

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/11/06/the-2-million-swing-state-voters-who-wont-be-voting-today/>

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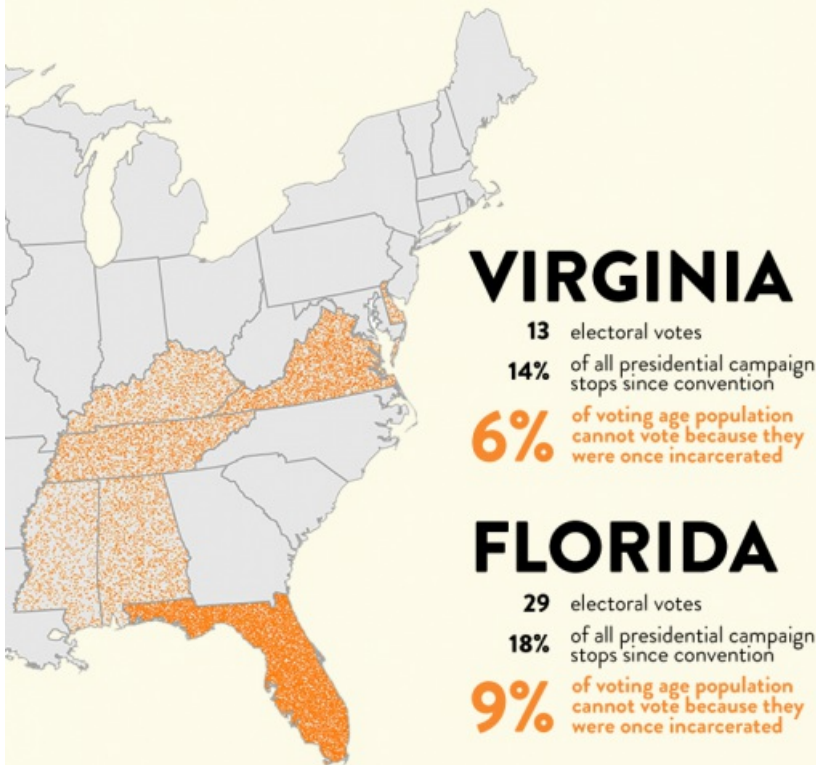
by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | November 6, 2012

This new infographic from the [Prison Policy Initiative](#) shows the impact of felon disenfranchisement laws. While most states forbid people to vote while they are in prison, and many extend that ban to people on parole, only a handful make it next to impossible to regain your right to vote if you've ever been convicted of a felony. Even after you've served your time, it's likely you'll never vote again. Among these are two key swing states, Florida and Virginia, where some 2 million people are permanently disenfranchised.

According to PPI's data, a full 9 percent of Florida's voting-age population is disenfranchised because they have at one time been incarcerated. In Virginia, the figure is 6 percent. Given that [a disproportionate number](#) of disenfranchised ex-felons are people of color, and that Obama [polls far ahead](#) of Mitt Romney in the black and Latino communities, it's not hard to deduce which candidate the missing votes would favor. The results of this election may therefore hinge on the denial of a basic right to men and women who have long since paid their debt to society, but remain permanently excluded from the democratic process. (For more on this subject, see our [recent article](#) on Mother Jones.)



Should the states that **bar the most people from the polls** be allowed to pick the president?



5.9 million people will be sitting out Tuesday's presidential election because they live in a state that bars some or all people with felony convictions from voting.

Of those, 2.6 million have already completed their sentence, but live in a state that bars people with old felony convictions from voting. Two-thirds of the people barred from the polls because of an old felony conviction live in two of the swing states that will determine who becomes the next president: Florida and Virginia.

**Is this how democracy is supposed to work?**

**PRISON**  
POLICY INITIATIVE  
PRISONPOLICY.ORG

**SOLUTIONS:**

- Re-enfranchisement: <http://fcpmovement.wordpress.com/national-voting-rights-campaign>
- Switch to a national popular vote: <http://nationalpopularvote.com>

Map shows 1 dot for every 100 people in each state that are barred from voting because they have an old, but completed, felony sentence. Disenfranchisement for reasons of incarceration, probation or parole is not included on the map. Data from "Estimates of disenfranchised population in each state from State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States", 2010, Table 3, by Christopher Uggen, Sarah Shannon and Jeff Manza, July 2012. Available at: [http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/fd\\_State\\_Level\\_Estimates\\_of\\_Felon\\_Disen\\_2010.pdf](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/fd_State_Level_Estimates_of_Felon_Disen_2010.pdf). The portion of the post-convention presidential visits from the candidates was calculated from The Center for Voting and Democracy's Presidential Tracker at: <http://www.fairvote.org/presidential-tracker> as of October 29, 2012. Graphic adapted from visual.ly and designed by Josh Begley.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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The politicians are pretty criminal They control the vote

Most of us learn in school that a felony results in loss of right to vote. The obvious answer would be dont commit a felony. Dont do the crime if you cant do the time.

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