

Voting Rights – Convicted Felons

[Article I, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution](#) gives the states the authority to determine the times, places, and manner of holding Elections. The legal authority of a State to revoke an inmate’s voting rights is based upon the Fourteenth Amendment. Voting rights advocates are urging Congress to require states to restore voting rights for felons once they complete their sentences.

According to Donald A. Stukes of the Voter News Network felon voter rights vary. Forty-eight states deny the vote to some felons. Thirty-three states withhold the right to vote from those on parole. Eight deny felons the vote for life, unless they petition to have their rights restored. A few allow former felons to vote once they have completed parole. Roughly, 4.2 million U.S. citizens cannot vote because they are convicted felons.

The U.S. is out of step with the world on this issue.

“Many democratic countries allow inmates to cast ballots while incarcerated including Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Peru, Poland, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. Others restore voting rights to prisoners once they have completed their sentence, such as in Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Portugal, Russia, and the UK.”¹

Explore this issue:

What phrase in the Fourteenth Amendment allows states to deny convicted felons the right to vote?

What is the law your state regarding the franchise of convicted felons?

Why would a State want to bar felons from voting?

Write a five paragraph, persuasive essay regarding convicted felons having the right to vote. Should they or should they not be permitted to vote? Under what circumstances could the right to vote be restored?

¹ Spencer Overton, *Stealing Democracy. The Politics of Voter Suppression*. W.W. Norton and Company, N.Y. 2006 P59.

Stukes, Donald A., “[Should Convicted Felons Vote?](#)” *Voter News Network* Newsletter. Nov. 5, 2005.