VOTING AND SUBSEQUENT CRIME AND ARREST: EVIDENCE FROM A COMMUNITY SAMPLE

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I. INTRODUCTION

A number of recent studies have examined the origins and consequences of felon disenfranchisement laws in the United States. These studies have identified a large and growing group of citizens who have lost the right to vote because of felony convictions.[1] The burden has fallen particularly heavily on minority citizens, with

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1. *See* Angela Behrens et al., *Ballot Manipulation and the 'Menace of Negro Domination': Racial Threat and Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 1850-2002*, 109 Am. J. Soc. 559 (2003); Alec C. Ewald, *'Civil Death': The Ideological Paradox of Criminal Disenfranchisement Law in the United States*, 2002 Wis. L. Rev. 1045 (2002); Jamie Fellner & Marc Mauer, Human Rights Watch and The Sentencing Project, Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States 1 (1998); Christopher Uggen & Jeff Manza, *Democratic Contraction? The Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States*, 67 Am. Soc. Rev. 777 (2002).

nearly two million African Americans currently disenfranchised.[2] American laws are uniquely restrictive on the international scene.[3] Since laws that regulate voting rights for felons and ex-felons are specific to each state—ranging from states with no restrictions to states enforcing lifetime bans on participation—there is wide variation in the size and distribution of the disenfranchised population.[4] A number of studies have suggested that disenfranchisement is likely to have impacted both electoral turnout and, in a handful of cases, even electoral outcomes.[5]

The existing research literature considering the *political* implications of disenfranchisement hardly exhausts the range of important issues to consider. One of the most important issues, the relationship between political participation and subsequent criminal activity, has yet to be systematically addressed. If voting is unrelated to later criminal behavior, then legal changes that extend the franchise to convicted felons are unlikely to affect crime or desistance rates. In that case, current policy debates over felon disenfranchisement laws should pivot primarily on questions of political rights and democracy. However, if those who vote are actually less likely to commit new crimes, legal changes easing the right to vote for felons may facilitate reintegration efforts and reduce rates of recidivism.

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2. Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 1, at 798.

3. *See* Alec C. Ewald, Of Constitutions, Politics, and Punishment: Criminal Disfranchisement Law in Comparative Context (Aug. 2002) (unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Boston) (on file with authors) (evaluating felon disenfranchisement policies in various countries). *See also* Jeff Manza & Christopher Uggen, *Punishment and Democracy: The Disenfranchisement of Nonincarcerated Felons in the United States*, 2 Persp. on Pol. 491, 501 (2004) (stating that the United States "stands alone" in disenfranchising large numbers of non-incarcerated felons); Brandon Rottinghaus, International Foundation for Election Systems, *Incarceration and Enfranchisement: International Practices, Impact, and Recommendations for Reform* 24–25 (2003), *at* http://www.ifes.org/research_comm/08_18_03_Manatt_Brandon_Rottinghaus.pdf (comparing policies of countries that do not allow prisoners to vote and noting that, among those compared, U.S. policies were the most restrictive).

4. Fellner & Mauer, *supra* note 1, at 6.

5. *See, e.g.*, Michael P. McDonald & Samuel L. Popkin, *The Myth of the Vanishing Voter*, 95 Am. Pol. Sci. Rev. 963, 971 (2001); Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 1, at 789.

The reintegrative effects of voting may have broader implications. The right to vote is one of the defining elements of citizenship in a democratic polity[6] and participation in democratic rituals such as elections affirms membership in the larger community for individuals and groups.[7] Because of all that voting represents in this society, voting can be viewed as a proxy for other kinds of civic engagement associated with the avoidance of illegal activity.

Establishing a causal relationship between voting, or civic reintegration more generally, and recidivism would require a large-scale longitudinal survey that tracked released offenders in their communities and closely monitored changes in their political and criminal behavior. At present, no such data exist.[8] Nevertheless, it is possible to bring some empirical data to bear on this question now. In this paper, we present a simple analysis of the relationship between voting and crime using data we have collected from the Youth Development Study, a prospective longitudinal investigation of a cohort of former Minnesota public school students.[9]

We will first establish a correlation between voting and crime by examining whether those who voted in the 1996 presidential election had lower rates of arrest, incarceration, and self-reported

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6. *See* Judith N. Shklar, American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion 25–62 (1991) (discussing the way in which the struggle for citizenship in the United States has led to a symbolic satisfaction derived from voting as affirmation of citizenship).

7. *See* Alexander A. Schuessler, A Logic of Expressive Choice (2000); Christopher Uggen et al., *Less than the Average Citizen: Stigma, Role Transition, and the Civic Reintegration of Convicted Felons*, *in* After Crime and Punishment 261, 264 (Shadd Maruna & Russ Immarigeon eds., 2004); Adam Winkler, *Expressive Voting*, 68 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 338, 368 (1993).

8. There are longitudinal studies such as the National Longitudinal Study of Youth or the Panel Study of Income Dynamics that include some information about criminal background, but these surveys do not include information about political participation. *See* Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Labor, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, at http://www.bls.gov/nls/home.htm (last visited Oct. 10, 2004); Inst. for Soc. Research, Panel Study of Income Dynamics, at http://psidonline.isr.umich.edu/ (last visited Oct. 10, 2004). The handful of election panel studies, such as the panels associated with the American National Election Study, do not include any information about criminal history. *See* Nat'l Election Studies, American Nat'l Election Study, at http://www.umich.edu/~nes/ (last visited Oct. 10, 2004).

9. Jeylan T. Mortimer, Working and Growing Up in America 29 (2003).

criminal behavior in the years following this election than those who did not participate. We then conduct a logistic regression analysis to test whether this correlation is spurious due to factors that are associated with both voting and crime. By statistically controlling for prior self-reported and official criminal behavior and background factors such as race, gender, education, employment, and marital status, we can learn the extent to which the raw correlation is due to the self-selection of persons at low risk of crime into voting. While this approach cannot firmly establish political participation as a cause of desistance from crime, it allows us to rule out some of the most compelling alternative explanations for the correlation. We will estimate the net effect of voting on crime by statistically controlling for several factors closely linked to both behaviors.

II. CIVIC REINTEGRATION AND DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

A. Insights from Criminology and Prior Research

We might expect a relationship between political participation and recidivism for a number of reasons. Solid empirical evidence demonstrates that former criminal offenders who enter stable work[10] and family relationships[11] are most likely to desist from crime. In addition to securing stable employment and family situations, convicted felons are expected to return to their communities and either resume or begin their lives as active and law-abiding citizens. The primary causal mechanism hypothesized in these studies is one of informal social control, in which attachment to social institutions such as families and labor markets increase the reciprocal obligations between people and provide individuals with a stake in conforming behavior.[12] Social-psychological theories of symbolic interactionism, while differing from informal social control theories in some respects, make a similar prediction that the

10. *See* Robert Sampson & John Laub, *Crime and Deviance over the Life Course: The Salience of Adult Social Bonds*, 55 Am. Soc. Rev. 609, 617–18 (1990); Christopher Uggen, *Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism*, 65 Am. Soc. Rev. 529, 542 (2000).

11. John Laub et al., *Trajectories of Change in Criminal Offending: Good Marriages and the Desistance Process*, 63 Am. Soc. Rev. 225, 237 (1998).

12. Robert Sampson & John Laub, Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life 18 (1993).

assumption of work and family roles facilitates the development of an identity as a productive and responsible law-abiding citizen.[13]

Although the issue has received scant research attention in the study of desistance from crime, reintegration as a voting member of one's community would appear to be a logical analog to work and family reintegration. As Shadd Maruna notes in a recent study of desistance, the desire to "be productive and give something back to society" appears to be critical to the desistance process.[14] To date, however, much of the research on this question has been based on small-scale interview projects, or correlational studies based on highly selected samples.[15]

B. Insights from Democratic Theory

A second theory linking political participation to reduced crime derives from the literature on democracy. Conventional theories of democracy typically emphasize instruments available for citizens to control their government—through elections, public opinion, or popular revolts.[16] However, some democratic theorists focus on the benefits to the individuals who participate in democratic processes. In this latter view of democracy, individuals become citizens in part through the "educative" or "constitutive" impact of political participation.[17]

This view was first suggested by de Tocqueville and Mill, with the latter's classical statement explicitly referencing de

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13. Ross Matsueda & Karen Heimer, *A Symbolic Interactionist Theory of Role-Transitions, Role-Commitments, and Delinquency, in* Developmental Theories of Crime and Delinquency 163, 196 (Terence P. Thornberry ed., 1997); Uggen et al., *supra* note 7, at 264.

14. Shadd Maruna, Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives 88 (American Psychological Association 2001).

15. *See, e.g., id.*; Uggen et al., *supra* note 7, at 267; Christopher Uggen & Jennifer Janikula, *Volunteerism and Arrest in the Transition to Adulthood*, 78 Soc. Forces 331, 337 (1999).

16. *See, e.g.*, The Works of Jeremy Bentham, (John Bowring ed., 1843); *see also* Carole Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory 14, 19–20 (1970).

17. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), *reprinted in* Essays on Politics and Society: Collected Works 371, 467–69 (J.M. Robson ed., 1977); Pateman, *supra* note 16, at 109–10; Benjamin R. Barber, Strong Democracy 265–66 (1984).

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.[18] According to Mill, when citizens participate regularly in politics, they develop an explicit identification with the polity and its norms and values.[19] In this sense, democracy fosters citizenship. In the narrowest reading of the constitutive argument, political participation produces citizens with a generalized sense of efficacy, who believe that they have a stake in the political system. This, in turn, fosters continued political participation.[20] Some classical studies provide evidence in support of this view.[21] More recently, the National Commission on Electoral Reform endorsed the idea that the greater an individual's participation in the political process, the more fair the individual is likely to consider the system.[22]

Theories of "expressive voting"[23] and communitarian and republican theories of government[24] hold that the right to vote is

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18. Mill, *supra* note 17, at 468; *see* 1 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America 243–44 (Henry Reeve trans., Phillips Bradley ed., Knopf 1990) (1840) (observing that Americans become patriots through their participation in government); *id.* at 317–18 (observing that Americans are educated though their participation in government).

19. Mill, *supra* note 17, at 469.

20. M. Margaret Conway, Political Participation in the United States 185–86 (3d ed. 2000).

21. *See* Gabriel A. Almond & Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations 246–53 (1963) (discussing a study that determined a person's ability to participate within the political system often leads to an "attachment" or "loyalty" to that system); Lester W. Milbrath & M. L. Goel, Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics? 57–59 (1977) (discussing findings of two studies, both of which essentially conclude that "persons who feel efficacious participate at a higher level [in the political system] than those who lack such feelings."); M. Kent Jennings & Richard G. Niemi, Generations and Politics: A Panel Study of Young Adults and Their Parents (1981) (discussing an eight-year study that analyzed change and continuity in peoples' political estimations over generations).

22. John Mark Hansen, *Sizing the Problem*, *in* To Assure Pride and Confidence in the Electoral Process: the Final Report of the Commission's Task Force 126 (Nat'l Comm. on Fed. Election Reform 2001).

23. *See* Dennis F. Thompson, Just Elections 19–64 (2001); Adam Winkler, *Expressive Voting*, 68 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 330, 363–64 (1993); Alexander Schuessler, A Logic of Expressive Choice 11–62 (2000).

24. *See* Sanford Levinson, Constitutional Faith 62–63 (1988); Michael Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice 201–02 (1982); Frank Michelman, *Conceptions of Democracy in American Constitutional Argument: Voting Rights*, 41 Fla. L. Rev. 443, 451 (1989).

important precisely because it helps make individuals into democratic citizens. In the words of one legal theorist

> the vote should be protected not simply because it enables individuals to pursue political ends, but also because voting is a meaningful participatory act through which individuals create and affirm their membership in the community and thereby transform their identities both as individuals and as part of a greater collectivity."[25]

The expressivist theories are today the leading response to rational choice models of voter turnout,[26] suggesting that people participate in part because elections give them an opportunity to express their civic identities.[27]

More expansive views of the impact of participation have also been developed, but typically in relation to forms of participation that extend beyond the mere act of voting. In her modern reconstruction of the idea of participatory democracy, for example, Pateman argues that

> the major function of participation in the theory of *participatory* democracy is . . . an educative one . . . including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of experience in democratic skills and procedures. . . . For a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e., a society where all political systems have been democratized and socialization through participation can take place in all areas.[28]

Other advocates of "strong democracy"[29] and deliberative democracy[30] emphasize forms of participation that go beyond the

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25. Winkler, *supra* note 23, at 331.

26. Rational choice models posit that voters make the decision to participate by weighing the anticipated costs and benefits of voting. *See* John H. Aldrich, *Rational Choice and Turnout*, 37 Am. J. Pol. Sci. 246 (1993).

27. *See* Schuessler, *supra* note 23, at 46; Thompson, *supra* note 23, at 22–24.

28. Pateman, *supra* note 16, at 42–43.

29. *See* Barber, *supra* note 17, at 117–313.

30. *See* Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Thomas Burger trans., M.I.T. Press 1989) (1962); *see also* Andrew Jonathan Perrin, Civil Society and the Democratic Imagination (2001) (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of California (Berkeley)) (on file with Digital Dissertations, File No. AAT 3025178)

"mere" act of voting and involve citizens talking about politics.[31] McAdam's analysis of the impact of social movement activism on the lives of activists and non-activists provides powerful evidence of the constitutive and life-changing experience of high-risk activism.[32] Although the political life of felons extends to myriad activities,[33] the analysis below will focus on a single fundamental question about political participation: How is voting related to crime and recidivism?

III. DATA AND MEASURES

The criminological and political theory literature reviewed in the previous section suggest some possible links between civic participation and desistance, but the case has yet to be proven. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews we have presented elsewhere[34] are suggestive, but not ideally suited to test ideas about the possible impact of civic integration. Moreover, our interviews hardly provide unambiguous evidence in support of such an impact. To develop a more systematic assessment, we examine some longitudinal survey data containing information about both voting and criminal behavior.

The study involves a survey of the effects of voting participation in the 1996 election upon self-reported crime and arrest in the years from 1997 to 2000. We consider both the simple correlation or association between voting and crime, as well as the net impact of voting after statistically controlling the effects of race, sex, education, marital status, employment, and anti-social behavior.

(noting that political decisions are reached through a combination of consensus decision-making derived from participation and electoral outcomes).

31. *See* Nina Eliasoph, Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life 11–12, 277–78 (1998) (arguing that democratic citizenship requires a vibrant public sphere—defined as associations and institutions in which private citizens carry on conversations about issues of common concern); *see also* Perrin, *supra* note 30, at 171 (arguing that "citizens gain capacities for intelligent, strategic operation in the public sphere by gathering cues and resources from a variety of civic contexts and experiences.").

32. Doug McAdam, Freedom Summer 127–45 (1988); Doug McAdam, *The Biographical Consequences of Activism*, 54 Am. Soc. Rev. 744, 757–58 (1989).

33. *See* Christopher Uggen & Jeff Manza, *Lost Voices: The Civic and Political Views of Disfranchised Felons in* Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration 165, 180–83 (Mary Pattillo et al. eds., 2004).

34. Uggen et al., *supra* note 7, at 269–86.

We first explore whether voting is at all related to crime and arrest and then address the more complicated issue of whether voting is an independent cause of desistance from crime. We analyze data from the Youth Development Study (YDS), a survey of 1,000 persons who began the study in 1988 as ninth-graders in St. Paul, Minnesota public schools.[35] The YDS offers a general sample, rather than a focused group of convicted felons. It is useful for our purposes, however, because it is among the very few existing data sets (if not the sole data set) that include information on both criminal behavior and voting. Self-reported crime and arrest data are drawn from data collected between 1988 and 2000. Political participation questions for the 1996 election are taken from the twelfth survey wave in 2000, when a total of 757 respondents, aged twenty-six to twenty-seven, remained in the sample. Subsequent criminal behavior is measured by self-reported indicators of property crimes and violence (reported in 1998 and 1999 for the years 1997 and 1998) and arrest and incarceration (reported in 2000 for the 1997–2000 period). Information on marital status, employment, and educational attainment were taken from the 1995 survey so that these background characteristics would precede both the 1996 voting data and the 1997-2000 information on subsequent criminal behavior. Finally, self-reported crime and arrest data prior to 1996, important statistical controls in this analysis, were taken from earlier retrospective reports of arrest, drunk driving, shoplifting, and violence.

These longitudinal data are important because a negative statistical association between voting and arrest may be an artifact of some unmeasured characteristic—such as a propensity for antisocial behavior—reflected in both processes. We exploit the longitudinal nature of the YDS to examine the effects of voting on subsequent arrest after statistically controlling for measures of self-reported deviance that would indicate antisocial propensity. In addition to race, sex, education, marital status, and employment, we control for arrest prior to 1996 and three indicators of common self-reported deviance: drunk driving, shoplifting, and hitting or threatening to hit another person. Our goal in this analysis is to determine whether the voting effect is signaling a real "prosocial

35. Mortimer, *supra* note 9, at 32–33, 36.

orientation" linked to desistance from crime, or whether it is simply capturing stable, underlying differences across respondents in social background and criminal history.

Table 1. Variable Descriptions and Descriptive Statistics for Youth Development Study

Variable	Description	Percentage/ Mean
Voting		
1996 voting	Percentage reporting voting in the 1996 presidential election	65.2
Background		
Female	Percentage female	56.5
White	Percentage reporting white race	76.7
Years education in 1995	Number of years of education	13.6 (1.8)
Marriage in 1995	Percentage married	11.6
Employed in 1995	Percentage employed	82.3
Subsequent Crime		
Arrested 1997-2000	Percentage reporting arrest in 1997, 1998, 1999, or 2000	8.82
Incarcerated 1997-2000	Percentage reporting incarceration in jail or prison in 1997, 1998, 1999, or 2000	7.39
Violent crime 1997-1998	Percentage reporting hitting or threatening to hit someone, fighting, or robbing someone	32.3
Property crime 1997-1998	Percentage reporting shoplifting, theft, check forgery, or burglary	13.4
Any crime 1997-1998	Percentage reporting at least one property or violent offense in 1998 or 1999	38.3
Prior Deviance		
Arrest prior to 1996	Percentage arrested prior to 1996	18.7
Prior drunk driving	Percentage reporting driving after having too much to drink during high school (1988-1991)	28.4
Prior shoplifting	Percentage reporting shoplifting during high school (1988-1991)	38.0
Prior violence	Percentage reporting hitting or threatening to hit someone during high school (1988-1991)	41.4

Note: Standard deviations for continuous variables are in parentheses.

Variable descriptions and summary statistics for each of these measures are shown in Table 1. Self-reported turnout rates were relatively high for this Minnesota cohort, with 65% of respondents reporting that they voted in 1996, one of the first federal elections in which they would have been eligible to cast ballots, as against 59.6% of people aged eighteen to twenty-four in that election in Minnesota, a high-turnout state.[36] At the time of data collection in 2000, approximately 57% of the remaining sample was female and about three-fourths of respondents were white.[37] By 1995, the cohort had achieved an average of 13.6 years of education and a good number were currently enrolled in post-secondary education. Only 12% were married by 1995 and approximately 82% were employed.

With regard to official measures of crime, about 9% reported being arrested and 7% reported being incarcerated at some point in the four years following the 1996 election. Prior to 1996, about 19% reported being arrested. With regard to self-reported criminality, we consider both property and violent offenses. About 38% of the sample indicated that they had committed at least one property crime or act of violence in the 1997-1998 period. The property crime indicator flags those who reported shoplifting, theft, forgery, and burglary. Overall, approximately 13% of the sample reported at least one of these offenses in 1997 or 1998. The violence indicator measures those

36. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex and Age, for States: November 1996* (Aug. 17, 1998), *available at* http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/96cps/tab4B.txt (last visited June 9, 2004). There are a number of methodological issues raised by reliance on self-reported turnout. Some non-voting survey respondents claim to have voted, which may be explained by Bernstein's finding that "those who are under the most pressure to vote are the ones most likely to misrepresent their behavior when they fail to do so." This includes better-educated and more privileged groups with much lower levels of criminal activity, and also minorities in politically charged areas. *See* Robert Bernstein et al., *Overreporting Voting: Why It Happens and Why It Matters*, 65 Pub. Opinion Q. 22, 41 (2001).

37. As in other longitudinal surveys, race and family income are associated with sample attrition in the YDS. In supplementary analysis, however, we found no evidence that estimates reported here are biased by sample selectivity or attrition. For example, the magnitude and direction of the voting effects appear to be consistent across income and racial groups, although the estimated standard errors are larger, and fewer of the relationships are statistically significant in the subgroup analyses. More complete information about YDS sample attrition can be found in Mortimer, *supra* note 9, at 36–37, and further details about the crime measures are reported in Uggen & Janikula, *supra* note 15, at 337.

who reported hitting or threatening to hit someone, being involved in a physical fight, or robbing someone by force. The combined prevalence of these behaviors is about 38% overall.

In sum, the YDS sample reflects the St. Paul, Minnesota community from which it is drawn,[38] tracking a cohort of young adults as they gain eligibility to vote, transition to adult work and family roles, and desist from crime and minor deviance. As in other samples of young adults from the general population,[39] we find high rates of self-reported crime and deviance, low rates of arrest, and age-appropriate levels of marital formation, employment, and educational attainment.

IV. RESULTS

We first present simple bivariate results.[40] These are shown in figures contrasting the percentage of voters who go on to commit crime or to be arrested with the percentage of non-voters who go on to commit crime or to be arrested. We then present multivariate results in tables with regression coefficients. These figures show the relationship between voting and crime while simultaneously controlling for the effects of other variables that could alter this relationship, such as prior deviance and marital status.

A. Bivariate Relationships

1. Voting is Correlated with Arrest and Incarceration

We first examine the most basic question about the relationship between political participation and criminality. Is there any correlation between voting and crime, arrest, and incarceration? Figure 1 shows the bivariate relationship between voting in 1996 and subsequent arrest and incarceration. The figure shows clear differences in rates of arrest and incarceration by levels of political participation. Approximately 16% of the non-voters were arrested

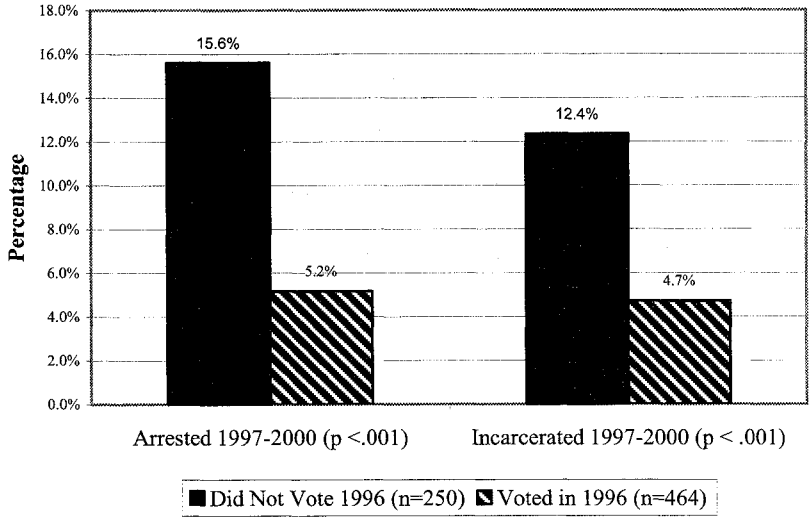
38. *See* Mortimer, *supra* note 9, at 241.

39. *See, e.g.*, Delbert Elliott, *National Youth Survey: Wave VII, 1987* (2002), ICPSR, File No. 6542, *available at* http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/access/index.html; Lloyd D. Johnston et al., *Monitoring The Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth (12th-Grade Survey)* (2001), ICPSR, File No. 3425, *available at* http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/access/index.html.

40. Results of study, considering two variables.

between 1997 and 2000, relative to about 5% of the voters. Similarly, approximately 12% of the non-voters were incarcerated in jail or prison between 1997 and 2000, relative to less than 5% of the voters. Both of these contrasts represent statistically significant differences ($p < .001$) between those who participated in the 1996 election and those who did not participate.

Figure 1. Percentage Arrested and Incarcerated in 1997-2000 among Voters and Non-Voters in 1996

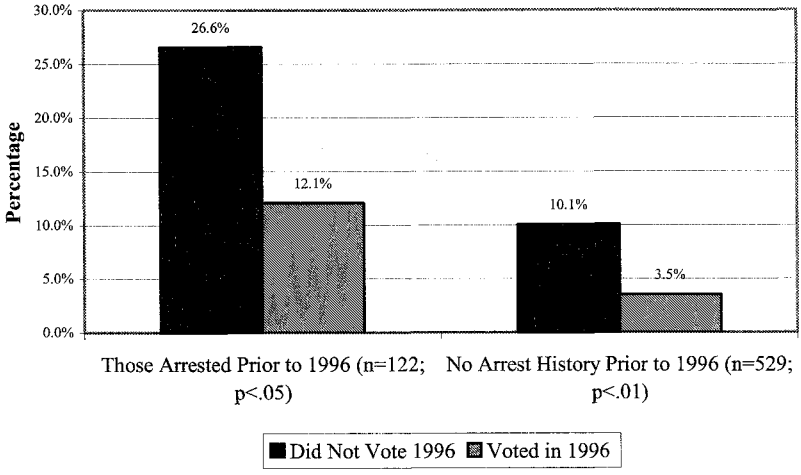


2. Voting is Correlated with Re-arrest among those with Arrest Histories

The YDS is a heterogeneous sample with regard to criminal history, but approximately 80% of the respondents had no prior arrests at the time of the 1996 election. We therefore split the sample into two groups to distinguish those with a prior arrest history from those with no such history. This allows us to learn whether the bivariate correlation shown in Figure 1 holds across different levels of criminal history. Figure 2 suggests that this is indeed the case. Among former arrestees, about 27% of the non-voters were re-arrested, relative to 12% of the voters. These results suggest that

there is at least some correlation between voting in 1996 and recidivism in 1997–2000 among people who have had some official contact with the criminal justice system.

Figure 2. Percentage Arrested in 1997-2000 among Voters and Non-Voters in 1996, by Arrest History

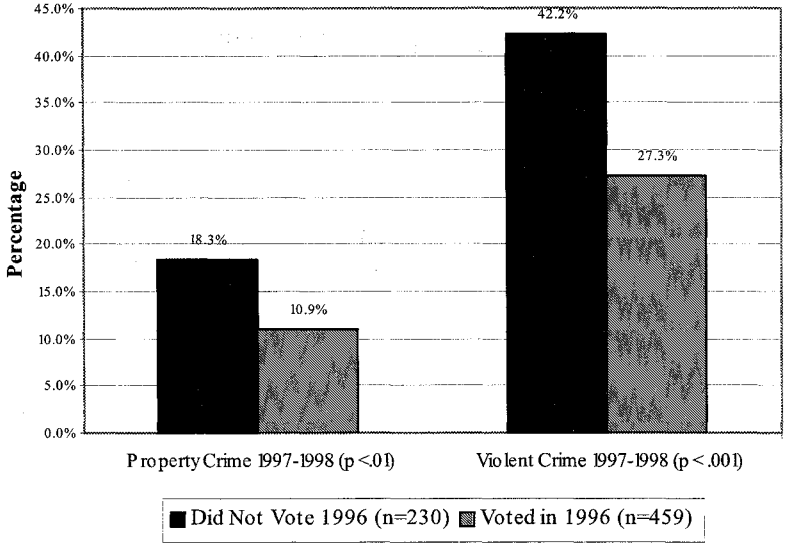


In Minnesota, those convicted of felonies may not vote until they have completed all prison, parole, or probation supervision. Therefore, it may be the case that the differences in re-arrest by voting status are due to *legal* restrictions on the ability of arrestees to vote—some of them may have been ineligible to vote in the 1996 election. The contrast shown in the right-hand side of Figure 2, however, suggests that this is unlikely to explain the correlation between voting and subsequent arrest. Even among those with no prior arrest history, about 10% of the non-voters were arrested, compared to less than 4% of the voters. Although there is less statistical power to detect these effects in the subgroup analysis in Figure 2 than in the analysis shown in Figure 1, both of these contrasts are again statistically significant ($p < .05$). Therefore, the relationship between voting and subsequent arrest does not appear to depend on criminal history.

3. Voting is Correlated with Subsequent Self-Reported Crime

Arrest is an important measure of official contact with the criminal justice system, but a flawed measure of criminal behavior.[41] Many crimes go unreported and official arrest data may be subject to biases relating to class, race, and other factors. If civic participation is truly related to desistance from crime, however, voting effects should be visible on self-reported criminal behavior as well as arrest and incarceration. Figure 3 considers the relationship between voting and common property crimes and violent behavior. The figure indicates that about 11% of the voters reported a property crime, compared to about 18% of the non-voters. Similarly, about 27% of the voters reported violence or threats of violence, relative to about 42% of the non-voters. Both of these contrasts represent statistically significant differences ($p < .01$).

Figure 3. Self-Reported Property Crimes and Violence in 1997-1998 among Voters and Non-Voters in 1996



41. *See, e.g.*, David Huizinga & Delbert S. Elliott, *Reassessing the Reliability and Validity of Self-Report Delinquency Measures*, 2 J. Quantitative Criminology 293, 323 (1986).

After examining Figures 1, 2, and 3, the answer to our first question about the basic relationship between crime and voting is clear: we find a significant bivariate association between voting and subsequent crime. Those who vote are less likely to be arrested and incarcerated, and less likely to report committing a range of property and violent offenses. Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, this relationship cannot be solely attributed to prior criminal history; voting is negatively correlated with subsequent crime among those with and those without a prior criminal history.

B. Multivariate Analysis

1. The Correlation between Voting and Arrest is Reduced when Controlling for Other Factors

Although Figures 1, 2, and 3 present an intriguing pattern of results, they show a correlation that may or may not be indicative of an underlying causal relationship. As our interviews with prisoners suggested, it seems likely that voting is correlated with other factors that are closely related to arrest. For example, race and sex are related to both processes. Women and whites had significantly higher turnout rates than men and African Americans in the 1996 election[42] as well as much lower rates of arrest.[43] Similarly, education is a very strong predictor of voter turnout in these data[44] and is also linked to crime and arrest.[45]

We begin to statistically control for the effects of these factors in Table 2. The table shows the effects of 1996 voter turnout on arrest in 1997-2000. Model 1 shows the significant bivariate association reported above in Figure 1. The exponentiated logistic regression coefficients may be interpreted as changes in the odds of arrest in these equations, such that the -1.044 voting effect in Model1 indicates a rate of arrest for voters that is a little more than one-third the corresponding rate for non-voters (e-1.044 = .35). Model 2,

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42. U.S. Bureau Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2002 253 (2003).

43. U.S. Dep't of Justice, Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 2002 380–84 (2003).

44. Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 1, at 791.

45. U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997* (June 1, 2000), ICPSR, File No. 2598, *available at* http://webapp.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR-STUDY/02598.xml.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting 1997-2000 Arrest

	ARRESTED 1997-2000		
Variable	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Political Participation			
1996 voting (1=voted)	-1.044** (.321)	-.677* (.340)	-.563 (.353)
Background			
White (vs. nonwhite)		-.945** (.350)	-1.156** (.377)
Female		-.976** (.346)	-.692* (.379)
1995 years education		-.366** (.108)	-.368** (.112)
1995 married		-.076 (.529)	-.007 (.543)
1995 employed		-.208 (.424)	-.209 (.436)
Prior Deviance			
Arrest prior to 1996			.696# (.382)
Prior drunk driving			.676# (.384)
Prior shoplifting			.847* (.383)
Prior violence			-.610 (.388)
Constant	-1.928** (.218)	3.828** (1.445)	3.213* (1.544)
Number of Cases	579	579	579
-2 Log Likelihood	295.8**	263.7**	248.4**

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Models also include two dichotomous indicator variables for cases missing education and marital status information.
# $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

however, shows that a good portion of this voting effect on arrest is explained by differences in race, gender, and education levels of voters and non-voters. Controlling for the effects of education, marital and employment statuses are only weak predictors at this stage of the life course (most respondents were approximately twenty-one to twenty-two years of age in 1995). Whites, females, and those with greater education are unlikely to be arrested relative to non-whites, males, and those with fewer years of education.

Nevertheless, the effect of voting is not rendered spurious by the inclusion of these background characteristics.

Finally, in Model 3, we no longer detect a statistically significant voting effect (p = .110) once the effects of prior criminal behavior and arrest are statistically controlled. This more stringent test suggests that the voting effect is at least partially a product of antisocial propensity—insofar as we can name and measure this construct with prior arrest and deviance indicators. Although the effect of voting is no longer statistically significant in Model 3 in either the arrest or incarceration models,[46] this does not necessarily indicate that the effect of voting is irrelevant with respect to subsequent crime. In predicting a relatively rare event such as arrest in a sample of this size, a large effect would be required to reach statistical significance. The magnitude and direction of the estimated voting effect warrant further investigation into the relationship.

2. The Correlation between Voting and Self-Reported Crime is Reduced when Controlling for Other Factors

We next consider the relation between voting and self-reported crime and deviance in Table 3. Voting in 1996 is again a strong negative predictor in the equation predicting any self-reported crime in 1997–1998. For this analysis, the indicator flags any crime, whether it is a property offense (shoplifting, theft, forgery, and burglary) or an act of violence (hitting or threatening to hit, fighting, and robbery). Although the voting effect is partially mediated by background characteristics and prior criminal behavior in Models 2 and 3, respectively, political participation remains a statistically significant predictor in all models. In the final model, which adjusts estimated voting effects for the degree of prior official and self-reported criminal history, the odds of committing any self-reported crime are approximately .60 times as high for voters as for non-voters (e-.506 = .60).

As with the arrest outcome, the self-reported crime results again show a strong correlation between voting and criminal behavior. In contrast to the final arrest model, however, a statistically significant voting effect remains in all three models predicting any crime of property or violence. When the crime items

46. The incarceration model is not shown, but is available upon request.

are examined individually, or added in a summative scale and analyzed using ordinary least squares regression, the results tend to parallel those shown in the figures and Tables 2 and 3. A large bivariate relationship is partially mediated by indicators of socioeconomic status (mainly education) and prior official and self-reported criminal behavior. Regardless of the particular crime

Table 3. Logistic Regression Predicting 1997-1998 Self-Reported Crime

	ANY PROPERTY/VIOLENCE 1997-98		
Variable	***Model 1***	***Model 2***	***Model 3***
Political Participation			
1996 voting (1=voted)	-.857** (.181)	-.617** (.194)	-.506** (.210)
Background			
White (vs. nonwhite)		-.921** (.222)	-1.002** (.244)
Female		-.503** (.183)	-.110 (.208)
1995 years education		-.154** (.056)	-.129* (.060)
1995 married		.277 (.270)	.479 (.213)
1995 employed		-.347 (.234)	-.304 (.257)
Prior Deviance			
Arrest prior to 1996			.770** (.265)
Prior drunk driving			.253 (.225)
Prior shoplifting			.671** (.208)
Prior violence			1.095** (.202)
Constant	.095 (.146)	3.223** (.786)	1.530# (.858)
Number of Cases	588	588	588
-2 Log Likelihood	760.8**	711.7**	633.7**

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Models also include two dichotomous indicator variables for cases missing education and marital status information.

# $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

outcome we examined, the voting effect is consistently negative in direction, but does not consistently reach standard levels of statistical significance ($p < .05$) in the final models that include all of the relevant statistical controls.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Insights from Convicted Felons

We first encountered the possibility that civic reintegration may be connected to motivations for desistance in a series of in-depth interviews we conducted with convicted felons in Minnesota.[47] Those we interviewed often spoke passionately about the stigma of a felony conviction and told us that losing the right to vote, in particular, was a powerful symbol of their status as "outsiders." Steven, an older male probationer, told us that "on top of the whole messy pile, there it was. Something that was hardly mentioned, and it meant a lot."[48] Pamela, a female prisoner in her forties, felt the loss of voting rights as additional "salt in the wound" and "another [loss] to add to the pile" of problems she was encountering as a result of her criminal convictions.[49] In that study, we argued that civic reintegration and the adoption of a role identity as an active citizen may facilitate desistance from crime and reconnection with other social institutions.

Yet while many of the prisoners, probationers, and parolees we met regretted the loss of their ability to participate as citizens in their communities, they were often skeptical about drawing any direct connection between voting and subsequent criminality. Andrew, a probationer in his twenties, thought it "would be a stretch" to tie voting to recidivism:

> To me that would be a stretch. . . . I think that people who are more likely to vote are, you know, just at different points in their life, and I just think that the people [who] are more likely to commit crimes aren't gonna either commit those crimes or not commit those crimes because

47. *See* Uggen et al., *supra* note 7, at 267; *see* Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 33, at 177 for interview details.

48. Interview by Christopher Uggen with a male inmate in his fifties, Minnesota prison (Mar. 27, 2001).

49. Interview by Christopher Uggen with a female inmate in her forties, Minnesota prison (Mar. 14, 2001).

> they have the ability to, to vote. I just don't think that voting's gonna be a priority to them.[50]

Larry, a young prisoner, echoed these sentiments in arguing that "people that are gonna get into crime are gonna do it whether they have the right to vote or not."[51] Alex, in the midst of a long prison sentence, similarly doubted the link between voting and recidivism:

> I don't think that would have anything to do with it [committing future crime], the right to vote. . . . I mean I had the right to vote before I came to prison, but I still let my crime happen. I don't go around beating up on people as a hobby or anything. But it just happened. But I don't see voting as having an effect on criminal behavior.[52]

Other felons described voting as "a small factor," or as a possible deterrent to committing future felonies. In short, our interviews showed us that while many convicted felons care deeply about disenfranchisement and other civil disabilities, they were on the whole unconvinced that voting in itself would affect subsequent criminal behavior.

B. Results of the Statistical Analysis

Taken as a whole, however, our statistical analysis suggests that a relationship between voting and subsequent crime and arrest is not only plausible, but also supported by empirical evidence. We find consistent differences between voters and non-voters in rates of subsequent arrest, incarceration, and self-reported criminal behavior. While the single behavioral act of casting a ballot is unlikely to be the sole factor that turns felons' lives around, the act of voting manifests the desire to participate as a law-abiding stakeholder in a larger society. At a minimum, our multivariate analysis suggests that the political participation effect is not entirely attributable to preexisting differences between voters and non-voters in criminal history, class, race, or gender.

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50. Interview by Christopher Uggen with a male probationer in his twenties, Minnesota community corrections office (Mar. 21, 2001).

51. Interview by Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza with a male inmate in his thirties, Minnesota prison (July 10, 2001).

52. Interview by Christopher Uggen with a male inmate in his thirties, Minnesota prison (Apr. 11, 2001).

Nevertheless, a substantial portion of the association between voting and subsequent criminality appears to be a result of the greater educational attainment of voters and their less serious criminal histories. While criminal histories are not amenable to intervention, education is at the heart of ongoing correctional efforts to reintegrate felons. Moreover, a general education program working in concert with citizenship education and political participation may be especially effective in facilitating desistance from crime. For example, Larry, one of the prisoners we interviewed, strongly advocated for greater educational resources:

> I think education is underrated. There's not enough of it. They don't think about it enough. I mean there should be more education. They keep taking it away. You know, I was going to [names university] through their program in [names city], and they took the program away. About a year later they brought a smaller version of it back, but still it's not the same as it was.[53]

When asked about whether civics education might be effective in prison, Larry responded:

> I think that'd be a really good idea, though, because most of us, and, you know, me included, don't really think about my place in society as a citizen. . . . It's just about, "What's going [on] with me and my immediate surroundings?" you know? "What's going to affect me?" instead of, "Where do I stand as a citizen?" That'd be interesting.[54]

VI. CONCLUSION

While these ideas are largely speculative, we can take from this study both provisional support for the idea of civic reintegration through voting and confirmation of the skepticism expressed by some of the prison inmates and probationers we interviewed. Voting appears to be part of a package of pro-social behavior that is linked to desistance from crime. Though the unique independent contribution of voting participation is likely to be small relative to pressing socioeconomic needs, family support, and other factors, the right to vote remains the most powerful symbol of stake-holding in our

53. Interview by Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 51.

54. *Id.*

democracy. To the extent that felons begin to vote and participate as citizens in their communities, it seems likely that many will bring their behavior into line with the expectations of the citizen role, avoiding further contact with the criminal justice system.