Felon disenfranchisement could almost be considered an American institution. It creates a large portion of our population who are overlooked and unaccounted for national tallies, surveys, etc., that exclude those being held in the justice system. As a result they are neglected as policy makers enact new initiatives that fail to recognize this vast number of individuals who are incarcerated or have once been incarcerated. Felon disenfranchisement gives false sense of progression toward racial equality among other national matters. Our class has conducted research to analyze the views toward voting rights of convicted felons and whether the rights should or should not be restored to individuals once they have served their sentences. One element I thought would be relevant to focus on is the concept that people who consume news more frequently may be exposed to extreme portrayals of crime and violence that the media headlines that creates a society that is over sensitized to the terms crime, conviction, felon, and the like. Subsequently making them think negatively about restoring a convicted felons’ right to vote. Also individuals that believe discrimination is still an issue in today’s society may be more prone to think that voting rights of a convicted felons should be restored because perhaps they view felon disenfranchisement as another medium of discrimination in an era that our society is encouraged to believe has progressed beyond issues involving civil rights and discrimination.

To commence our research, we first acknowledged how we would construct our sample for analysis. It was determined that each member of our class would gather feedback from seven individuals with the only stipulation being they are members of the undergrad population
on our campus. Next as a class we constructed a survey of 20 questions including two sub
questions that we felt would lead to significant insight into the perceptions of IU students
regarding this issue of felon disenfranchisement. We formed our questions around aspects
such as age gender and national orientation along with questions about political alignment,
personal perceptions of our legal system, and media consumption. However, the 20 questions
were a product of initial grouping of a large pool of possible questions which were then subject
to two rounds of pretesting before arriving at our final survey. Pretesting involved us revising
survey questions to ensure that there were not instances where negative effects of social
desirability bias, grammatical ambiguity, complexity of terminology, among other things to
consider when forming survey questions were not included in our final product. Once we
finished drafting the survey it was up to each student to conduct the survey to their seven
respondents. For survey feedback to be valid, it was important that we followed proper
protocol for conducting surveys in a manner that avoided any influence from ourselves as those
giving the survey. The standardized interviewing techniques of Fowler and Mangione were a
great resource for our class to be certain to adhere to.

After we had concluded conducting our survey, our data was coded for each survey
question then entered into a file with the feedback gathered by the whole class. Our universal
dependent variable was the results received from the survey question asking the respondents
“On a scale from 1-10, where 1 is very strongly oppose and 10 is very strongly favor, how would
you feel about a law that restores voting rights to convicted felons?” For the sample of 300
respondents, the mean of the responses was 5.78, the median was 6, and the mode was 5.
Beyond these measures, the maximum response received on the 1-10 scale was 10 and the
minimum was 1. This led to a standard deviation of 2.38. The first independent variable I analyzed was the frequency a respondent consumed news from their desired source. Out of the responses that measured how many days out of one week that they had consumed news from this source, the mean was 5.16, the median was 5, and mode was 7, while the minimum and maximum were 0 and 7, respectively. These numbers all in regard to a standard deviation of 2.0. Following frequency of news consumption, I isolated the responses from the survey question that asked participants to rate how big of a problem they thought racial discrimination is in today’s society. Based on being measured on a scale from 1-10, 1 being “not even an issue” and 10 as “a major problem”, the mean was 6.68, the median and mode were both 7, with a minimum response of 1 and a maximum response of 10, exercising full use of the 10 point scale. In the attached graphs you can see the distributions of responses and how the independent variables of news consumption and discrimination related to the dependent variable of respondents feelings toward restoration of voting rights for convicted felons. Overall, the feedback from the 300 respondent sample, represented in Figure 1 rendered a response of 5 being the most common among those about the degree of feeling toward restoration of voting rights. The distribution of responses is rather normal while representing that responses from 3-8 being most favored by the participants while 1-2, and 9-10 did not receive as many responses. If you view Figures 2 and 3 you can see that there is little indication of frequency of news consumption or ratings of discrimination as being a societal problem having any statistical significance on respondents’ views toward voting rights of convicted felons as the responses are fairly evenly distributed across the graphs. In Figure 4 which analyzed the relationship between views of discrimination in conjunction with the race of the
respondent and their overall views of voting rights of felons you begin to see more indication of influence from variable to variable. Being that the survey questions that asked about views toward restoration of voting rights for convicted felons and views about discrimination being a societal problem were both measured by a 10 point scale you can observe that respondents had similar ratings for each question. There is a large portion located in the constraints of responses between 4-7 on both scales. It can also be observed that respondents who rated discrimination from 6-10 had more consistently voted between ratings of 5-7 for felons’ voting rights. In Figure 4 it is easy to identify that there are significant outliers with ratings of discrimination at 1, 2, and 3 having very skewed representation among the races and the responses of 5.5, 6.5, and 8.5 are representative of a very small portion of the sample.

When looking back at the research, it is evident that our sample is very small when compared to the whole student body here at IU therefore it is difficult to make any inferences with too much confidence. Overall it is fair to be said that students’ ideas of voter disenfranchisement and their feelings toward restoring voting rights of convicted felons is in favor of taking steps toward reintroducing this population of ‘invisible men’ back into the statistically recognized population of our country.
Figure 1: Distribution of Feelings Toward Felons’ Voting Rights

Frequency

Degree of Feelings Toward Voting Rights

Series 1
Figure 2:

Relation Between Frequency of News Consumption and Views Toward Voting Rights of Felons

Average Degree of Feelings

# of Days per Week News is Consumed

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Figure 3:

Relation of Feelings Toward Discrimination and Voting Rights

Average Voting Rights Responses

Discrimination as a Societal Issue
Figure 4:

**Relationship Between Respondent’s Race, Feelings Toward Discrimination and Voting Rights**

1. White
2. Black
3. Hispanic
4. Asian/Pacific Islander
5. Other