

AFF Case

Because I believe disenfranchisement destroys democracy, I must affirm the resolution, **Resolved: In a Democratic society, felons ought to retain the right to vote.**

In order to clarify today's round, I would like to offer the following definitions from the New American Edition Webster's Encyclopedia of Dictionaries:

Democratic: A form of government for the people by the will of the majority of the people, based on the conception of equality of man.

Society: People in a general community

Felon: A person who has committed a felony.

Felony: One of several grave crimes punishable by a more stringent sentence than that given for a misdemeanor.

Retain: To maintain possession of.

In order to clarify my contentions, I would like to offer further definitions from the American Heritage Dictionary:

Aristocracy: A government ruled by those best qualified to do so, also defined as the rule of the upper classes.

Autonomy: The right of self government.

Tyrant: Any person or group of persons enforcing their will on others, cruelly and arbitrarily.

Citizen: The state of being a citizen; having the rights and responsibilities of a citizen.

My value in today's debate will be **Freedom**, defined as Liberty of the person from slavery, detention, or oppression. Democracies are based in the idea of personal freedom, and as such, Freedom is the most important value to use when considering what democracies ought to do. My Value Criterion will be **Respecting Autonomy**, which is respecting people's rights to govern themselves. While full autonomy is impossible in any governmental system, limited autonomy is possible in most. When people are given their autonomy, they are also given their freedom, and therefore, the highest value of a democracy is upheld.

Contention 1: To lose the right to vote is to lose autonomy.

Sub A: When citizens are stripped of their autonomy, society is no longer a democracy

A true democracy depends on the autonomy of its citizens. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, "Without power and independence, a town may have good subjects, but it can have no active citizens." Democratic societies require active citizens. When citizens lose their autonomy, the government itself changes. The government is no longer a democracy because people go from being citizens to being subjects, from having freedom to being ruled.

Sub B: A loss of voting rights is a loss of Autonomy

The idea of Autonomy is based in the idea that an individual should be able to determine FOR the self. When autonomy is achieved, freedom is achieved as well. When individuals lose the ability to determine rules and laws for themselves, the individuals lose their autonomy, and by extension, their freedom. When this occurs, they become subjects, and not citizens. They lose the ability to control laws that directly affect them, and lose all freedom. When citizens of a democratic society lose their autonomy, the core of that democratic society is destroyed, changing it to an aristocracy.

Contention 2: Voting Rights are Necessary in a Democratic Society.

Sub A: The Idea of One Person, One Vote is the backbone of a democracy

According to Chief Justice Warren, in the case of Reynolds v Sims, "The conception of political equality ... can mean only one thing - one person, one vote." Warren goes on to state, "As long as ours is a representative form of government, and our legislatures are those instruments of government elected directly by and directly representative of the people, the right to elect legislators in a free and unimpaired fashion is a bedrock of our political system." To deny people their autonomy and impair their ability to elect legislators and representatives is to strike at the very heart of a democracy. Without the idea of "One person, one vote," A democracy quickly shifts to an aristocracy, where the government is controlled by a group of social and political "elite". When a group of people are denied their autonomy, they lose their freedom, and the democracy itself is destroyed.

Sub B: The right to vote in a democratic society prevents tyranny.

As I stated before, To ignore the idea of One person One vote allows for an aristocracy. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his Book Democracy in America states, “We must ask the question whether democratic rule could be so organized and conducted that it would not degenerate into license and result in the tyranny of absolutism, without saving to the people the power so often found necessary of repressing or destroying their enemy...” When felons are not given the right to vote, they lose the means to defend themselves from the repression and destruction at the hands of the majority. When this happens, the majority effectively becomes an uncontrollable tyrant, and the checks placed on the majority disappear as the opponents of the majority lose their voting rights. At this point, the “democratic society” is no longer a true democracy, but rather, an aristocracy.

Contention 3: Felons Deserve Autonomy

Sub A: Felons are still Citizens.

Felons, though they have committed crimes, still deserve their autonomy. Felons are still human beings, and they are still citizens. Felons in the United States are still required to pay taxes, and they are still expected to follow the law. Felons are afforded the same protection under the law as law abiding citizens. They are still given their due process rights, and their rights to property and safety are still protected by the law enforcement. As I have already proven, to deny a citizen of a democratic society the right to vote, is to damage the foundation of that democratic society and ultimately warp it into an aristocracy, and NOT a democracy. Therefore, to protect DEMOCRATIC values, we must give all citizens the right to vote.

Sub B: Felon Disenfranchisement creates a permanent underclass of citizens.

Felon Disenfranchisement robs an entire group of citizens their right to vote. Any citizen categorized as a felon loses this, and many other important rights. Important to note however, is the fact that once a citizen becomes a felon, he stays that way forever. If a citizen is convicted of carrying a felonious amount of marijuana with them at the age of 18, they will maintain that label of felon for the rest of their lives. With that label, comes the loss of the rights I mentioned above, the most important to this round being the right to vote. Once a citizen is convicted of a felony, they will always be a felon, and they will always have the right to vote restricted. As I've proven already, to deny a citizen the right to vote in a democratic society is to undermine and destroy that democracy as a whole. When we deny a citizen the right to vote for their entire lives, we undermine the democracy that much more.

I now stand open for points of clarification and cross examination.