

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/states-continue-to-make-progress-on-restoring-voting-rights-for-people-with-conviction-histories>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Update November 6, 2018: Florida Amendment 4 passed with [64 percent approval from Florida voters](#).

Next week, millions of Americans across the United States will vote in the federal midterm elections, as well as countless critical state and local races.

While pulling that lever, scanning that ballot, or pushing that touch screen, please take a moment to remember that many Americans remain disenfranchised. Approximately [6.1 million Americans](#) cannot vote because they are incarcerated, on probation or parole, or are forever barred due to a past conviction despite having already served their time. [While each state is different](#), nearly all ([except two and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico](#)) have some restrictions on voting for people with certain conviction histories. Four states have laws that are so onerous, they effectively bar certain individuals from voting for life.

The sheer number of people impacted by these policies is overwhelming, and the loss of such a vital civic right [can have negative consequences on individuals, communities, and the nation](#). These policies also have a disproportionate impact on communities of color and [serve to perpetuate systemic racism and oppression](#).

Other countries, in contrast, embrace a more human dignity-centric approach to incarceration and criminal justice, allowing individuals to vote either while incarcerated or as soon as they are released. On a recent trip to Germany by Vera staff, [people incarcerated in prison there were shocked to hear about voting restrictions in America](#).

Today, however, important progress is being made in America to change these restrictions and restore voting rights for those with criminal justice system involvement. [Polls show that a majority of Americans support these measures](#), and despite our era of increasing political polarization the movement has received significant bipartisan support as well. [States](#) across the political and geographic spectrum have taken steps to restore voting rights for people with conviction histories.

This year, one ballot measure in Florida is poised to restore voting rights to more than 1 million people in what would be the largest increase in the U.S. electorate since 18 to 21 year olds secured the right to vote. Floridas Amendment 4, if passed by 60 percent of Florida voters, will restore voting rights for [approximately 1.4 million people](#) who have served their sentences, completed parole or probation, and paid any owed restitution. The measure does not include individuals who have served their time but were convicted for murder or sex crimes [and while it is far from perfect in that regard](#), it would still be a major win for voting rights in America.

Similar to other justice reforms, Amendment 4 has received public support from both liberals and conservatives, ranging from the ACLU to [conservative Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher](#), Republican State Senator Jeff Brandes, and the [Koch-funded Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce](#).

Additionally, [recent polls show that a majority of Florida voters 71 percent are in favor of the amendment](#), including 83 percent of registered Democrats and 62 percent of registered Republicans. If voters do indeed approve the measure, Florida would join the ranks of other states that have recently moved to restore voting rights, including [Alabama](#) and [Wyoming](#) in 2017 and [Maryland](#) in 2016.

[There are certainly politicians in Florida who do not support Amendment 4](#). But, given both the number of people directly impacted and the bipartisan desire for reform across the American electorate, this is one issue that should be seen as a source of unity, not division.

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