



# Felony Disfranchisement in Arizona

In the United States, over 5.8 million Americans are barred from voting due to criminal convictions. Felony disfranchisement laws vary from state to state, with Arizona's policy among the 10 most regressive—permanently banning certain individuals with a felony conviction from voting. Four of the 10 bar all persons with a felony conviction from voting.

Many disfranchised individuals are no longer incarcerated, but are living in their communities on probation or parole; 2.6 million members of the disfranchised population have fully completed their sentences. These disfranchised individuals are tax-paying citizens, involved with the issues in their community, but unable to vote to affect them.

The impact of felony disfranchisement falls disproportionately upon communities of color. Nearly 2.2 million African-Americans, or one out of thirteen, are disfranchised due to felony convictions. If incarceration rates hold steady, 3 in 10 of the next generation of black men can expect to be disfranchised at some point in their lives. Black Americans are 4 times more likely to lose voting rights.

In a democracy, voting is a right, not a privilege. But for almost 6 million Americans, that is not the case. We are aiming to change that in Arizona.

## Arizona Disfranchisement Policy

In Arizona, individuals on probation, in prison or on parole cannot vote. A first time offender has his or her right to vote restored automatically upon completion of sentence, as long as there are no outstanding financial obligations to the state. Individuals with multiple felony convictions are barred from voting, unless they seek to have their rights restored through a court process or a pardon.

## Who is disfranchised regionally?

Arizona's felony disfranchisement laws are more restrictive than 5 neighboring states. Utah automatically restores voting rights upon release from incarceration; California and Colorado allow individuals on probation, but not parole, to vote; New Mexico and Texas restore voting rights upon full completion of sentence.

## Who is disfranchised in Arizona?

An estimated 199,734 people with felony convictions are barred from voting in Arizona. Only 20% of the disfranchised are in prison. Almost 96,000 individuals, about 48% of the disfranchised population, have fully completed their sentences.

Like many of us, individuals who have fully completed their sentences live in their communities and work, pay taxes and raise families.

## Racial Impact

One out of 9 voting age African-Americans is disfranchised in Arizona, compared to 1 out of 23 voting age Arizonans. As a result, Arizona has the ninth highest rate of African-American disfranchisement in the United States. African Americans comprise 11.2% of the disfranchised population, even though they comprise only 3% of the state's voting age population.

## Voting & Public Safety

Felony disfranchisement runs counter to the goal of public safety. Restricting voting rights does not prevent crime, nor does it provide compensation to victims. In fact, disfranchising persons after release from prison is antithetical to the reentry process and harmful to long-term prospects for sustainable reintegration of ex-offenders into society. Research has found a link between voting participation and re-offense; people who voted after release from supervision were half as likely to be re-arrested as those who did not vote.

- More than 199,734 Arizona residents are disfranchised.
- The vast majority of Arizona's disfranchised population is not in prison or jail, but lives in Arizona's communities.
- Arizona has the ninth highest rate of African-American disfranchisement in the country, with 1 out of every 9 voting age African-Americans disfranchised.
- Arizona has more restrictive felony disfranchisement laws than 40 other states, including New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Texas and California.

Far from making streets safer, felony disfranchisement may be detrimental to public safety. Voting demonstrates an individual's commitment to the institutions of American democracy. The irony of felony disfranchisement is that the very behavior that society strives to encourage – the commitment to the larger social and political collective – is undermined by a policy that requires people who desire to engage in that behavior to relinquish the right to vote.

## How can I help in Arizona?

Join the coalition working to repeal Arizona's law. To contact the coalition, email [info@acluaz.org](mailto:info@acluaz.org).

Call your legislator and tell them you support legislation that automatically restores voting rights upon completion of sentence.

Visit <http://www.acluaz.org> to learn more about felon disfranchisement.