforms.
- See the www.fairvote.org for pending legislation in your area. Help FairVote by alerting us to developments in your community.