

Turnout and Amendment 4: Mobilizing Eligible Voters Close to Formerly Incarcerated Floridians*

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Abstract

Recent scholarship shows that eligible voters in neighborhoods home to many arrested and incarcerated individuals vote at lower rates than those in less-impacted neighborhoods. Little work, however, has interrogated how this turnout gap might be counteracted. This paper uses Amendment 4, a 2018 Florida ballot initiative that promised to re-enfranchise most individuals whose voting rights had been revoked due to a felony conviction, to investigate whether this turnout disparity can be narrowed by a ballot initiative of particular significance to communities most impacted by incarceration. Using prison release records, I identify the neighborhoods and households where formerly incarcerated individuals live and assess the voting history of their neighbors and housemates. I find no evidence that Amendment 4 increased these voters' turnout in 2018 relative to other voters. While ending felony disenfranchisement is necessary, closing the turnout gap resulting from histories of policing and incarceration will require greater investment and engagement.

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