

Welcome Home — Now Vote!*

Voting Rights Restoration and Post-Supervision Participation

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October 27, 2020

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 individuals on parole, after previously restoring voting rights only at the completion of parole. By leveraging randomness in parole discharge date, I interrogate whether restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated individuals while still on parole increases their post-supervision propensity to register and cast a ballot. I demonstrate that in-person rights restoration prior to parole discharge significantly increased participation, but this group-level effect masks racially heterogeneous effects. Although rights restoration prior to parole discharge increased turnout by non-Black individuals by 1.4 percentage points, the treatment effect was substantially smaller for Black individuals. This raises important questions about how members of different communities can be brought back into our democratic processes.

*The author thanks Jacob Faber, Jeff Manza, Myrna Pérez, Ariel White, and Peter Miller for their comments on this project. All errors are my responsibility.

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