Greetings University of the South UOSPIT-DAI:

The Free the Vote Coalition is a collection of groups seeking to restore the vote for formerly incarcerated persons in Tennessee. The challenge is that, although Tennessee has made advancements in voter restoration since 2006 (a state law was passed that expanded the right to vote for justice-impacted persons), a large number of people in this cohort cannot vote. This is because the state has several requirements:

1. persons must pay their legal financial obligations accrued during incarceration;
2. Tennessee is the only state that requires the payment of child support as a condition for voting for formerly incarcerated persons;
3. Persons convicted of certain crimes, e.g., murders, rapes, are permanently disqualified from voting;
4. There could be Federal offenses that bar voter participation;
5. Tennessee has a complicated [certificate of restoration](about:blank) process;
6. and as of January 2024, persons can’t vote unless they get their full citizenship rights restored, including the restoration of the right to carry a gun.

As a result of these conditions, Tennessee has the [second-highest per capita](about:blank) in the country of formerly incarcerated persons who cannot vote. This includes perhaps as much as 1/5 of African Americans. In total, an estimated 470,000 persons are disenfranchised.

The problem is that we don’t have good data on where people are incarcerated and how many votes are lost. What we have are the following: 1) Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC) data; 2) the total # of persons incarcerated who are disqualified from voting (see discussion above). What’s missing is the category of people who are disqualified because of legal financial obligations. In other words, this group is eligible if they paid their debt: fines, fees, child support, etc. (Note that persons who were incarcerated accrue fines and fees. Longer sentences can amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars.)

We also have people who were incarcerated in other states and moved to Tennessee. Now, as a result of [*Falls v. Goins*](about:blank), 2023, these persons must comply with Tennessee law and have been declared ineligible to vote unless they meet strict requirements.

There are several ways to approach this depending on time, length, and available data. One way is to see how many votes are lost across all 95 Tennessee counties given the available data sources. Another way is to select several counties and home in on lost votes due to incarceration, LFOS, etc. during a given election year.

These are some additional data sources that may assist with the project:

**LFOs**

[https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/2020/01-15-TN-LFO-Report.pdf](about:blank)

[https://www.sycamoreinstitutetn.org/criminal-justice-fees-fines-11-policy-options/](about:blank)

[https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/jurisdictions/tennessee/](about:blank)

[https://nashvillebanner.com/2024/04/10/tennessee-voter-turnout-problems/](about:blank)

**Tennessee Department of Corrections**

Data for TDOC can be found at https://www.tn.gov/correction/statistics/annual-reports.html (see reports on right-hand side labeled “statistics”). The reports give data on “felon population by conviction.” For example, see the annual report for 2023 - [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/correction/documents/StatisticalAbstract2023.pdf](about:blank) (p. 12).

**Voter Restoration and Related Issues**

[https://decriminalizepoverty.org/report/](about:blank)

[https://www.vera.org/publications/the-criminalization-of-poverty-in-tennessee](about:blank)

[https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/studies-and-reports](about:blank) (produces purges voters due to felony convictions, but ignores most of the formerly incarcerated persons barred from voting due to LFOs)

[https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/09/19/tennessee-s-voter-restoration-gauntlet](about:blank)

[https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jul/22/tennessee-toughens-voting-rules-for-people-with-felony-convictions](about:blank)

[https://www.actionnews5.com/2024/04/03/tenn-election-commission-felons-must-have-gun-rights-restored-before-they-can-vote/](about:blank)