

Welcome Home — Now Vote!*

Voting Rights Restoration and Post-Supervision Participation

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Abstract

This paper presents causal estimates of the effect of voting rights restoration prior to discharge from parole on post-supervision participation. In 2018, New York State began restoring voting rights to parolees, after previously restoring voting rights only at the completion of parole. By leveraging randomness in parole discharge date, we interrogate whether restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated individuals while still on parole increases their post-supervision propensity to cast a ballot. We demonstrate that in-person rights restoration prior to parole discharge significantly increased turnout. This group-level effect, however, masks race-specific effects. Although rights restoration prior to parole discharge increased turnout by non-Black former parolees by 1.4 percentage points, the treatment effect was substantially smaller for Black former parolees. This raises serious questions about how rights restoration programs are implemented, and how incarceration might differently structure Black Americans' view of the democratic process.

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