

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** RAGNAR RESEARCH PARTNERS  
**SUBJECT:** RAGNAR LABS 2019 STUDY ON FELON ENFRANCHISEMENT AND ASSOCIATED ELECTORAL IMPACT  
**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 16, 2019

### Felon Enfranchisement & Potential Impact On Future Elections

Due to recent legislative reforms, Ragnar Research Partners has conducted a Ragnar Labs project focused on felon enfranchisement. The purpose of this research is to better understand the current state of felon enfranchisement and the potential impact that allowing ex-felons to vote may have on future elections. This research indicates that efforts to fight re-enfranchisement are more likely to hurt candidates, as they would go against public sentiment when the likely impact of re-enfranchisement on the outcome of the 2020 election is minimal. The study's sources and full methodology are provided in the [Appendix](#).

### Current Legislation, Imprisonment Rates, & Enfranchisement Rates

Ex-felons' voting rights vary widely from state to state. Currently, there are nine states in which a felon may permanently lose their right to vote.

- Alabama
- Arizona
- Delaware
- Florida
- Iowa
- Kentucky
- Tennessee
- Mississippi
- Wyoming

Broadly, these states **do not** allow those convicted of violent crimes, such as murder, sexual offenses, or crimes against minors, to regain their ability to vote automatically. They may allow non-violent ex-felons to vote after 1) completing their sentence, parole or probation and 2) paying all court ordered fines or restitution, particularly if the ex-felon is a first-time offender.

However, many of these require to some degree, that an ex-felon formally apply to local government bodies or request a pardon for their crimes from the governor or state legislature, in order to restore their right to vote. [12](#)

These states naturally rank among the highest estimates of felon disenfranchisement rates. Florida leads with an estimated 10,430 disenfranchised out of every 100,000 citizens.

Felony Disenfranchisement Rate (per 100K) [3](#)

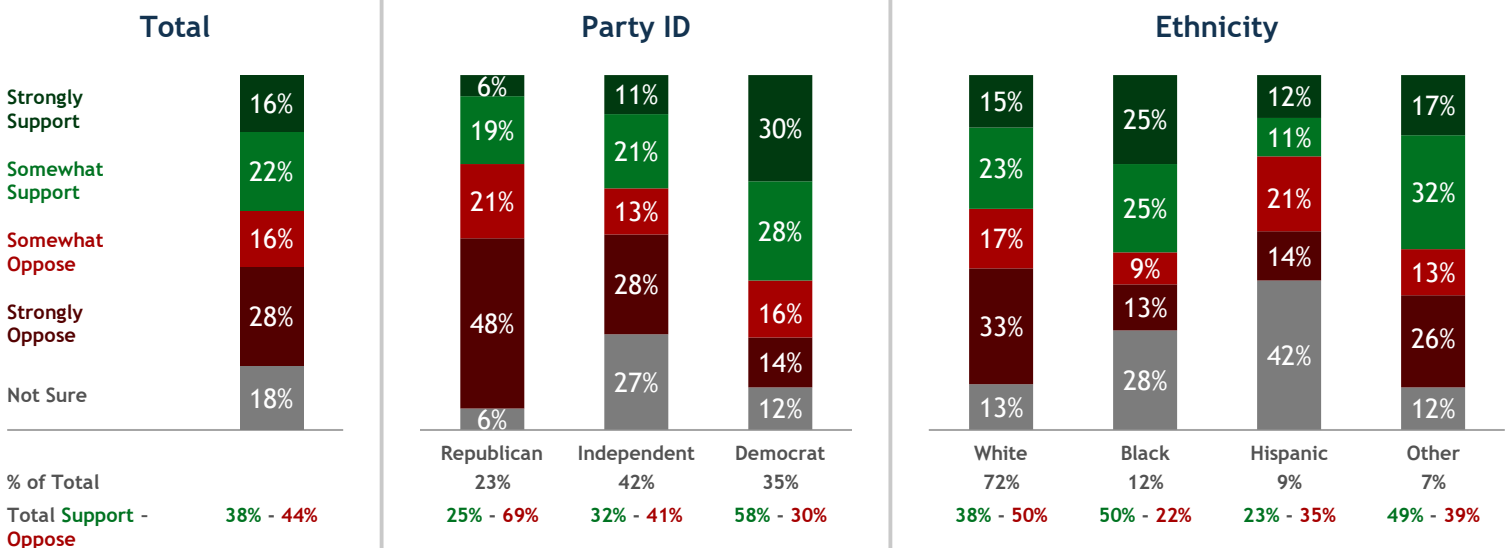
Florida	10,430	Missouri	1,910	Indiana	590
Mississippi	9,630	Idaho	1,890	Ohio	590
Kentucky	9,140	South Dakota	1,610	Hawaii	570
Tennessee	8,260	New Mexico	1,530	Michigan	570
Virginia	7,810	Minnesota	1,510	Pennsylvania	520
Alabama	7,620	Wisconsin	1,470	Montana	510
Wyoming	5,330	New Jersey	1,360	Illinois	500
Arizona	4,250	South Carolina	1,240	Oregon	470
Nevada	4,020	Nebraska	1,230	Maryland	460
Georgia	3,230	North Carolina	1,180	Rhode Island	400
Louisiana	3,040	West Virginia	1,010	North Dakota	370
Arkansas	2,930	Washington	870	Utah	370
Alaska	2,610	Kansas	800	New Hampshire	280
Texas	2,450	California	740	Massachusetts	210
Iowa	2,170	Colorado	740	Maine	0
Delaware	2,120	New York	630	Vermont	0
Oklahoma	1,980	Connecticut	610		

## Public Opinion Favors Re-Enfranchisement

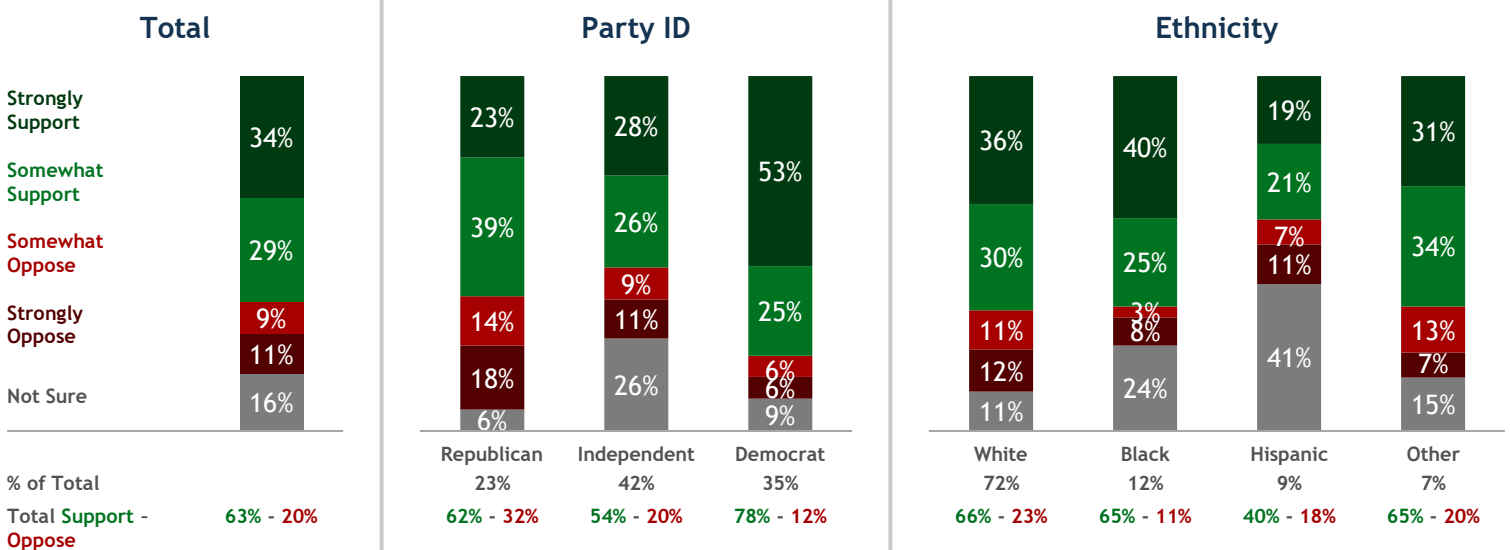
Recent studies show that public sentiment is broadly in favor of re-enfranchisement, particularly for felons who have completed their entire sentence. A study conducted by HuffPost and YouGov (March 2018) <sup>4</sup> shows that the public is overall more opposed to re-enfranchisement for felons still on probation or parole (+6% oppose). Further, opposition is relatively strong compared to support, particularly among Republicans (+44%) and white adults (+12%).

However, the study found that nearly two in three adults (63%) support re-enfranchisement for those who have completed their entire sentence. This is true among both Republicans (62%) and white adults (66%). These results held in the 2018 election results in Florida, where Amendment 4 passed by 65% for and 35% against. <sup>5</sup>

### Restoring The Right To Vote While On Probation Or Parole (n=1,000 U.S. Adults)



### Restoring The Right To Vote After Completing Entire Sentence (n=1,000 U.S. Adults)



## The Potential Impact Of Re-Enfranchisement - Florida As A Case Study

In 2018, Florida passed Amendment 4 to reinstate the right to vote for ex-felons. However, the legislature is still determining the specifics of who will be allowed to vote, including a recent move to require payment of all court ordered fines or restitution.

In the meantime, Ragnar Research Partners has sought to explore how re-enfranchisement may impact the outcome of future elections in the state. In order to do this, Ragnar Research matched a database of 97,034 currently incarcerated felons (active) and 342,101 ex-felons (released) who have remained in the state, and were registered to vote prior to their incarceration, to Florida's current voter file. <sup>6</sup> It is important to note Florida conducts list maintenance every odd year, at which point any voters who have been inactive for two years are removed from the voter file. As a result, Ragnar Research was only able to match felons who were registered to vote in the last election cycle to Florida's voter file. While this method reduces the overall number of potential matches, it offers the most up-to-date understanding of the current felon and ex-felon population in Florida regarding voting behavior.

### Republicans Are In The Minority Among Both Populations

Currently incarcerated felons are more than three times as likely to be registered Democrats (1.7:1) or unaffiliated (1.4:1) than Republicans. Ex-felons are four times as likely to be Democrats (2.7:1) or unaffiliated (1.3:1).

Notably, the gap between Democrats and unaffiliated voters is significantly lower among the active population (+7 Dem) than it is among the released population (+28% Dem). This dataset cannot determine whether release is an underlying cause for this disparity, but the correlation should not be ignored.

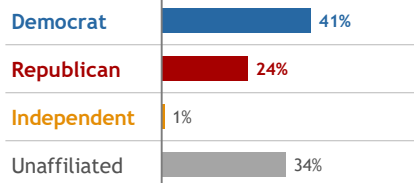
Regionally, an increase in ex-felons voting will impact Republicans in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota DMA the most, as over one in four felons and ex-felons are from this region (27% & 29% respectively). This is followed by Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne (19% both populations) and Miami-Ft. Lauderdale (13% both populations).

#### Registered Party & Geographic Profile Of Active & Released Population <sup>6</sup>

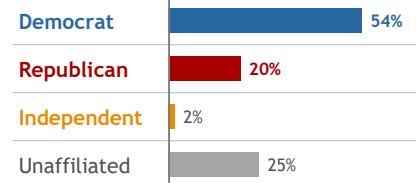
Active & Released Felons were matched to Florida's current voter file using their full name, birthdate, and county or zip code, when available.

This information was provided by the Florida Department of Correction's database.

#### Active (n = 2,513)

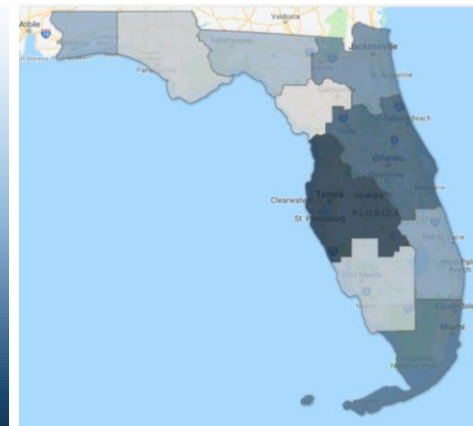


#### Released (n = 14,881)



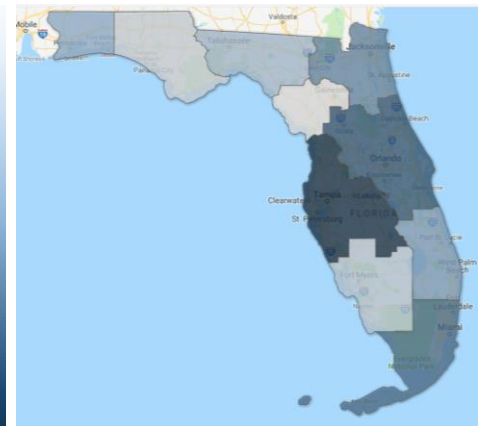
#### Active (n = 2,513)

Gainesville	4%
Panama City	4%
Ft. Myers - Naples	5%
Tallahassee - Thomasville	5%
Mobile, AL - Pensacola, FL	5%
West Palm Beach - Ft. Pierce	9%
Jacksonville	10%
Miami - Ft. Lauderdale	13%
Orlando - Daytona Beach - Melbourne	19%
Tampa - St. Petersburg - Sarasota	27%



#### Released (n = 14,881)

Gainesville	3%
Ft. Myers - Naples	3%
Panama City	4%
Mobile, AL - Pensacola, FL	5%
Tallahassee - Thomasville	5%
West Palm Beach - Ft. Pierce	8%
Jacksonville	12%
Miami - Ft. Lauderdale	13%
Orlando - Daytona Beach - Melbourne	19%
Tampa - St. Petersburg - Sarasota	29%



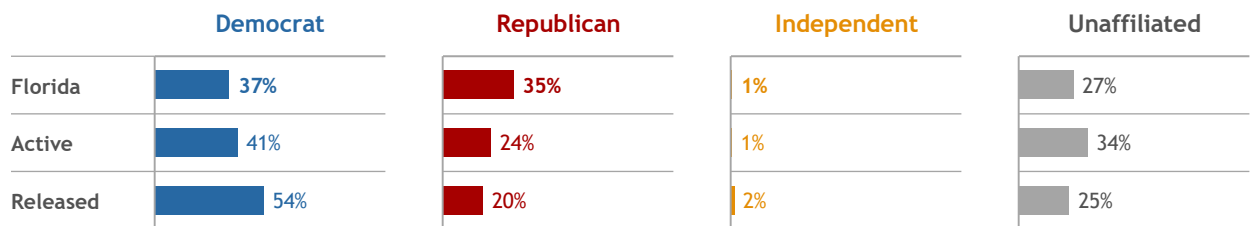
## Republican Felons Are More Likely To Vote

Compared to the total number of voters currently registered in Florida, both active and released felons are more likely to be Democrats (+4% & +17% respectively). While this should cause Republicans to hesitate in supporting re-enfranchisement, it's important to consider actual turnout among the felon population. Please note this data is based on felons' voting behavior prior to being incarcerated.

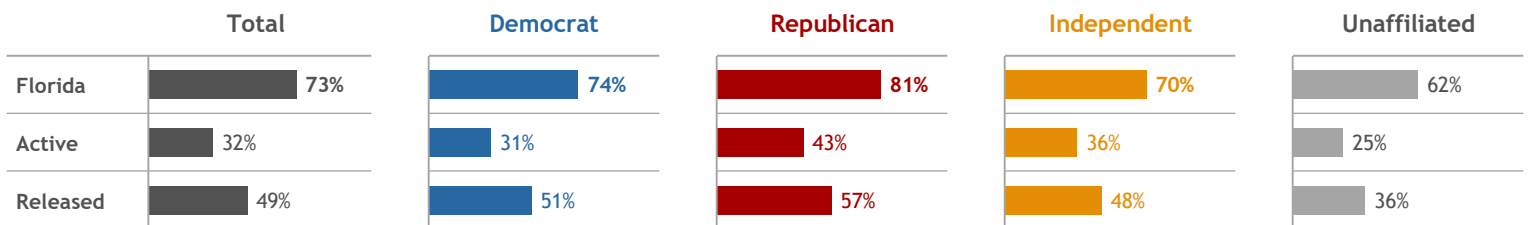
In 2016, Republicans in both the active and released population were much more likely to vote than their Democratic counterparts (+12% & +6%).

This trend held in the 2018 election, where Republican turnout among active and released felons was slightly higher than Democrat turnout (+6% & +2%).

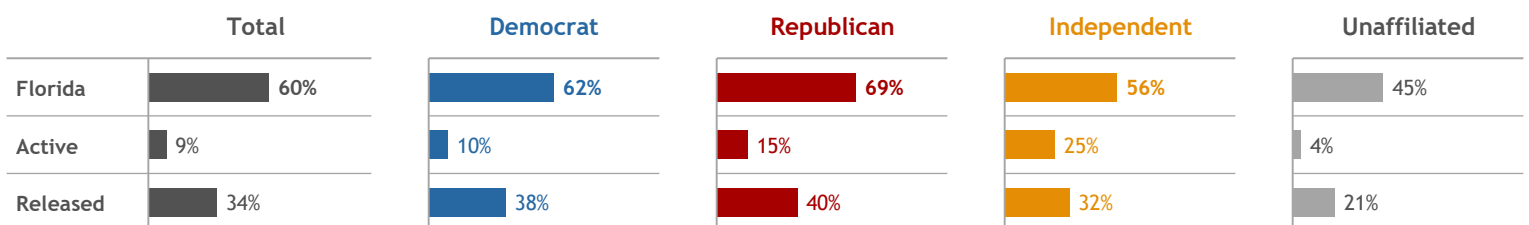
### Party Registration Among Florida, Active Felons, & Released Felons (Out Of Voters On The 2019 Voter File) [Z](#)



### 2016 Turnout Vote History Among Florida, Active Felons, & Released Felons (Out Of Voters On The 2019 Voter File) [Z](#)



### 2018 Turnout Vote History Among Florida, Active Felons, & Released Felons (Out Of Voters On The 2019 Voter File) [Z](#)

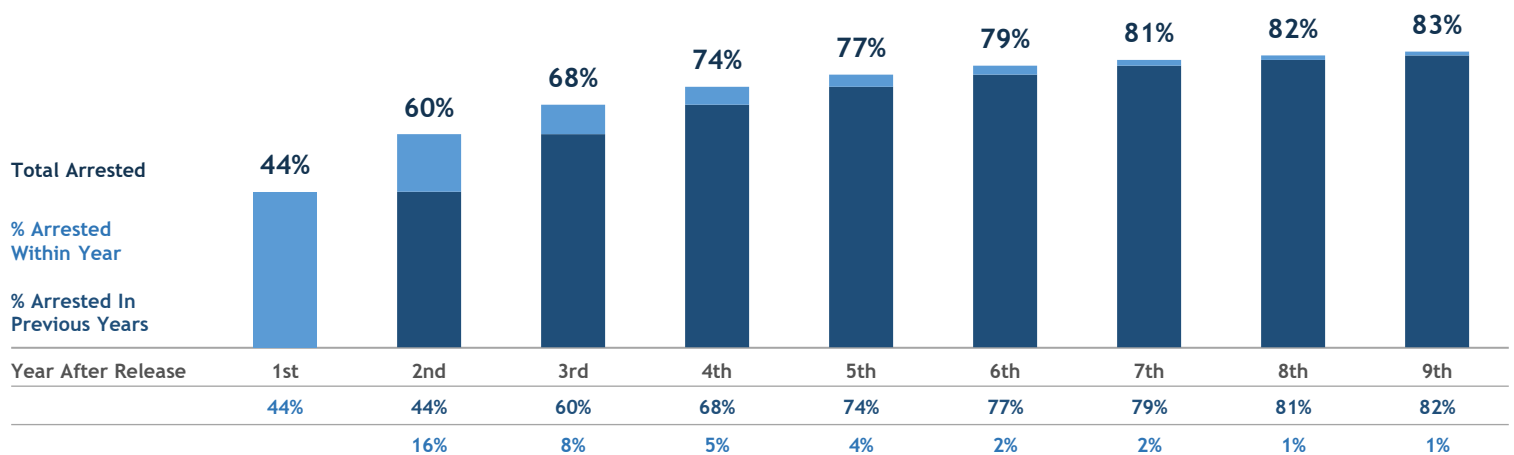


## Recidivism May Further Dampen The Partisan Impact Of Re-Enfranchisement

The U.S. Department of Justice <sup>8</sup> has found that the rate of recidivism is particularly high within the first few years after release. Within the first year, a plurality were arrested (44%) and within the first four years nearly three in four had been arrested (74%).

Felons originally arrested for a violent crime (39%), were less likely to be arrested than those who committed lesser crimes, such as property (51%), drug (43%) or public order crimes (41%). These depressingly high numbers realistically diminish the impact of re-enfranchisement laws, as they typically exclude felons who have committed serious violent or sexual crimes. This may diminish the impact partisanship would have on elections.

### Cumulative % Of Prisoners Arrested By Year After Release



### Cumulative % Of Prisoners Arrested By Year After Release, By Most Serious Offense At Time Of Original Arrest (2005)

Year After Release	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
Violent Arrest	39%	54%	62%	68%	72%	74%	76%	78%	79%
Property Arrest	51%	67%	75%	80%	82%	84%	86%	87%	88%
Drug Arrest	43%	60%	69%	74%	78%	80%	82%	83%	84%
Public Order Arrest	41%	56%	65%	70%	74%	77%	79%	81%	82%

### Cumulative % Of Prisoners Arrested By Year After Release, By Demography

Year After Release	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
24 or younger	52%	69%	77%	81%	85%	87%	88%	89%	90%
25 to 29	46%	63%	72%	77%	81%	83%	85%	86%	87%
30 to 34	44%	60%	69%	74%	77%	80%	82%	83%	84%
35 to 39	45%	61%	70%	75%	78%	81%	82%	84%	84%
40 or older	38%	53%	61%	66%	70%	72%	74%	75%	77%

## Electoral Impacts Of Felon Re-Enfranchisement

Increasing the number of ex-felons who have the ability to vote has implications beyond the topline partisan numbers. This is especially true for campaigns in metro areas of states with a high number of disenfranchised voters compared to their overall population.

One solution is to actively block legislative efforts to relax the constraints on ex-felons' voting rights. However, studies show that public sentiment in the US supports re-enfranchisement, particularly for felons who have completed their full sentence. This is true regardless of political affiliation, with 78% among Democrats and 62% support among Republicans. Re-enfranchisement is also popular across ethnicities, with roughly two in three white and black adults saying they support re-enfranchisement. These results held in the 2018 election results in Florida, where two in three voted to pass Amendment 4.

If recent action in Florida, the state with the highest percent of disenfranchised voters, is the proverbial canary, than this approach is an uphill battle against public sentiment. Further, it places non-incumbent Republicans battling for blue seats at a disadvantage.

Re-enfranchisement is also unlikely to have a significant impact on election results. While active and released felons in Florida are more likely to be registered Democrats than Republicans (+4% & +17% respectively), turnout among those populations was significantly lower among both populations compared to total voters in Florida.

Further, of the felons registered to vote in July 2019, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to have voted in both the 2016 and 2018 elections. This disparity between party turnout was higher in 2016, where 43% of active Republicans and 57% of released Republicans voted, compared to 31% of active Democrats and 51% of released Democrats. A similar turnout for the 2020 Presidential election would diminish the effects of party alignment among ex-felons eligible to vote.

In conclusion, based on the current state of registered voters in Florida, efforts to fight re-enfranchisement are more likely to hurt candidates. These efforts would be an unnecessary expenditure of political capital, as they would go against public sentiment when the likely impact of re-enfranchisement on the outcome of the 2020 election is minimal.

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## About Ragnar Research Partners & Ragnar Labs

Founded in 2016, Ragnar Research combines its partners' over 40 years of experience in public opinion research, including political, academic, and corporate industries. In its short life time, Ragnar Research maintained one of the strongest margins of accuracy in its 2018 primary and general election polling, across federal, state, and local elections.

Among Ragnar Research's founding principles is the belief in and drive to constantly explore the science of polling. To that end, Ragnar Research conducts a quarterly Ragnar Labs project with the goal of strengthening ourselves and contributing to the broader community of Republican pollsters and politics. To learn about past Ragnar Labs projects, reach out to us at [info@ragnarresearch.com](mailto:info@ragnarresearch.com) or visit us at [www.ragnarresearch.com](http://www.ragnarresearch.com).

## Appendix

### Sources

#### 1 State Felon Voting Laws

ProCon.org, "State Felon Voting Laws," last modified July 2, 2019. <http://felonvoting.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000286>. (accessed August 2019)

#### 2 Felon Voting Rights

National Conference Of State Legislatures, "Felon Voting Rights." <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights.aspx> (accessed August 2019)

#### 3 Felony Disenfranchisement Rate

The Sentencing Project, "Felony Disenfranchisement Rate." <https://www.sentencingproject.org/the-facts/#rankings?dataset-option=FDR> (accessed August 2019)

#### 4 Restoration of Voting Rights

HuffPost & YouGov, "HuffPost: Restoration of voting rights."

[big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/tabsHPRestorationofvotingrights20180316.pdf](http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/tabsHPRestorationofvotingrights20180316.pdf). (accessed August 2019)

Web-based interviews conducted March 16-18, 2018; n=1,000 U.S. citizens, aged 18 and over. Respondents were selected from YouGov's opt-in Internet panel using sample matching. A random sample (stratified by gender, age, race, education, geographic region, and voter registration) was selected from the 2014 American Community Study. Voter registration was imputed from the November 2014 Current Population Survey Registration and Voting Supplement. The sample was weighted based on gender, age, race, education, 2012 and 2016 Presidential. The weights range from 0.185 to 6.606, with a mean of one and a standard deviation of 0.837. Margin of error is ±4%.

#### 5 Voting Restoration Amendment

Florida Department of State Division of Elections, "November 6, 2018 General Election Official Results - Constitutional Amendment." <https://results.elections.myflorida.com/Index.asp?ElectionDate=11/6/2018&DATAMODE=>. (accessed August 2019)

#### 6 Registered Party & Geographic Profile Of Active & Released Population

##### 7 2016 & 2018 Turnout Vote History Among Florida, Active Felons, & Released Felons (Out Of Voters On The 2019 Voter File)

Florida Department of Corrections, "Public Records Requests For The OBIS Database." [http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/obis\\_request.html](http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/obis_request.html) (accessed July 5, 2019)

The Florida Department of Corrections database includes 97,034 currently incarcerated felons (active) and 393,378 ex-felons (released). Of those ex-felons, Ragnar Research determined 342,101 remain in Florida based on their last known address. Ragnar Research partnered with The Data Trust to compare both databases to Florida's current voter file. This voter file contains a combination of active and inactive voters. The state of Florida considers a voter to be inactive after the voter fails to respond to three attempts to update their registration. Florida conducts list maintenance every odd year, at which point any voter who has been inactive for two years is removed from their voter file. Due to this, Ragnar Research and Data Trust were only able to match active and released felons who were registered to vote in the last election cycle. Ragnar Research and Data Trust used a combination of active and released felons' full names, date of birth, county and/or zip code (when available) to match them to registered voters. Matches include 2,513 active felons (3% of total active population) and 14,881 released felons (4% of total released population in Florida).

#### 8 2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)

U.S. Department of Justice, "2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)."

<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>. (accessed August 2019)

This study estimates the recidivism patterns of persons released in 2005 from state prisons in 30 states. States were included in this study if the state departments of corrections could provide the prisoner records and the FBI or state identification numbers on persons released from prison during 2005. The fingerprint-based identification numbers were required to obtain the criminal history records on released prisoners. The prisoner records—obtained from the state departments of corrections through the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP)—also included each prisoner's sex, race, Hispanic origin, date of birth, confinement offenses, sentence length, type of prison release, and date of release. The 30 states whose departments of corrections submitted the NCRP data on prisoners released in 2005 included Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Florida released 31,537 prisoners in 2005. Of those released in Florida, 3,350 were used as sample cases.