

SPECIAL REPORT
ON
THE IMPACT
OF INCARCERATION
AND REENTRY

from the
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POLITICAL PUNISHMENT

The Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement for Rhode Island Communities

The 2000 Presidential election in Florida, won by a mere 537 votes, was one of the most hotly contested elections in the history of the United States.¹ With its recounts, court challenges, and voter purges, the Florida tally raised a host of voting-rights issues. It also drew attention to the only *legal* means of denying the vote to U.S. citizens: felon disenfranchisement laws.

Felon disenfranchisement is the legal restriction of voting rights due to a past or current felony conviction, and it prevents approximately 4.7 million US citizens from voting nationwide.² As national elections come down to the votes of a few city blocks, policymakers are increasingly concerned with the implications of felon disenfranchisement for both election outcomes and political equity.

Most media and scholarly scrutiny has focused on Southern states, states that permanently disenfranchise, and swing states for the 2004 presidential election. But Rhode Island is home to some of the most restrictive disenfranchisement laws in the country. Rhode Island is the only state in New England that restricts voting rights not only while an individual is incarcerated for a felony conviction but for the entire duration of the sentence, including time served in the community under parole and probation supervision.³

As a result, many Rhode Islanders are denied the right to vote, and the numbers of disenfranchised are only increasing. The state's prison population has grown by 625 percent over the last 30 years.⁴ Rhode Island's prison expansion is largely attributable to the war on drugs and tougher sentencing. In fact, 40 percent of Rhode Island's prison population is sentenced for nonviolent or drug offenses.⁵ As a result, disenfranchisement is not a rare punishment, nor is it one reserved for Rhode Island's worst offenders. Rather, disenfranchisement affects a substantial portion of the state's population in every community.

KEY FINDINGS

- Rhode Island disenfranchises a greater share of its residents than any other state in New England
- More than 15,500 Rhode Islanders cannot vote due to a felony conviction
- 1 in 5 black men is barred from voting statewide
- 1 in 11 Hispanic men is barred from voting statewide
- The rate of disenfranchisement in urban areas is 3.5 times the rate for the rest of the state
- More than 10 percent of South Providence residents are disenfranchised
- 86 percent of those disenfranchised are not currently in prison

Furthermore, Rhode Island's urban residents, and the state's black and Latino communities, make up a disproportionate share of those deprived of their voting rights, reducing their political power statewide.

Whether in prison or under supervision, Rhode Islanders who have been convicted of a felony are shut out of the political process, to the detriment of themselves and their communities. In neighborhoods and among racial groups disproportionately involved with the criminal justice system, felon disenfranchisement deprives them of an effective political voice.

This report answers the question: What is the impact of Rhode Island's felony disenfranchisement law on the size and nature of Rhode Island's eligible voting population?

This report estimates the proportion of adult Rhode Islanders prevented from voting due to a felony conviction. Our analysis is unique in that it moves beyond a broad state-wide analysis and compares the impact of felon disenfranchisement across Rhode Island’s cities and towns, and even across neighborhoods in Providence. This level of analysis is critical to understanding the dilution of communities’ political voices at all levels of government. Central to our analysis is the racial impact of this law. This report illustrates how race, gender, and geography together can have a profound affect on one’s political opportunities.

Our results demonstrate that Rhode Island’s felon disenfranchisement law is not an irrelevant relic of the past. Felon disenfranchisement is a powerful feature of Rhode Island’s political system, and one that has lasting consequences for political representation and racial equality.

Statewide Impact

Felon disenfranchisement is not a new practice for the state of Rhode Island. Felon disenfranchisement laws date back to the very first state constitution, drafted in 1842.⁶ In the state constitution, convicted felons are also barred from serving on a jury.⁷

A felony conviction indicates a term of sentence greater than one year or a fine exceeding \$1,000, and a misdemeanor conviction is reserved for those sentenced to less than 1 year or those fined less than \$1,000.⁸ Felonies may range from writing a bad check to murder. Nearly all sentences include a lengthy term of probation. Rhode Island has the second highest percentage of people on probation (3.1 percent) in the nation.⁹ Most Rhode Islanders in prison or under community supervision have been convicted of felonies.

An estimated 15,500 Rhode Islanders are unable to vote due to a felony conviction, representing nearly 2 percent of the state’s voting-age population (see Table 1). Eighty-six percent of those disenfranchised are not currently in prison. While 2,188 disenfranchised men and women are incarcerated, 13,569 of them are out of prison and living in our communities.

86% of those disenfranchised are not currently in prison

The male disenfranchised population is more than six times the size of the female disenfranchised population.

Rhode Island’s black and Latino communities are disproportionately disenfranchised. The rate of disenfranchisement for black voters is over six times the statewide rate. The rate of disenfranchisement for the adult Hispanic population is 2.5 times the statewide average.

Even more striking, 20 percent of adult black men are disenfranchised, as are 9 percent of adult Hispanic men. In comparison, the rate of disenfranchisement for white males is 2 percent (see Table 1).

Felon Disenfranchisement Law in Rhode Island

According to Article II, Section 1 of the Rhode Island State Constitution, all citizens convicted of a felony lose the right to vote for the entire duration of their sentence. They may not vote while incarcerated or while living in the community on parole or probation. They are also excluded from serving on a jury for the duration of their sentence.

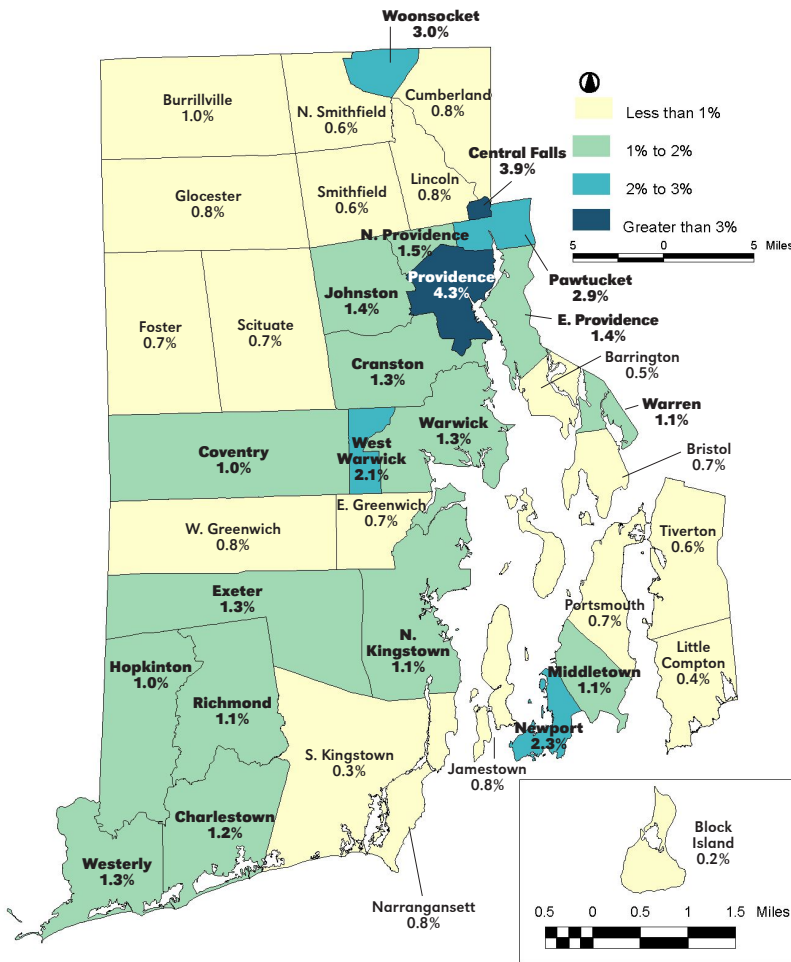
TABLE 1: Statewide Population Disenfranchised: Number and Percent

Number of ineligible voters. Percentage of given population, over 18 years old, unable to vote.

	NUMBER	PERCENT (%)
Total	15,758	1.96
Male	13,405	3.54
Female	2,352	.55
Black	3,494	12.07
Male	3,003	20.45
Female	491	3.44
White	8,634	1.27
Male	7,319	2.30
Female	1,315	.36
Hispanic	2,877	5.12
Male	2,530	9.30
Female	347	1.20
Asian	156	.93
Male	142	1.74
Female	14	.16
American Indian	59	2.16
Male	48	3.79
Female	11	.75

Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

FIGURE 1: Disenfranchisement Across Rhode Island
 Percentage of town residents, over 18 years old, unable to vote.



Nearly 60 percent of the disenfranchised population comes from just five cities: Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, Newport, and Woonsocket.

Close to 80 percent of the disenfranchised population is from Rhode Island's 10 most urban areas.

The impact of felon disenfranchisement varies dramatically across Rhode Island's cities and towns. But, Rhode Island's urban areas are disproportionately disenfranchised. 58 percent of the state's disenfranchised population comes from only five cities: Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, Newport, and Woonsocket. Nearly 4 out of every 5 disenfranchised residents come from just 10 municipalities.

Over 4 percent of Providence's adult population cannot vote as a result of felon disenfranchisement. The second most disenfranchised city is Central Falls, where 3.9 percent of the adult population cannot vote.

Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

INTERPRETING THIS REPORT

Research on correctional populations are accompanied by a number of caveats with regard to interpreting and generalizing findings, and this study is no different. The purpose of this report, *Political Punishment*, is to document the impact of Rhode Island's felon disenfranchisement laws by conducting the closest estimation possible given the data available.

While the state bans felons serving sentences either in prison or under supervision, there is no completely accurate database of existing felons. The two data files analyzed for this report contained data on people *indicted* for felonies in prison, and on probation or parole. The degree of error introduced by the use of felony indictments rather than felony convictions results in a small degree of overestimation. However, other aspects of the analysis significantly underestimate the impact, resulting in an overall conservative estimate.

For a complete discussion of the methodology and its implications for the analysis, see page 10 of this report.

Urban Impact

In both Providence and Newport, more than 1 in 4 black men cannot vote.

In Woonsocket, West Warwick, East Providence, and Pawtucket, more than 1 in 10 Hispanic men cannot vote.

Table 2 provides a more complete picture of the impact in Rhode Island’s urban areas by demonstrating the rate of disenfranchisement for each racial group, by gender, for the state’s eight most urban municipalities.

While the rates of disenfranchisement are greater in urban areas, regardless of race, those for the black community are disproportionately high. In every city and town, black residents are disenfranchised at least 4 times as often as white ones. In both Providence and Newport more than 1 in 4 black men cannot vote.

Hispanics also have higher rates of disenfranchisement than urban residents as a whole. In Woonsocket, home to the most disenfranchised Hispanic population, more than one out of every seven Hispanic men cannot vote.

White residents are disenfranchised less, on average, than black and Hispanic residents. The most disenfranchised white population is found in Central Falls, where just over 3 percent of the adult population cannot vote.

In Newport, we find the greatest racial disparity in disenfranchisement rates for white men versus black men in the state. Newport’s rate of disenfranchisement for black men is 11 times that of white men.

Across Rhode Island’s urban areas, an alarming proportion of the state’s black and Hispanic residents are barred from the polls. In denying voting rights to so many black and Hispanic residents, felon disenfranchisement substantially reduces the political power of *entire* communities, in both local and statewide elections. Equal opportunity in political representation is impossible without equal representation at the polls.

TABLE 2: Disenfranchisement in Urban Rhode Island: Race and Gender

Percentage of given population, over 18 years old, unable to vote in each town. (e.g. 5.5% of white males in Central Falls are disenfranchised.)

	TOTAL			WHITE			BLACK			HISPANIC		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Urban Core												
Central Falls	3.9	6.9	1.1	3.1	5.5	1.2	13.8	20.8	3.2	4.1	7.4	.7
Pawtucket	3.1	5.6	.9	2.2	4.0	.6	10.5	17.5	2.8	6.5	11.8	1.6
Providence	4.3	7.7	1.3	2.1	3.7	.7	14.5	26.3	4.3	5.3	9.6	1.3
Newport	2.3	4.1	.6	1.4	2.4	.4	14.8	26.5	3.2	2.9	5.1	.5
Woonsocket	2.9	5.2	.9	2.1	3.8	.7	12.5	19.9	3.8	7.9	15.9	1.6
Urban Ring												
Cranston	1.3	2.4	.4	1.2	2.2	.3	7.0	10.3	3.0	2.3	4.0	.9
East Providence	1.3	2.6	.3	1.1	2.0	.3	6.6	13.1	1.0	5.3	12.3	.3
North Providence	1.5	2.8	.5	1.4	2.5	.4	5.8	9.4	2.3	2.8	5.8	.2
Warwick	1.3	2.4	.3	1.2	2.3	.3	5.1	8.0	1.8	3.1	5.3	1.1
West Warwick	2.0	1.2	2.7	1.8	3.3	.5	18.3	15.0	3.3	15.6	14.1	1.6

Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

Impact on Providence

Providence may be Rhode Island’s economic, cultural, and political hub, but it is also marked by profound economic inequality.¹⁰ The median family income in the College Hill neighborhood is \$120,783 per year, whereas the median family income in Olneyville is less than \$20,000.¹¹ 24 percent of Providence families live in poverty.¹² Providence is the most incarcerated city in the state. While Providence residents make up only 17 percent of the state’s population, 38 percent of the prison population is from Providence.

Over 5,000 Providence residents are unable to vote as a result of a felony conviction. 85 percent of those disenfranchised are out of prison, living in the city.

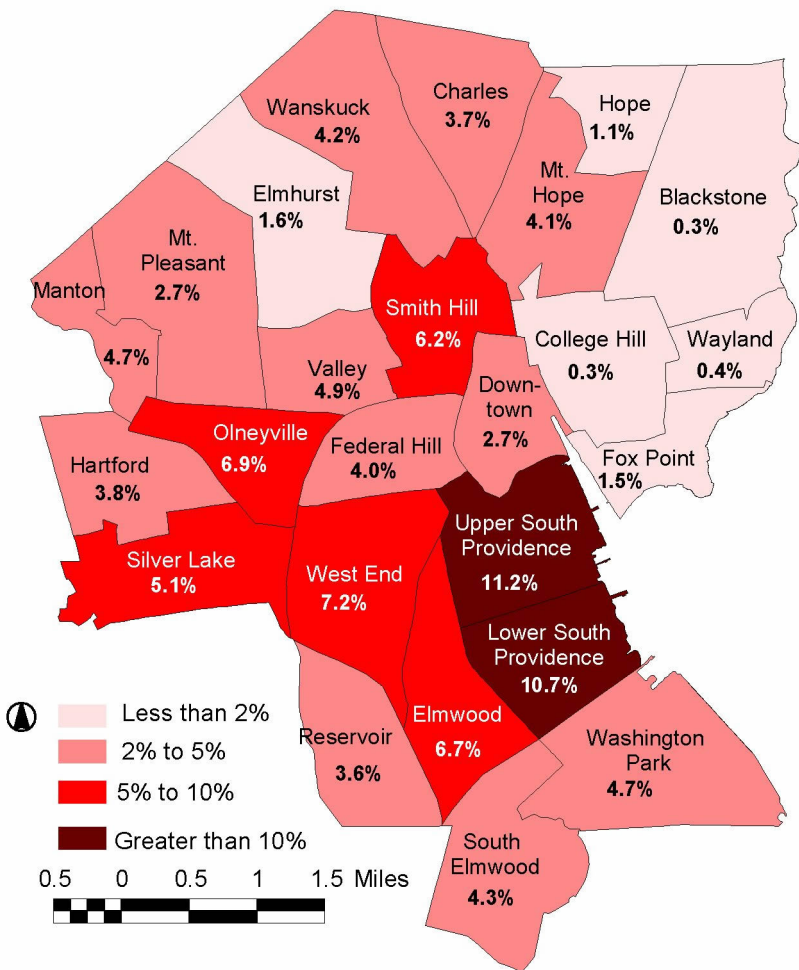
While Providence is the most disenfranchised city in the state, there is considerable variation in the distribution of that population. In some neighborhoods, felon disenfranchisement restricts voting rights for less than one percent of the population, while in others, more than one in ten residents is restricted.

More than half of the disenfranchised population lives in just seven neighborhoods. Upper and Lower South Providence, the most disenfranchised neighborhoods in the city, lose more than 10 percent of their voting population. By way of comparison, the neighborhoods of Blackstone, College Hill, and Wayland lose less than one percent of their voting population. The rate of disenfranchisement in Upper South Providence is over 35 times the rate in Blackstone.

This analysis demonstrates that felon disenfranchisement does not only punish the felon, but the entire neighborhood. In statewide and citywide elections, the neighborhoods of Upper and Lower South Providence cannot represent their interests in the way East Side neighborhoods can, because so many of their residents are barred from casting a vote. If crime affects entire communities, so too does the loss of voting rights for large numbers of residents. It’s not only felons who suffer a loss of political voice, but their neighbors as well.

FIGURE 2: Disenfranchisement in Providence

Percentage of residents, over 18 years old, unable to vote in each neighborhood.



Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

TABLE 3: Disenfranchised in Providence: by Gender

Number of ineligible voters of each gender per neighborhood. Percentage of given population, over 18 years old, unable to vote.

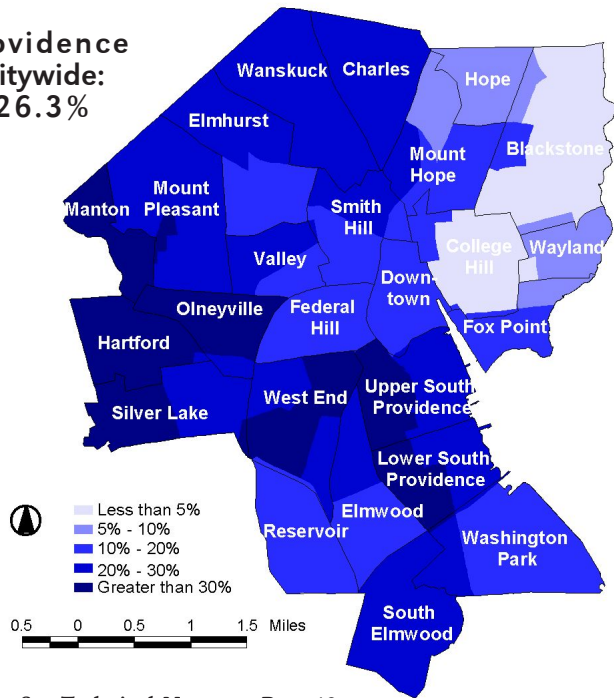
	MALE		FEMALE	
	#	%	#	%
Blackstone	16	.6	3	.1
Charles	147	6.3	35	1.4
College Hill	23	.6	2	-
Downtown	59	4.8	10	.8
Elmhurst	121	2.8	31	.6
Elmwood	419	12.5	79	1.9
Federal Hill	205	6.8	42	1.4
Fox Point	56	2.7	6	.3
Hartford	132	7.2	20	.9
Hope	25	1.9	5	.3
Lower South Prov.	300	19.0	77	3.9
Manton	78	8.6	18	1.6
Mount Hope	137	8.0	26	1.1
Mount Pleasant	174	4.9	31	.7
Olneyville	245	11.9	50	2.3
Reservoir	57	6.5	15	1.4
Silver Lake	296	8.5	83	2.1
Smith Hill	202	11.4	36	1.8
South Elmwood	61	8.5	7	.8
Upper South Prov.	317	19.8	62	3.5
Valley	122	8.2	25	1.6
Wanskuck	273	7.9	53	1.3
Washington Park	213	8.6	31	1.2
Wayland	11	.8	-	-
West End	624	13.0	112	2.1

Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

FIGURE 3: Black Men Disenfranchised in Providence

Percentage of black male population, over 18 years old, unable to vote in each census tract.

Providence Citywide: 26.3%



Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

Racial Impact

Providence is one of the most diverse cities in the state. While Providence claims 17 percent of the state’s population, it is home to 50 percent of the state’s nonwhite population.¹³ 12.7 percent of Providence residents are black or African American, compared to 5 percent for the state as a whole. 30 percent of its residents are Hispanic, compared to 8.6 percent statewide. Furthermore, the Hispanic population in Providence has doubled in the last ten years.¹⁴

Black men are the most disenfranchised group in the city. Rates of disenfranchisement for adult black men exceed the state average in more than half of all Providence neighborhoods. More than 40 percent of black men cannot vote in some parts of South Providence, the West End, Silver Lake and Olneyville.

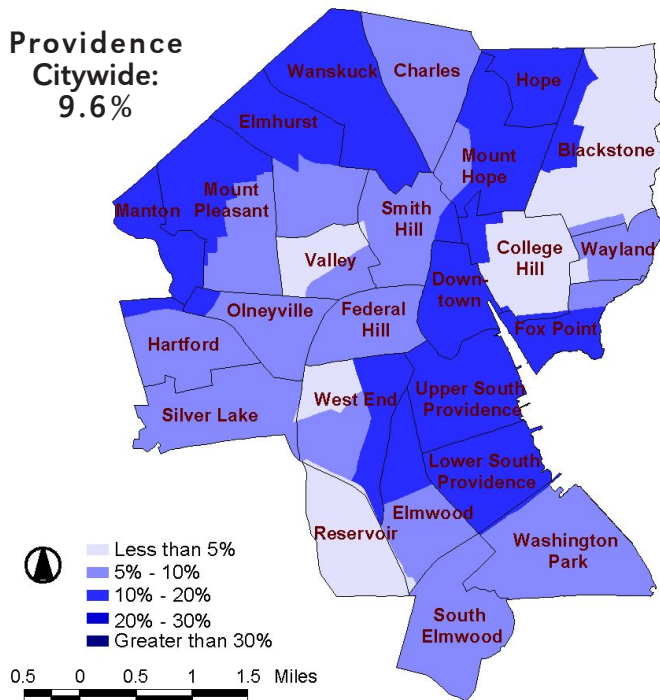
Hispanic men have the second highest rate of disenfranchisement. Nearly 1 in 10 Hispanic men in Providence have lost their voting rights. More than 15 percent cannot vote in parts of the West End.

Table 4 indicates that men ages 18-35 are the most disenfranchised population in the state. Residents of the Southside of Providence are the most disenfranchised, where 2 out of every 5 black men, ages 18-34, cannot vote. The rates of disenfranchisement for Asian and white men on the Southside is more than four times their rates statewide.

FIGURE 4: Hispanic Men Disenfranchised in Providence

Percentage of Hispanic male population, over 18 years old, unable to vote in each census tract.

Providence Citywide: 9.6%



Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

TABLE 4: Disenfranchised Men: 18-34 years old

Percentage of given male population, ages 18-34, unable to vote.

	RI	Providence	Southside*
	%	%	%
Total	5.0	8.0	15.7
White	3.3	3.3	10.4
Black	24.8	32.1	40.0
Hispanic	10.0	10.4	10.9
Asian	2.3	2.8	7.1
AIAN**	4.5	2.9	8.6

* Southside refers to four Providence neighborhoods: West End, Elmwood, Upper South Providence, and Lower South Providence.

** AIAN is a U.S. Census category abbreviation for American Indian or Alaskan Native.

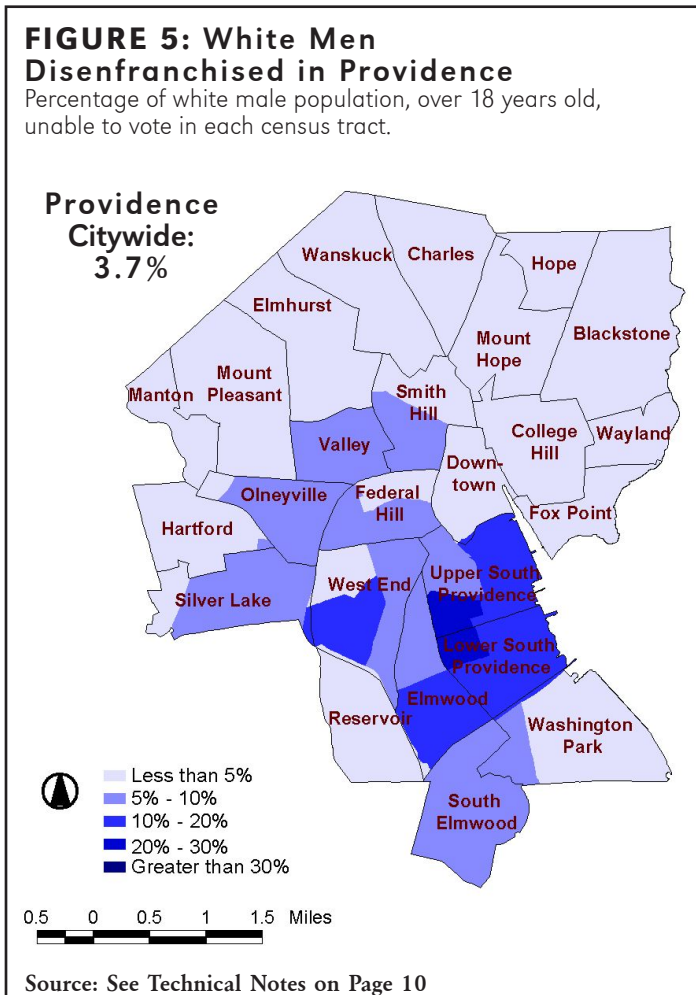
Source: See Technical Notes on Page 10

Providence has a smaller white population (45.8%) than the rest of the state (81%). Although the Asian and Asian American population in Providence is small (5.9%) it amounts to 44 percent of the Asian population statewide. Less than 1 percent of Providence residents are American Indian or Alaskan Natives.¹⁵

White men are less disenfranchised than black or Hispanic men in every neighborhood in Providence. In the most disenfranchised neighborhoods, on the Southside, 8 percent to 28 percent of white men cannot vote.

Asian men are the least disenfranchised (2.2%) group in the city, but are disproportionately concentrated in certain neighborhoods. While in most of the city less than 5% are disenfranchised, in parts of two neighborhoods (Lower South Providence and the West End) more than 14 percent of Asian men cannot vote.

There is substantial variation in the disenfranchisement of American Indian and Alaskan Native men. In most of the city, no American Indian or Alaskan Native men are disenfranchised, reflecting the small size of their populations. Where present, though, American Indian and Alaskan Native men have some of the highest rates of disenfranchisement in the city. In parts of Smith Hill and the West End, 20 to 30 percent of American Indian or Alaskan Native men are disenfranchised.



Conclusion: Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement

Felon disenfranchisement dramatically diminishes the political power of cities and neighborhoods. With this loss of electoral power, the neighbors of felons are subjected to some of the same punishments as felons themselves.

In this report, we examine the impact of Rhode Island's felony disenfranchisement law on the size and nature of eligible voting populations across the state. Our study finds that urban areas lose the largest share of their voting population under the law. Providence loses more of its voters than any other town. Furthermore, within the city of Providence, we found enormous disparity in the rates of disenfranchisement across neighborhoods, with some neighborhoods losing the votes of more than 10 percent of their residents.

The racial impact of felon disenfranchisement is troubling. A full 12 percent of African-Americans are disqualified from voting. More than 20 percent of black men cannot vote, 1 out of 5 statewide. 5 percent of Rhode Island's Hispanic population cannot vote, and over 9 percent of Hispanic men. At the municipal level, rates of disenfranchisement for black and Hispanic residents are even higher. Up to 25 percent of black men are disenfranchised in some cities, and, in others, 18 percent of Hispanic men cannot vote. In some neighborhoods in Providence, over 40 percent of the young black male population is barred from the political process.

Comparisons by race, gender, and region show that felon disenfranchisement is more than a personal punishment for the offender. Felon disenfranchisement dramatically diminishes the political power of cities and neighborhoods. In statewide and citywide elections, communities with high incarceration rates lose a disproportionate share of their voting population, and with it, electoral clout. With this loss of electoral power, the *neighbors* of felons are consequently subjected to some of the same punishments as felons themselves.

Felon disenfranchisement has significant consequences for racial equality in political representation in Rhode Island. Community advocates have long fought to redraw district boundaries to ensure majority status for a particular racial group. Racial disparities in felony disenfranchisement, and the dilution of political power in Rhode Island's communities of color, reverse this important effort and undermine the fairness of our political system.

Felon disenfranchisement does nothing to improve public safety in Rhode Island. Restricting voting rights does not prevent felons from committing crimes. It does not provide compensation to victims, nor does it rehabilitate the person convicted of a felony.¹⁶

Expanding the franchise for people on probation or parole may actually increase public safety. 99 percent of those who enter Rhode Island prisons will eventually be released. Encouraging felons to engage in society, through their behavior, but also through political expression, may in fact help them commit to a positive life. Participation in the electoral process may help people with felony records develop a sense of social responsibility, community, and civic engagement.¹⁷ Re-enfranchisement could be a vital step in the reentry process.

Most Americans support extending voting rights to ex-felons. A recent survey found that 80 percent of respondents believe that ex-felons who have served their entire sentence, regardless of type of offense or length of sentence, should have the right to vote. Additionally, 64 percent maintain that people on probation and living in their communities should have the right to vote.¹⁸

Many states have recently reconsidered and revised their felony disenfranchisement laws. The states of Nevada, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Hampshire, Wyoming, Alabama, Texas, Virginia, New Mexico, and Maryland have already enacted legislation to expand the voting rights of formerly incarcerated individuals. In 2001, Connecticut's legislature voted to remove the ban for probationers, leaving Rhode Island as the only New England state with such restrictive practices.¹⁹

Rhode Island has received national attention on the issue of prisoner reentry, rehabilitation, and public safety. In order to maintain a reputation for national excellence, Rhode Island must revisit the issue of felon disenfranchisement.

Note on Race Definitions

Definitions of race vary from study to study. This study requires a comparison between two data sources: the 2000 United States Census and the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) INFACTS data system. Population totals reflect the 2000 United States Census definitions of race. Data used to estimate disenfranchisement totals reflect racial definitions used by RIDOC. Estimating the proportion of a given racial population disenfranchised thus required a comparison of incongruous definitions of race.

When the study refers to white individuals, 2000 Census estimates refer to all individuals who reported an ethnicity of non-Hispanic and only one race: white. The RIDOC data estimates refer to all individuals who self-reported the race white, and may include Hispanic whites as well as multiracial individuals. As a result of a more limited Census category, white disenfranchisement estimates are slightly increased.

When the study refers to black individuals, 2000 Census estimates refer to all individuals who reported an ethnicity of non-Hispanic and only one race: black or African-American. The RIDOC data estimates refer to all individuals who self-reported the race black and may include Hispanic blacks as well as multiracial individuals. As a result of a more limited Census definition, black disenfranchisement estimates are slightly higher.

When the study refers to Hispanic, 2000 Census estimates refer to all individuals who reported the ethnicity Hispanic and any other race. The RIDOC data estimates refer to all individuals who self-reported the race Hispanic. This comparison slightly underestimates the disenfranchised Hispanic population.

When the study refers to Asian individuals, 2000 Census estimates refer to all individuals who reported an ethnicity of non-Hispanic and only one race: Asian or Pacific Islander. The RIDOC data estimates refer to all individuals who self-reported the race Asian and may include Hispanic Asians as well as multiracial individuals. This comparison likely had little impact on Asian or Pacific Islander disenfranchisement estimates.

When the study refers to American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2000 Census estimates refer to all individuals who reported an ethnicity of non-Hispanic and only one race: American Indian or Alaskan Native. The RIDOC data estimates refer to all individuals who self-reported the race American Indian and may include Hispanic American Indians as well as multiracial individuals. This comparison likely had little impact on Asian or Pacific Islander disenfranchisement rates, although Alaskan Natives did not likely report American Indian to RIDOC.

End Notes

- 1 David Gonzales, "The 2000 Election; Protesters; Jesse Jackson Demands Inquiry on Florida Vote," *The New York Times*, 10 November 2000, Section A, p. 27.
- 2 Alec Ewald, Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action, *Punishing at the Polls: The Case Against Disenfranchising Citizens With Felony Convictions* (24 November 2003), 13. <<http://www.demos-usa.org/pub109.cfm>>
- 3 Patricia Allard & Marc Mauer, The Sentencing Project, *Regaining the Right to Vote: An Assessment of Activity Relating to Felon Disenfranchisement Laws* (January 2002) <http://sentencingproject.org/pubs_05.cfm>
- 4 Leo Carroll, *Lawful Order: A Case Study of Correctional Crisis and Reform* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 329-330; Rhode Island Department of Corrections, *2003 Annual Report*. Cranston, RI: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, 2003.
- 5 Carroll, 213-16; Rhode Island Department of Corrections, *2003 Annual Report*, 14.
- 6 Christopher Uggen & Jeff Manza, The Sentencing Project, "Summary of Changes to State Felon Disfranchisement Law 1865-2003," (April 2003) <http://sentencingproject.org/pubs_05.cfm>
- 7 Rhode Island State Constitution, Article II, Section 1.
- 8 Rhode Island General Laws, Section 11-1-2.
- 9 Lauren Glaze & Seri Palla, "Probation and Parole in the United States, 2003," Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, Office of Justice Programs, July 2004.
- 10 The Providence Plan, "Presentation to Mayor Cicilline's Transition Working Groups," Powerpoint Presentation, November 26, 2002. Available at <http://www.provplan.com/download/CTT_Final.ppt>
- 11 The Providence Plan, "2000 Median Family Income Summary Table." Available at <http://provplan.org/nprof/cw_mrecon.html>
- 12 The Providence Plan, "Census Quick Fact Sheet". Available at <<http://www.provplan.com/nprof/censummary.html>>
- 13 The Providence Plan, "Presentation to Mayor Cicilline's Transition Working Groups."
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 The Providence Plan, "2000 Racial and Ethnic Breakdown", Available at <<http://www.provplan.com/nprof/charts/combpie.gif>> & U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics*, PHC-1-41, Rhode Island (Washington, DC, 2002) p. 19. Available at <<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/phc-1-41.pdf>>
- 16 Ewald, 23-24.
- 17 Christopher Uggen, "Barriers to Democratic Participation," paper presented at the third Reentry Roundtable on Prisoner Reentry and the Institutions of Civil Society: Bridges and Barriers to Successful Reintegration. (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, March 2002).
- 18 Jeff Manza, Clem Brooks, and Christopher Uggen, "Civil Deaths or Civil Rights? Public Attitudes Towards Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States," upcoming in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. (Volume 68), 2004
- 19 Allard & Mauer.

Technical Notes

Data Sources

1. Rhode Island Department of Corrections Data Files of Sentenced and Supervised Offenders. As of September 30, 2003.
2. Census 2000. SF1: PCT12 Sex by Age; PCT12H Sex by Age (Hispanic or Latino); PCT12I Sex by Age (White Alone, Hispanic or Latino); PCT12J Sex by Age (Black Alone, Hispanic or Latino); PCT12K Sex by Age (AIAN Alone, Hispanic or Latino); PCT12L Sex by Age (Asian Alone, Hispanic or Latino).

Methodology

Given the absence of a completely accurate database of individuals currently serving felony sentences in prison, on parole, or probation, this study used RIDOC data to best estimate the impact of felon disenfranchisement laws. Throughout this study we designated individuals as disenfranchised if they had a felony designation in either the sentenced data file or probation and parole data file, they were 18 years or older, and (based on their address) were a Rhode Island resident.

A felony designation, however, indicates an indictment rather than conviction in the sentenced data file and in the probation and parole data file. Since no accessible database exists with conviction data for people currently in prison or on probation or parole, this study uses indictment data in order to estimate rates of disenfranchisement, resulting in a small degree of overestimation. In order to gauge the degree of overestimation caused by the use of indictment data, a randomly selected sample was examined. From those people on probation or parole predicted to be disenfranchised based on indictment data, a random sample of 143 cases were cross-examined with information publicly available from the Rhode Island Judiciary. Of these, 119 case identification numbers matched data from the courts and of these, 95.8 percent were reported as having also been convicted of a felony, while only 4.2 percent had been convicted of a misdemeanor. Given this sample and using a 95 percent confidence level, this estimation has a confidence interval of plus/minus 3.9 percent. Reliance on indictment data to estimate felon disenfranchisement complicates this research and similar studies in other states as well. In order to arrive at the closest estimate possible we use indictment data while taking measures that underestimate the disenfranchised population in later parts of the analysis.

Since people in Rhode Island's criminal justice system are not all residents of this state, this study determined residency in the following manner. Using the last known self-reported address in RIDOC data files, only records *without* an out of state address were considered Rhode Island residents. Records were then geocoded to census tract and Providence neighborhood levels. 688 records (4.4 percent) did not contain sufficient address information to geocode by municipality. An additional 411 records (7.4 percent) were without sufficient information to geocode to Providence neighborhoods. The removal of these records from municipal and Providence analyses results in an underestimation of the disenfranchised populations.

Due to sentencing laws in Rhode Island, some individuals appear in both the sentenced and the probation and parole data files. Prisoners serving probation for a felony conviction while incarcerated for a misdemeanor conviction were removed

from the analysis, resulting in underestimation. Both RIDOC databases collect multiple offenses for each offender. All but one most serious charge was considered for each offender for the purposes of this study.

Citizenship and its impact on voting eligibility were not taken into account for the purpose of this analysis. Both the census data and the estimated disenfranchised population were not scanned for citizenship.

Missing values in the data file for race, gender, or address resulted in those records being removed from the analysis. This further underestimates the disenfranchised population.

The population against which the estimated disenfranchised population is compared for rates and percentages comes from 2000 Census estimates of population over 18, or ages 18-34 in Table 4.

Population estimates were also adjusted to correct for the Census miscounting prisoners as residents where the prison is located. To account for incarcerated residents, denoted as Cranston residents in the 2000 Census (location of the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI)), population estimates reflect the 2000 population total, over 18 years old, for the given location with the addition of current inmates living in those localities directly prior to conviction (which remains their address according to Rhode Island's election statute section 17-1-3.1). Estimates of the Cranston population denote Cranston residents in the 2000 Census, with the addition of inmates living in Cranston prior to conviction, and the subtraction of the total ACI population. This methodology was used consistently across estimates for all racial and gender breakdowns, reducing both the underestimation that otherwise would have resulted from using mistakenly higher Census population estimates in Cranston and the overestimation that would have resulted from using lower Census population estimates in all other localities. Rates of disenfranchisement per locality represent the total estimated disenfranchised divided by the total adjusted population, 18 and over, using the above changes to the Census.

Despite the imperfections in both the RIDOC data files and the 2000 Census as data sources for this study, they are the best and only sources available. Throughout this study, we have tried to arrive at a conservative estimate of Rhode Island's disenfranchised population. The lack of conviction data for individuals on probation and parole presents an initial and unknown degree of overestimation. Throughout the rest of the analysis, however, we have taken measures that underestimate to both known and unknown degrees. On the balance, we feel as though the methodology employed and described above provides the best possible estimation of Rhode Island's disenfranchised population to date.

Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the support of a number of organizations: The Providence Plan, Rhode Island Department of Corrections Planning & Research Unit, Urban Institute's Reentry Mapping Network, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The findings of this report do not represent the conclusions or opinions of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections.

Special thanks to: Jim Vandermillen, Ethan Horowitz, Holly Harriel, Jen Olivelli, Ray Perault, Pat McGuigan, Ross Cheit, Nancy LaVigne, Marc Mauer, and Laleh Ispahani.

The Right to Vote Campaign provided generous funding to support the printing and distribution of this report.

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