

TOPIC #3: Should felons be allowed to vote?

Proponents of restoring voting rights to convicted felons believe that felons who serve their sentences and complete their terms of parole should be allowed to vote, while opponents argue that those who violate the law should not have the right to make the law.

In your response, analyze the two articles taken from www.procon.org to determine which position is best supported. Use relevant and specific evidence from both articles to support your response.

Article 1

(1) Rand Paul, JD, US Senator (R-KY), is quoted in a September 2013 article as stating: "The biggest impediments to voting rights, right now, are convicted felons. One in three young black males has been convicted of a felony and they've lost their voting rights. I think it dwarfs all other (election-related) issues... We haven't decided which crimes yet, but I think particularly for non-violent drug crimes where people made a youthful mistake, I think they ought to get their rights back."

(2) The *Washington Post* stated the following in its July 29, 2012 editorial "A Lifetime Sentence for Felons:" "In Virginia, Kentucky and Florida, felon disenfranchisement affects a staggering one in five African Americans. There's no excuse for that. The underlying question is why these states disenfranchise felons who've served their sentences, paid their dues and rejoined their communities. According to the Sentencing Project, of the 5.85 million Americans subject to felon disenfranchisement, almost half, or 2.6 million, are out of prison. If a purpose of punishment is to rehabilitate persons to become functioning members of society upon their release, why would you deprive those who succeed of a fundamental right of citizenship? Although states have made advances in restoring voting rights to felons who've completed parole, the franchise should be automatically restored after a sentence is completed, as it is in Maryland."

(3) The *New York Times* stated the following in a July 15, 2012 editorial "Disenfranchised Felons:" "The number of Americans who cannot vote because they have been convicted of a felony continues to grow...About a quarter are in prison, but the rest have completed their sentences or are on probation or parole. The only reason not to let them vote is to stigmatize them or to continue punishing them...These limits are seriously counterproductive. Former offenders who are allowed to vote are less likely to return to prison and more likely to become reintegrated into their communities...The disproportionate number of blacks among the disenfranchised remains a huge racial justice problem...Until the criminal system is made fairer, the number of people disenfranchised will grow, with blacks unfairly excluded from voting at a much higher rate."

(4) John Conyers, Jr., LLB, Member of the US House of Representatives (D-MI), stated the following during a March 16, 2005 congressional address: "The United States may have the most restrictive disenfranchisement policy in the world. Such prohibitions on the right to vote undermine both the voting system and the fundamental rights of ex-offenders."

Article 2

(1) Roger Clegg, JD, President and General Counsel at the Center for Equal Opportunity, stated the following in his October 18, 2004 article "Perps and Politics, Why Felons Can't Vote:" "Individuals who have shown they are unwilling to follow the law cannot claim the right to make laws for the rest of us. We don't let everyone vote, not children, for instance, or noncitizens, or the mentally incompetent. We have certain minimum standards of trustworthiness before we let people participate in the serious business of self-government, and people who commit serious crimes don't meet those standards."

(2) Edward Feser, PhD, Instructor of Philosophy at Pasadena City College, stated the following in his 2005 article "Should Felons Vote?": "The claim that disenfranchising felons is wrong because the right to vote is basic and inalienable...is no more convincing. Obviously the right is not basic and inalienable in any legal sense, since the laws banning murderers, thieves, and other wrongdoers from voting have stood for a long time...If the right to vote is as precious as felon advocates claim...we should expect people to uphold at least some minimum moral standards in order to keep it – such as refraining from violating their fellow voters' own inalienable rights."

(3) Bill McCollum, JD, Florida Attorney General, stated the following in a 2007 article: "The campaign to automatically restore civil rights to nearly all felons upon release from prison, with no waiting period and no hearing to determine if those felons will go right back to a life of crime, is reckless and irresponsible...The revolving-door effect of restoring felons' rights only then to revoke them due to a new criminal offense would diminish the integrity of our democratic government and the rule of law. According to the Florida Department of Corrections, nearly 40 percent of offenders commit another crime within three years of release and 45 percent do so within five years...Rather than automatically restore rights to violent repeat offenders, we should ensure fairness in the clemency process by immediately eliminating the backlog, as I previously proposed. But for Florida's serious career criminals, this motto ought to apply: A person who breaks the law should not make the law."

(4) Lowell Pointe, Contributing Editor for *Front Page Magazine*, stated the following in a July 2003 article: "Why give a convicted felon a ballot that can be used like a bullet to empower a robber-politician's gun? Do we want our politicians pandering for the votes of felons? Or making government policy designed to win their votes and serve those constituents? Do we want America to become a felonocracy?"