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Nonprofit Social Service Employees' Perceptions of Barriers or Facilitators to Voting Registration Among Previously Incarcerated Individuals

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Walden University

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Anthony Jerome Nixon

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Nonprofit Social Service Employees' Perceptions of Barriers or Facilitators to Voting

Registration Among Previously Incarcerated Individuals

by

Anthony Jerome Nixon

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MS, Tiffin University, 2004

BS, Saint John's University, 1992

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

Most U.S. states have applied permanent restrictions on incarcerated individuals in custody for crimes more serious than misdemeanors. After time is served and limitations are removed, the right to vote may not be restored to previously incarcerated individuals. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore what nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voter registration among previously incarcerated individuals. The social acceptance model provided the theoretical framework to support the study. Data collection was completed through a brief demographic survey and individual interviews with 15 nonprofit organizers in Ohio. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify four themes: interest as it relates to voter registration, experiences trying to register, information obtained about registering to vote, and outcomes in this target population. Findings may be used to promote positive social change through a sense of empowerment and agency among previously incarcerated individuals by affirming their status as citizens with a right to vote. Findings may also be used to mitigate cases of stigmatization and marginalization among this population.

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Dedication

To my wife, Carlette, my love and life's partner, along with the village of my community that contributed to this journey by motivating me to fulfill this lifelong educational endeavor. My maternal grandmother, Inez Ray; my legacy of two sons, Anthony Jr., and Travis Mitchell, and my nephew, Douglas Edward Sarjeant. With successful gratitude, I thank the members of my village who in physical presence are not able to witness this collaborative achievement but are looking down on me.

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Thank you will never humbly be enough for me to acknowledge my committee members, Michael Knight, PhD, and Lori Demeter, PhD, along with University Research Reviewer Kristin Dailey, PhD. Together your guidance and mentorship through this process was invaluable to my growth and development. This journey shall allow me to reach back and pay it forward for the next generation of social change agents.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you, and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Nearly the entire United States prohibits at least some felons from participating in local and federal elections, and a few states continue to disenfranchise ex-felons after they have ended their sentences (White, 2019). The more than 4,000,000 Americans who are not able to vote because of a felony conviction include individuals in prison, those on probation or parole, and in some states those who have served their felony sentence. Most inmates in local jails, however, are lawfully entitled to vote (White, 2019). These include individuals in pretrial detention awaiting trial and those serving misdemeanor sentences. For example, it is difficult for convicted felons to acquire voting registration forms from the office of the registrar. Additionally, for those who are in prison and already registered to vote, it may be difficult to obtain an absentee ballot. The Hispanic and African American populations are disproportionately incarcerated, making up approximately 68% of the incarcerated population nationally (World Atlas, n.d.). People of color are particularly vulnerable to these difficulties. In recent years, social and voting rights activists have undertaken campaigns to inform incarcerated individuals of their voting rights and encourage prisoners to register to vote.

Stances on permitting convicted felons to vote have been varied with numerous states currently allowing ex-felons who have served their prison terms to participate in elections. For example, voters in Florida recently decided to permit ex-felons to have their rights to participate in elections restored upon ending their sentences (Kiefer, 2019). The current study was designed to explore the barriers and concerns about voting registration campaigns while being in jail or custody.

Chapter 1 includes a discussion of the historical and theoretical bases for the exclusion of convicts and ex-felons from voting. The chapter also includes a discussion of why the study was needed and sections on study objectives, study assumptions, the scope of the study, definitions of terms, the nature of the research, limitations, and significance. The chapter ends with a summary and transition to the Chapter 2.

Background

State approaches to felon disenfranchisement differ. Even when lawbreakers are in prison, they do not lose their voting rights in Vermont and Maine (Kiefer, 2019). In other cases, prisoners only lose the right to vote when they are in custody, and their rights are restored once released; this happens in Washington D.C. and 16 states in the United States (Kiefer, 2019). In 21 states, felons lose their rights to participate in elections throughout incarceration and while on probation and parole. Ex-felons might be required to pay any unsettled fines, fees, or restitutions before they regain their voting rights (Kiefer, 2019). In 11 states, prisoners lose voting rights based on the crimes they committed, and it sometimes necessitates felons getting a governor's pardon for their voting rights to be restored (Kiefer, 2019).

Ohio is among the states that permit convicted felons to vote; the right ends if they are incarcerated as part of their sentences. Once they have completed their sentences, though, ex-felons can reregister to vote. One exemption, however, is for defendants convicted of felonies linked to election fraud. In these cases, the defendant is perpetually not eligible to vote.

Prisoners' rights to participate in elections originated from the concept of civil death. According to this concept, an individual regarded as an offender, outlaw, or infamous person is deprived of the rights enjoyed by citizens, including the right to freedom of expression, gathering, owning, or inheriting property, serving in the army, and other privileges (Kaur, 2019). Most of these restrictions no longer exist, except those involving voting rights (Kaur, 2019). The strongest argument against convicts participating in elections is that the offender has breached the social contract, the unspoken agreement that citizens will follow and be governed by a set of guidelines (Kaur, 2019). In contemporary democracies, the rule of law is central to the social contract; therefore, the moment an offender breaks the law, the individual breaches the social contract (Kaur, 2019). The logic of social contract holds that an offender has broken the public's trust and therefore ought to be excluded from civic duties, including voting (Kaur, 2019). Denial of voting rights provides a signal of disapproval from society and thus acts as a deterrence.

There has been limited research on why ex-felons should be permitted to participate in federal and local elections. The present study was designed to explore the barriers to ex-felons' concerns about voter registering campaigns while incarcerated. I sought to fill the gap in the literature regarding prisoners having the right to participate in elections because this right is fundamental to democracy; people are in custody for various reasons that undermine an overall decision, and the voice of every citizen matters. Democracy's central basis is equal rights for all citizens, which also includes privacy rights, the right to have a fair trial, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech

(Klumpp et al., 2019). Conversely, it is unclear whether an individual who has violated someone else's rights retain their right to be a contributing member of a democratic society. That is the central issue in the discussion concerning the rights of felons to participate in elections.

Not every crime has a comparable damaging act, and that is the reason why convicts may retain their privileges, including rights to participate in voting. State felony disenfranchisement laws restrict millions of American citizens from participating in local and federal elections. These laws are not only antidemocratic, but they send the message that the voices of people returning to their communities do not matter. Therefore, the current study was necessary to explore why the nation and states should permit felons and ex-felons to exercise their democratic rights like other citizens. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the barriers to and concerns about voting and registering to vote that offenders experience while in jail or custody.

Problem Statement

Globally, the right to vote is enjoyed by citizens in nations that are considered democratic; however, most of these countries put limits on the right to vote once an individual is placed in custody and accused of a felony or equal crime. Countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa place limitations on all inmates in correctional facilities. In the United States, most states have placed permanent restrictions on incarcerated individuals placed in custody for crimes more serious than misdemeanors. Even after time is served and limitations are removed, the right to vote may not be restored to previously incarcerated individuals (Taylor, 2017).

Failure to restore the rights of individuals after completing their sentences has repercussions socially, politically, and emotionally (Taylor, 2017). Some ex-felons may repeat previous offenses believing that all is lost because they cannot vote or exercise other rights. Only a few states and regions have allowed individuals under custody to participate in nationwide voting; these include Vermont and Maine, which have amended their constitutions permitting all prisoners to vote. Ohio has begun efforts to allow former prisoners to vote (Taylor, 2017). However, such progress constitutes only a small percentage of regions in the United States that are yet to fully allow former and current inmates in correctional facilities to vote. Moreover, such restoration is also offense based on the type of offense and time served in correctional facilities. Restoration for restored citizens occurs only when certain voting registration requirements are met, which include lengthy legal formalities that discourage most previous offenders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore what nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio. Allowing previously convicted individuals to vote in states such as Mississippi, Alaska, and Alabama has not been enough. The central issue is that experiencing democracy and civic rights ends once an individual breaks the law (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Therefore, social and voting rights activists have championed for the withdrawal of restrictions to voting rights for previously and currently incarcerated individuals (Root & Kennedy, 2018). In addition, scholars have explained why prisoners should be allowed to vote. Scholarly positions and

political influences have aided in championing the right to vote among incarcerated individuals.

Ohio has allowed certain offenders to vote once they complete their terms in correctional facilities (American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, n.d.). Once voting activities were satisfied, postelection analysis showed that only a few offenders took part in the voting activities. I sought to examine why offenders should take part in pre-election voting registration campaigns during their period of detention. I aimed to identify the barriers offenders experience through social and political influences on why restrictions to voting registration campaigns should not be placed on incarcerated individuals. Information collected from the study may help emancipated prisoners take part in voting activities and increase prisoners' participation in election activities through an improved understanding of the barriers to voting and registering to vote for formerly and currently imprisoned individuals.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided this general qualitative study:

RQ1: What do nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting or voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio?

RQ2: What impact do nonprofit social service organizers believe voter registration among incarcerated individuals has on the communities into which they will reintegrate?

Theoretical Framework

Social acceptance theory (DeWall, 2011) was the theoretical framework for the study. Social acceptance refers to individuals feeling the need to be included in prosocial relationships and groups (Dermont et al., 2017). Because humans are social beings, they generally want to feel appreciated and accepted in groups and communities (Dermont et al., 2017). Researchers have used social acceptance theory to explain prosocial environments and community practices in which people feel welcome when participating in social practices that are common among community members (Dermont et al., 2017).

Social science researchers have used social acceptance theory to study individuals leaving previous environments for new and different ones (Wojcik, 2018). For example, a researcher may apply social acceptance theory to the study of the formative years of first-year college students, when new students must fit into existing groups and integrate into the campus community. Social acceptance theory would explain why some students may feel the pressure to use drugs and engage in substance abuse to feel a sense belonging to a group (Wojcik, 2018). Similarly, inmates who have been in prison for a long time may find it difficult to reintegrate into society; voting and participating in civic duties may help them develop prosocial and civic-minded relationships. Social acceptance theory helped me understand how barriers to restoring voting rights of people who have been released from custody in Ohio can support their reentry into the community.

Social acceptance theory helped me frame the RQs and understand the barriers to voting eligibility of offenders and those recently released from prison. The theory has also been used to explain how people fit into society and accept obeying authority to be

productive members of communities. Social acceptance theory formed the basis of understanding the phenomenon of allowing people in jail awaiting trial to vote when it comes to increasing their ability to reform. Additionally, the theory aided in exploring the issue of voting rights of custody-based individuals in jails and residential facilities in central Ohio.

Nature of the Study

The study was qualitative because I sought to explore the barriers individual offenders face when it comes to their rights to participate in elections through voter registration campaigns. The research focused on the social phenomena underlying the residents of Ohio jails who are eligible voters. Voting registration campaigns made the study reliant on direct human experiences. To ensure the study goals were achieved, I employed interviews to gather data from the sample population. The interviews were limited to a specific demographic group to permit precise data collected from individuals of interest. This sampling technique guaranteed that relevant data would be collected. I aimed to capture participants' views concerning the issues that exist in jails concerning the rights of detained individuals. The approach permitted comprehension of the underlying problems that custody-based individuals face when attempting to exercising their democratic right to register to vote. Qualitative methodology was employed to answer the RQs.

Definitions

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Custody based: Acquiring voter registration forms or an absentee ballot while incarcerated (Gregory, 2019).

Disenfranchisement: Being denied the right or privilege to vote (Kiefer, 2019).

Election: A formal decision-making process by which citizens select a person to hold a public office that governs them (Paikowsky, 2019).

Felon: An individual who has been convicted of a felony, which is a crime that may involve violence or is more serious than a misdemeanor (Klumpp et al., 2019).

Incarceration: Being confined in jail or prison (White, 2019).

Postelection: The state of something happening after an election (Morris, 2021).

Voting: A formal expression of choice or opinion made by a citizen during an election (Mauer, 2018).

Voting registration: The act of registering to vote (Emerson et al., 2020).

Voting rights: The act or process of voting or bringing the issue to a vote (Shineman, 2020).

Assumptions

I assumed that incarcerated individuals are qualitatively the same as nonincarcerated individuals. From this assumption, disenfranchisement is deemed not to be a reasonable penalty to be imposed on this group of individuals. I also assumed that incarcerated individuals are not lesser human beings to be mistreated, especially when it comes to matters of democracy. The only difference is that they are held in correctional facilities for some time to promote behavioral changes. Being in prison should not be interpreted as characterizing a lesser being who does not deserve democratic rights. I

viewed custody-based individuals as rational human beings throughout the study and perceived them members rather than outcasts of society.

Another assumption made in this study was that the right to vote is a fundamental human right. The right to decide who governs a nation or state is a fundamental human right for every citizen, regardless of whether they are incarcerated (Hess et al., 2016). I assumed that this privilege should be enjoyed by every citizen in Ohio or any other state that claims to be democratic. This assumption was crucial to the study because it tried to show that, when it comes to democracy, all individuals should be treated equally, which includes ensuring everyone's voting right. However, this is not what happens in real life in the United States, where democracy is the norm.

Finally, I assumed that participants would answer the interview questions honestly to satisfy the study's purpose. I assumed the participants would be reflective enough to describe their experiences and perceptions regarding the topic of study. Finally, I assumed the qualitative methodology would be appropriate to answer the RQs.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was based in Ohio because it is one of the states in which convicted felons are permitted to vote. However, a convicted lawbreaker is not allowed to participate in voting registration during an election when incarcerated serving their sentence. Once they have completed their sentence, they can reregister to vote.

The study addressed barriers that restrict convicted individuals from pre-detention registration to vote in local and federal elections. Additionally, this study aimed to provide information on how to help incarcerated individuals be recognized and stop

deprivations of their voting rights. The study was limited to Ohio, and the population included individuals who had completed their jail sentences.

The study was limited to the incapacitation and social acceptance theories. These theories define further offenses by restraining prospects that can predispose an offender from engaging in other criminal crimes. Other theories linked to the study but not used in this study include strain theory, which contends that society puts pressure on people to attain an acceptable objective. If people are not able to attain these objectives, it results in a strain, which can cause wrongdoing. Furthermore, depriving felons of the right to vote can distance them from the normative populace, creating the kind of strain that can cause them to reoffend (Walsh, 2012). This study was conducted with limited financial resources and time.

Limitations

Due to the study's qualitative nature, the sample was small, which prevents the generalizability of the findings. Findings from qualitative studies are not meant to be generalizable to a larger population but yield in-depth information not obtainable from quantitative studies with large samples (King et al., 2018). Open-ended interview questions were sent to one community organization conducting voting registration campaigns within local adult correctional or residential facilities in Ohio. I selected post detention when gathering the data to ensure the information participants provided was honest and accurate. The project's limitations were attributed to the data collection method and research sample. One disadvantage of a semi structured interview is the potential for self-report bias. This problem occurs when participants provide inaccurate or

distorted information about their experiences, attitudes, or behaviors. This bias can be influenced by a variety of factors such as social desirability bias (the tendency to provide responses that are perceived as more socially acceptable), memory recall bias (the tendency to forget or misremember events), and response bias (the tendency to provide responses that are influenced by the interviewer's expectations or cues). Second, the sample of 15 individuals limited the findings' generalizability. In qualitative research, a small sample size can limit the depth and richness of the data collected.

With a small sample size, there may be limited variation in participants' experiences and perspectives, which can make it difficult to fully understand the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, a small sample size can limit the sample's diversity, which can impact the transferability of the findings to other contexts or populations. The current size limitations could be addressed in future research studies in different counties in Ohio or other cities outside the state.

Significance

The study may help to ensure that the democratic rights of custody-based individuals are considered. The results may clarify why it is important not to deprive these individuals of their right to vote because they are human beings like those not in prison. This study may also expose obstacles to registering as a voter after disenfranchised individuals become eligible to vote again. The study may provide a clear picture of what happens to a convicted individual after the deprivation of their right to vote and their perception of the laws governing them.

Moreover, this study may provide information that could assist politicians and social activists in defending the rights of formerly incarcerated individuals because their voice matters when it comes to deciding who will govern them. The study may provide information on why this group of individuals should be considered and why their fundamental civil rights ought not to be interfered with (see Hess et al., 2016). The study may provide information on the barriers to voting offender experiences in correctional facilities and why they fail to register to vote.

Also, this study may yield information that may help in the restoration of voting rights for custody-based individuals, which will benefit the democratic rights of these individuals and may help increase democratic representation at the social level. The study was designed to explore the barriers offenders experience when registering to vote in correctional facilities and why they fail to vote. An opportunity to participate in the democratic process may result in a positive social change in the communities to which offenders return after incarceration.

Summary

Chapter 1 highlighted the basis of this study and why it was necessary. I shared content on why custody-based individuals are deprived of the ability to register to vote and exercise voting rights. The chapter outlined the purpose of the study and the RQs. The chapter also provided the conceptual framework for the study and the nature of the study. The chapter also included a discussion of the study's limitations. Lastly, the significance included a discussion of how the study's findings may inform future research and practice. Chapter 2 includes a review and synthesis of prior research on the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the barriers to and concerns about voting and registering to vote that offenders experience while incarcerated. Allowing previously convicted individuals to vote in states such as Mississippi, Alaska, and Alabama has not been enough. The central issue is that experiencing democracy and civic rights ends once an individual breaks the law (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Therefore, social and voting rights activists have championed for the withdrawal of restrictions to voting rights for previously and currently incarcerated individuals (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Scholars have argued why prisoners should be allowed to vote. However, scholarly positions and political influences have merely aided in championing for the privilege of the right to vote among incarcerated individuals.

Ohio has allowed certain offenders to vote once they complete their terms in correctional facilities (American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, n.d.). Once voting activities were satisfied, a postelection analysis showed that only a few offenders took part in the voting activities. The current study aimed to explore why offenders should take part in pre-election voting registration campaigns during their period of detention. I sought to explore the barriers offenders experience through social and political influences on why restrictions to voting registration campaigns should not be placed on incarcerated individuals. Information collected from the study may help emancipated prisoners take part in voting activities and help increase prisoners' participation in election activities by better understanding the barriers to voting and registering to vote for formerly and currently imprisoned individuals.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive search on the study topic was conducted using Walden University's online library portal. Databases and search tools included ProQuest Research Library, Criminal Justice Administration Resources, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic, BASE, Semantic Scholar, SAGE, and CORE. Keywords for locating relevant research included *voting rights*, *voting information*, *voting registration*, *incarceration*, *incarcerated individuals*, *prison*, *correctional facilities*, *ex-felon*, *ex-convict*, *barriers*, and *challenges*. Emphasis was placed on voting rights for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in central Ohio. Additionally, preference was given to full-text, peer-reviewed articles published in English and within 5 years of the anticipated year of study completion (2023).

Theoretical Foundation

Social acceptance theory (Dermont et al., 2017) served as the theoretical foundation for the study. Social acceptance is defined as individuals feeling the need to be included in prosocial relationships and groups (Dermont et al., 2017). Humans are social beings; as such, they generally want to feel appreciated and accepted in groups and communities (Dermont et al., 2017). Researchers have used social acceptance theory to explain positive environments and community practices in which people feel welcome when participating in social practices that are common among community members (Dermont et al., 2017).

Researchers have used social acceptance theory in the social sciences to study individuals who leave their homes and families for new and different environments

(Dermont et al., 2017). For example, researchers have applied social acceptance theory to the formative years of first-year college students, when new students struggle to fit into existing groups and integrate into the campus community (Wojcik, 2018). Social acceptance theory helped researchers explain why some students felt the pressure to use drugs and engage in substance abuse to feel a sense of social or group belonging (Wojcik, 2018). Similarly, inmates who have been in prison for a long time may find it difficult to blend back into society; being allowed to vote and participate in civic duties may help them recreate new prosocial and civic-minded relationships. Social acceptance theory helped me understand how registration campaigns in adult correctional facilities could impact the voting participation of individuals who have been released from custody into the community.

Social acceptance theory helped me frame the RQs and aided in understanding the phenomenon and its influence on the behavior of individuals recently released from prison. The theory had also been applied in understanding how people fit into society and accept obeying authority to be productive members of communities. Social acceptance theory helped form the basis of understanding the role of allowing people in jail awaiting trial to vote when it comes to increasing their ability to reform. Moreover, the theory helped me explain the issue of voting rights of incarcerated individuals in correctional facilities across central Ohio.

Literature Review

Voting rights for inmates remains a challenge in many states and countries in the United States because there no laws that define how incarcerated people should be helped

to register and vote. However, central Ohio has the least restrictive procedures and laws when it comes to incarcerated individuals voting while in prison (White, 2019). Convicts in Ohio have the freedom to vote if they have only been convicted of a misdemeanor; similarly, inmates who are awaiting trial for a felony charge are also allowed a vote as a fulfillment of their civic duty (Beck, 2017). Correctional facilities in central Ohio have played a significant role in ensuring that offenders are prepared to undertake the voting exercise (Beck, 2017). White (2019) argued that based on the current state law, felons serving terms in prison may not be allowed to vote. The situation creates a significant problem for a considerable percentage of inmates regarded as voteless constituents. On the other hand, politicians have taken advantage of this situation to top off the number of individuals required to create congressionally and general assembly districts for party expediency (White, 2019). Allowing inmates to exercise their voting rights and counting their voting places as their hometowns rather than prison cells will offer fairness and equality.

Furthermore, the laws made in the Ohio House of Representatives and the Senate affect the lives of prisoners. The high cost of prison telephone calls within the justice system requires that prisoners be allowed to vote for candidates in local and regional elections. Correctional facilities in the justice system are meant to do that: correct individuals' misdemeanors and ensure that they reenter society as reformed citizens to contribute to society (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Lawmakers who do not support universal prisoner suffrage are unpopular with family members of those who have been incarcerated. Allowing offenders to exercise their voting rights has a significant influence

on the improvement of the justice system because it supports those people who have a plan about how to improve the living conditions in correctional facilities. Some of the states that allow individuals convicted of a felony to vote include Vermont and Maine (Root & Kennedy, 2018). In other states, prisoners are allowed to exercise their voting rights depending on their felony convictions. Human rights activists, lawmakers, and social activists for equality for the incarcerated have backed efforts that make it easy for people to vote from jails.

Obstacles to voting rights in central Ohio's correctional facilities and others across the country include access to current or relevant information and interaction with registration advocates. According to Ebenstein (2018), many prison inmates and those in jails awaiting trial lack access to information on general elections and their voting eligibility. Correctional facilities have failed to allocate sufficient resources to support voting for inmates. Gerber et al. (2017) claimed that a significant population of inmates faces structural barriers to the voter registration process.

Most prisoners are barred from participating in the democratic process because the justice system and correctional facilities fail to prioritize their rights. Additionally, there is a political angle to the process because districts and the general assembly are created through prison gerrymandering. Unless there are unrelated reasons concerning the current detention, people on trial wait to be permitted legally to participate in voting. The age of the person awaiting trial, including their citizenship status, prior criminal history, and a felony conviction, can be used to deny someone the right to vote (Gerber et al.,

2017). The presumption that criminal defendants are innocent until proven guilty allows those who are in jail pending trial to exercise their voting rights (Beck, 2017).

The right to vote and elect leaders and representatives is the central pillar of American democracy. Denying people who are awaiting trial a chance to participate in their voting rights is a significant violation of the fundamental norms of the U.S. criminal justice system (Beck, 2017). States and counties have a principal role to play in protecting the rights of incarcerated people to vote, which enhances and protects democracy because it allows the voices of every American to be heard through the ballot. Gerber et al. (2017) argued that there have been concerted efforts at the state level to deny people in jail their right to vote by frustrating the process and curtailing information. However, policymakers have come up with essential recommendations that serve to protect the voting rights of those incarcerated in correctional facilities. Felon disenfranchisement laws have ensured that the rights of people awaiting trial and those who have completed their sentences regain their ability to participate in elections. Central Ohio has been at the forefront of working for the restoration of voting rights for people upon release from prisons. The main question addressed in the current study is what barriers do offenders experience in correctional facilities along with community supervision. Offenders' failure to vote or registering to vote in central Ohio is why current voting rights cannot be left intact during their period of incarceration.

Heath (2017) argued the law should be rethought, the benefits of denying incarcerated individuals their voting rights should be determined, and the cost-benefit of doing so should be realized. Allowing prisoners to vote and facilitating the process in

correctional facilities offers prisoners a chance to maintain connections with society and may enhance their rehabilitation process when released (White, 2019). Some prisoners have advocated for a disciplinary process that allows them to regain their rights on a case-by-case basis. However, others feel this approach will disenfranchise a group of people in society and undermine their democratic rights. According to Heath, most people fighting for their voting rights are out of prison after serving their terms in different correctional facilities in central Ohio. Restoring the voting rights of individuals once they are released from incarceration has become a daunting task because the process includes many systemic hurdles. Jail administrators may help prisoners access information and resources so they can participate in voting due to limited access to the outside world. Lack of information makes it difficult for prisoners to exercise their civic rights and denies them an opportunity to have elective representation.

Custody-Based Voter Registration

The right to vote is essential for every American because it offers individuals a chance to elect their representatives. Correctional facilities in the United States have more than 4,000,000 individuals who are unable to exercise their voting rights due to convictions for different felonies. The law affects people who are in local jails and awaiting trial to vote. Most of them face difficulties in voting because they depend on the administrators for information (White, 2019). Prison and jail administrators in different correctional facilities are unable to help most of the inmates who are eligible to vote because of logistical problems. Registering voters in correctional facilities requires resources that should be available to all eligible inmates in different prisons. According to

White (2019), administrators are required to visit the registrar's office to obtain the registration forms for first-time voters and absentee ballots for those already registered. Different states and counties have developed measures to help jail inmates vote. Some of these efforts include mass registration of eligible inmates to facilitate voting and ensure they have all the required materials (White, 2019).

Nongovernmental organizations, such as Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, play a significant role in assisting inmates in registering to vote. The organization understands that a country must lessen the government's dependence on correctional facilities, and incarceration should not deny individuals their right to vote. Root and Kennedy (2018) argued that the coordination process of ensuring that inmates have the right to vote can be tedious and requires the willingness of the prison coordinators to succeed. Education is a significant part of the process because many inmates are preoccupied with their cases and are not usually keen on other activities such as voting (White, 2019). Few programs exist that ensure inmates have the right information and understand what is going on in the political arena. Most counties, including central Ohio, continue to encounter challenges when it comes to educating inmates and facilitating voting for them. Organizations such as Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants augment the government's efforts in helping inmates fulfill their voting rights.

Central Ohio is less restrictive than other counties regarding inmate voting; inmates can vote if they have been convicted of a misdemeanor or are awaiting trial. Moreover, the county allows inmates who wish to apply for an absentee ballot to do so as

long as they follow procedures, including being registered to vote in central Ohio. Many prisoners who want to exercise their voting rights face systemic challenges. Root and Kennedy (2018) claimed that most inmates in state prisons are ineligible to vote, which makes it hard to have the exact figure of those who can be targeted for education and registration. Moreover, printing and distributing materials that inform inmates about their voting rights requires capital resources, which creates a significant challenge. However, advocacy work has been taken over by bodies such as the Center for Law and Justice, helping to ensure that as many inmates as possible are eligible to vote.

Protecting the Rights of Detained Voters

The civic and human rights of detained people should be protected at all costs to ensure people are treated with dignity as they serve their term or await the trial of their case. Voter disenfranchisement through the denial of voting rights for pretrial jail detainees is a considerable problem in the U.S. criminal justice system (Ebenstein, 2018). According to Ebenstein (2018), protecting the voting rights of people awaiting trial is pivotal in ensuring that the voice of every citizen counts in a presidential election. Violation of the rights of pretrial detainees to vote continues to be a challenge in central Ohio, as in many other counties, because the administration is not keen to accept and rectify this anomaly. The county board of elections in Ohio accepts applications from voters who are jailed and awaiting pending charges. However, the county jail officials do not make voting available on-site in jails and do not escort people to polling stations, which makes it difficult for inmates to exercise their voting rights and helps to systematically deny them of that opportunity.

Many people awaiting trial are eligible voters but fail to vote because of the continued disenfranchisement and blatant disregard of their rights by the different departments in the criminal justice system. People who have been arrested prior to elections in Ohio face challenges in fighting for their rights to vote. They are unconstitutionally denied their fundamental rights to elect leaders who can represent them in various elective posts. Democracy can be enhanced by ensuring that all eligible voters are allowed and facilitated to take part in the process. Prison administration must be well equipped with the knowledge, information, and resources to ensure they can support the rights of eligible voters to vote while in jail. Some eligible voters discover that they are unable to reach the polls in just a few days up to the election due to unforeseen hospitalization. The problem can be resolved through proper planning and coordination among jail administrators and the different players in the criminal justice system. The voting process for Ohio citizens detained in the days leading to the election is tedious, and many people give up along the way. Additionally, arranging for exceptional voting cases, especially for hospitalized voters and those in jail, takes a long time to complete. Determining the eligibility of the voters and the time taken to print the ballots as well as deliver them to the county jails makes it difficult for the process to be successful.

Furthermore, other issues that keep eligible voters in correctional facilities from voting include denial of absentee ballots because many inmates fail to register with their latest addresses. For others, it may be that they have a felony conviction and are not allowed to participate in the voting process. Jail administrators argue that inmates also do

not have access to the Internet, making it difficult for them to access information about candidates. Administrators in the correctional facilities are required to furnish eligible voters with information, which can prove to be an expensive affair that requires additional resources. This also presents another significant problem where inmates can be convinced to vote for particular candidates by the jail administrators because they are their only source of information.

Facilitating Voting Registration from Custody

Prison and jail officials, in collaboration with the criminal justice department and not-for-profit organizations, are at the forefront in promoting voting for eligible inmates. Inmates depend on the goodwill of the administrators and other organizations that fight for the rights of incarcerated individuals to vote. Lawmakers continue to create lawful avenues that allow eligible voters in different correctional facilities to vote. According to Wojcik (2018), campaigns to educate individuals across the country on their voting rights play a considerable role in enhancing jail-based voting. Enabling inmates to participate in their civic duties of voting ensures that their fundamental rights are not abused because they are innocent until proven guilty. Most individuals in jail awaiting trial can be assisted in applying for registration and obtaining absentee ballots to facilitate their voting. Moreover, those allowed to vote while in jail awaiting trial may have trouble during voting because logistical challenges can result in delays and even a lack of voting for inmates. Every American wants to have a say in their future and how the country is governed. White and Nguyen (2019) argued that being in lawful custody does not mean one should not be allowed to make choices for the future of their country, family, and

self. Those who are awaiting trial are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty, and they must be allowed to vote because they are likely to be released to continue with their normal activities in society.

Voting Rights Among Incarcerated People of Color

Denying voting rights to people in different correctional facilities has been a significant problem for people of color, especially African Americans who form the bulk of those in correctional facilities (Stevens et al., 2019). Research has shown that Black Americans who are eligible to vote are more than four times more likely to lose their rights to vote than the rest of the adult population in the United States (Wojcik, 2018). One of the ways the disenfranchisement of people of color is perpetuated is through incarceration, where voting rights are stripped from the affected people. The idea of counting inmates as part of the population to boost electoral advantages while denying them the right to vote is sinister and should be condemned. Most of the people in jails awaiting trial in different correctional facilities in the United States are African Americans who have been historically segregated (Stevens et al., 2019). Some people continue an oppressive plan, especially in states where many of the residents are White through the statistics from the criminal justice system.

Central Ohio has about 14.3% Black Americans whose population continues to increase steadily. However, Blacks are overrepresented in Ohio prisons as more than 50% of the population in all correctional facilities in the county are people of color. The increased lack of concerted efforts to ensure people in jails awaiting trial can vote is partly because Blacks form the highest population in correction facilities. According to

White and Nguyen (2019), Vermont and Maine are some of the states that allow individuals in prisons to vote and have the highest population of White residents in the country. In other states with mostly Black residents, the situation is different, as stringent measures have been put in place to ensure inmates are denied voting rights. People of color continue to bear the criminal brand in society, and their rights have further been abused in jails as they await trial for political expedience. The government should lift the entire structural barrier to voter registration and voting for all the people in jail awaiting trial. Moreover, the rights of the minorities, especially individuals who come from low-income families who cannot afford bail money, should be protected (Stevens et al., 2019). Correctional facilities in central Ohio have established measures to ensure that inmates' voting rights are protected through advocacy and facilitating registration processes.

Jail-based voter registration continues to be fraught with challenges (Gerber et al., 2017). Gerber et al., (2017) claimed that even though most jail inmates have a right to vote, very few can exercise that right. Major problems include logistical difficulties involving voting material for registration and the transportation of inmates to voting centers. Those who are eligible to vote in jail cannot just walk to the registrar's office to obtain registration forms. They require the assistance of the prison officers, and this is where the criminal justice system can fail to provide the necessary resources to help inmates participate in voting.

In the United States, voter eligibility is overseen by federal state laws and regulations. For example, federal law states that United States citizens aged 18 years and

above are eligible to participate in federal elections. State laws necessitate that a voter is an occupant (for at least a period of 30 days) of the state. Various states restrict voter eligibility on the foundation of criminal records or mental capacity, even though the particulars of such limitations differ. In local elections, some communities permit temporary occupants who might not be otherwise eligible to participate in voting to cast ballots. The privileges of a U.S. citizen to participate in elections are safeguarded by the United States constitution, which bans voter disenfranchisement for reasons like gender, age, and race (Gerber et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the 14th amendment to the constitution grants states full authority to prohibit a person's right to vote because of a criminal conviction.

In the United States, the discussion regarding the convict's right to participate in the election is practically unreal. Vermont and Maine are the only states that permit prisoners to participate in voting. On the other hand, Utah and Massachusetts have retrogressed by annulling the privilege in the past 2 decades. In Massachusetts, the privileges were removed through the state referendum. This was after a group of prisoners formed a political action committee, igniting a punitive censure from the state's governor, who demanded that offenders in penitentiaries have no business in making the decision of who is ought to govern upstanding citizens of the commonwealth.

Both federal laws and constitutional requirements guide how states carry out the registration of custody-based voters. Ever since the early 1960s, congress has gradually protracted the administration of federal election oversight and registration requirements. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 forbids prejudiced voting processes and averts a person

from being deprived of the right to vote due to the errors or oversights on registration documents that are not substantial to examine a voter's eligibility to vote. Successive legislation intended at enabling the registration of voters encompasses the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 (National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). This was followed by the 1986 legislation of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act and later the 1993 National Voter Registration Act, which necessitates that those applications be made obtainable at various public locations and by email and institutes that have extensive rules about the maintenance of voter registration lists.

Voter registration lists are utilized for numerous reasons besides creating the eligibility of a person to participate in voting during an election. For instance, voter registration lists are employed by political parties and candidates to recognize and get in touch with potential voters. At a local level, voter registration lists are employed in examining the number of individuals who will participate in an election, which aids direct election overseers as they prepare polling locations for election day (National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Preferably, voter registration lists ought to encompass all eligible persons who have an interest in being registered, provided the person has attained all the requirements. Therefore, the voter registration list is supposed to be complete and precise.

There are so many persons who believe that individuals incarcerated after being convicted of wrongdoings should not be allowed to participate in federal elections. These people believe said individuals ought to be punished and denied of their voting rights. On

the other hand, a handful of individuals think prison ought to be about rehabilitation; a borough to create opportunities for getting better and achieving a personal makeover otherwise absent in the most extremely dysfunctional and destroyed lives of numerous individuals incarcerated.

A convict's reintegration as a safe, accountable, and active member of the society should encompass the most fundamental right of a democratic undertaking, which is the right to decide who governs the nation. To deny prisoners' rights to choose who governs the nation is dehumanizing them. This is because, on the streets, there are numerous other convicts who are convicted on bail or just waiting for the judgment, and they participate in voting. With the individuals found guilty of wrongdoings but not provided custodial sentences being eligible to vote, the ones who are locked up should also be allowed to vote and should not be treated unfairly.

We ought not to confuse a criminal conviction and consequent elimination from the community with an aim to eliminate the vital human right to vote. This was the foundation of the latest European Union verdict to compel the United Kingdom to provide their prisoners' rights to vote. The issue of allowing prisoners to participate in elections has had a wide and diverse rejoin across the globe. Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden are some of the nations that do not have a ban on prisoner voting rights (Walsh, 2012). In other nations, electoral eligibility relies on the wrongdoing committed or the duration of the sentence.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which forbids prejudiced voting processes and averts a person from being deprived of the right to vote, should have included a clause for

prisoners. Maybe, by employing a comparable system, the verdict to permit prisoners to participate in elections might be based on the nature of their crimes or their severity. A process might be established that would trail a parallel path to parole procedures as part of tracking a convict's reintegration and preparedness to reenter society. Convicts are human beings who everyone has justifications for committing their wrongdoings. Being removed from the daily grind of wrongdoing, they rapidly see the necessity for a process of reintegration and aid in stabilizing their lives, lives more habitually than not ruined by family breakdown, economic dispossession, and addiction.

Maybe if the United States prisoner was provided with the rights to participate in federal elections, politicians would perceive the rights, needs, and interests of some 2.2 million convicts more seriously, in accordance with the 2018 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. They would necessitate to camp inside penitentiaries for votes and listen to the interests of the extensive range of citizens who are behind bars. Part of these visits might encompass an honest emphasis on the longstanding reintegration of the individual. This would consequently minimize reoffending rates and perhaps ensure a society with fewer criminals and convicts.

Elections help citizens of any nation speak about their issues and disappointments with the state of affairs in the country, whereas also taking the chance to campaign for their demands. In every policy, the emphasis should not be placed on the deterrence, prevention, and chastisement of wrongdoing but more imperatively on the conditions resulting in the wrongdoing and rehabilitation of the offender into the society. Withdrawal of rights to participate in elections compels the convicts far away from

society. A citizen without the right to participate in voting in a democracy has no existence (Kaur, 2019). This is palpable in Indian society as well, where manifestos for election hardly state any promises for improvement of penitentiary conditions or legislation. Convicts must rely on others to be their voice and put out concerns on their behalf. Henceforth, one direct effect that convicts' voting rights will bring is the apprehension of policymakers concerning the necessities of convicts. It might linger to be a small populace as equated to the size of the rest of society, even then a virtuous apprehension would stand for vote seekers and resultant winners of power to be receptive on the way to convict's demands.

Another imperative distinction to have in mind is that rules and regulations are created and modified with diverse administrations, whereas rights have been preserved as fundamental. A wrongdoing today may be legal tomorrow. Therefore, a right as basic as the right to vote ought not to be reliant on the status of incarceration or conviction.

Various countries have diverse electoral regulations overseeing the eligibility of prisoners and ex-prisoners to participate in national elections, often irrespective of international human rights agreements or regional electoral practice bargains. For the aim of the analyses, these countries have been categorized into four manageable groupings: countries that permit convicts to vote without any restrictions, countries that permit convicts to vote with some restrictions, countries that do not permit convicts to participate in an election, and countries that do not permit convicts to participate in elections and do not allow participation for a given time past one's imprisonment release date. Due to the ambiguous nature of the available information, not all countries were

classified. It is difficult to document the official voting rights of a prisoner as well as ex-prisoner because most constitutions and electoral laws are not clear concerning the rights of these people. In some cases, the electoral laws, or constitutions state that “all citizens” of a nation can participate in voting and leave the rest unstipulated. For example, if a nation makes exceptional requirements for particular voting necessities, for instance in military bases, prison facilities, and “special institutions,” they are not on the list. These kinds of whims are not involved in this grouping unless there is a document supporting it, for instance, an international observer or journalistic account. An example of a nation that could fit into two groupings is Chile, which, besides restricting its convicts from voting based on the type of crime, it also prohibits ex-prisoner voting for a period after imprisonment. Nations with an ambiguous description of these rights are not listed.

The following is a list of nations that permit prisoners to vote without any restrictions: Bosnia, Ireland, Montenegro, Iran, Ukraine, Canada, Pakistan, Albania, Peru, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, France, Bangladesh, Croatia, Lithuania, South Africa, Iceland, Slovenia, Kenya, Puerto Rico, Israel, Finland, Greece, Norway, Latvia, Macedonia, Czech Republic, Serbia, and Switzerland. Despite the legality of convicts participating in voting, in some of these nations, the procedure is not always smooth. Various issues can arise during the process, including ballot secrecy and registration issues.

The second category is nations that permit convicts to vote and the definite conditions that govern when convicts are eligible to participate. These nations include Turkey, Australia, Greece, Austria, Benin, Kosovo, Papua New Guinea, Italy, Jamaica,

Laos, Germany, Lesotho, Macedonia, Mali, Malta, Netherlands, Belize, Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, China, and Zimbabwe. Overall, irrespective of the nation, the more serious the wrongdoing encompassed, the less likely the eligibility will be to participate in voting. For example, in Lesotho, convicts with a death sentence cannot be allowed to participate in voting. The same policy exists in China. Prisoners incarcerated due to wrongdoings deliberated to be mainly egregious, for instances such as fraud in Germany, a felony in Kosovo, or “anarchistic or ideological” undertakings in Turkey, are not allowed to vote. In countries like Australia and Slovakia, particular convicts are permitted to vote in specific elections. For instance, in Australia, a prisoner convicted for fewer than 5 years can participate in federal elections, whereas in Slovakia, convicts can only participate in federal elections but not in local elections.

The third list is for the nations that prohibit prisoners from voting while serving their jail terms. These include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mongolia, Botswana, Egypt, Angola, Uruguay, Bulgaria, Malaysia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Comoros, Portugal, Bahamas, Moldova, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Belarus, Cyprus, Mozambique, India, Samoa Sao Tome, Azerbaijan, Argentina, Barbados, Palestinian, United Kingdom, Madagascar, Uganda, Territories, Georgia, Panama, Guatemala, Poland, Senegal, Russia Sierra Leone, Honduras, Venezuela, Hungary, Nigeria, Romania, Brazil, Cape Verde, Vietnam, Equator, Micronesia, St. Lucia St. Vincent, and Peru.

The fourth category includes the nations with the most restrictive guidelines where prisoners are not permitted to vote, whereas imprisoned and for the duration of time after their jail term is over. These countries include Cameroon, Armenia, Finland,

Belgium, New Zealand, Chile, the Philippines, and the United States. The United States has wide-ranging restrictive guidelines of this category of nations; some states completely ban ex-prisoners from participating in elections. Countries like Chile and Cameroon prohibit participating in elections for a period of 10 years after being released from prison.

From the nations listed, there are nearly 6,000,000-9,000,000 individuals who do not have the right to vote due to imprisonment. A nation like the United States, which has huge populations, also tends to be the most restrictive when it comes to prisoners having the right to participate in elections; however, there is no evidence of causation. It ought to be noted that more prisoners might be marginalized due to overall oversight throughout the administration of the election than from technical segregations. The effect on civil society, however, is much harder to examine. Whether these people, if released from penitentiaries, perhaps would positively contribute to the development of society.

Three hundred and sixty-three individuals per 100,000 were incarcerated in Maine and 328 per 100,000 in Vermont were incarcerated as of 2022 (World Atlas, n.d.). These are two of the few states that have given prisoners the right to vote. Within this number, only 4,000 were registered voters as of 2016. This means that only a few incarcerated individuals had their legal status to vote approved. Although this number is relatively low, studies in the state of Ohio have not confirmed the exact number of prisoners who have participated in national voting processes.

As the numbers continue to stagger, Wojcik (2018) showed that formerly incarcerated individuals experience considerable barriers to voter reinstatement. Some

states permanently disenfranchise all individuals from voting, even after serving their terms in rehabilitative facilities. In Ohio, all individuals incarcerated for a felony are considered ineligible to vote during national elections (White, 2019). However, the time of conviction, type of felony, the prerogative or mercy of governors, and the outcome of appealing cases can greatly affect the restoration of individuals' voting rights. More so, the overall reputation attached to a conviction that affects formerly incarcerated individuals' potential of obtaining good conduct approval from community heads can affect the restoration of their voting rights. Similarly, ex-convicts in Ohio need court approval to get their voting rights restored, adding yet another barrier to voting. Most of them must request a judicial pardon or petition the court.

There are concerns that formerly incarcerated individuals who have completed their terms and communal paroles are affected when they are disenfranchised from their civic rights. According to Kiefer (2019), the disenfranchisement from civic rights affects the social health and overall psychological health of ex-offenders. This predisposes the individuals to high chances of recidivism because they may feel they are no longer equal to other citizens and are no longer allowed to choose their political leaders, the concern that a ton of disenfranchisement on other privileges follow after one is incarcerated. This affects how they interact with other citizens and how they participate in economic activities, like searching for employment and other constructive tasks. Pleggenkuhle (2017) found that the negativity attached to post incarceration can affect formerly incarcerated individuals' mental health and their relationship with other citizens. Hence, they may prefer not to stick to the country's laws and may recommit the offense. From

the thematic analysis presented in this literature review, it is evident that the main themes covered include the failure of most regions within the United States, aside from Vermont and Maine, which are far from attaining modern-day democracy. Most U.S. states have failed to ensure that each citizen has the right to decide to whom to address their political needs and problems. Some states that used to allow pretrial detainees, felons, and some individuals tried for a misdemeanor to vote have banned the whole aspect of former or current detainees from voting. For example, Washington banned initially incarcerated individuals from voting. Some states like Illinois and New York have also provided the opportunity for prisoners to vote from their respective rehabilitative care facilities. However, this has only been achieved through a special situation mainly intervened by particular unions like the Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants. More so, this has only been achieved among detainees who are educated and informed about their overall human rights as prisoners and former inmates.

Secondly, the next theme derived in this section provides that most nations consider voting as a privilege. This privilege is usually taken away once an individual causes a misdemeanor to the law as a felon. However, human rights activists consider this an unfounded reason to cause the right-to-vote forfeiture. This explains why it is easy for one's voting status to be disregarded when one becomes a felon. However, the right to vote should not be regarded as a privilege (Kaur, 2019). It is a fundamental right that affects everyone when poor leadership is faced just because the millions of votes that could have changed the narrative are disregarded. Similarly, White (2019) pointed out that, yes, it is not wrong to follow the right-forfeiture theory. However, the voting status

should be restored as soon as an individual is set free from incarceration. It should not affect their lives after experiencing the periodicity of a lack of political, physical, and economic freedom during the prison days.

The last major theme explored in the literature analysis follows that criminal interests and felony accounts should not make anyone doubt the ability of an incarcerated individual to make the right choice regarding political leaders. Only a few rights, like the right to liberty, should be restricted in limits that protect the general public from any suspected vices attached to felons and criminals. However, the right to vote should be a privilege enjoyed by everyone because it is the only opportunity for each citizen to be able to change the country's political faces and growth.

Most present studies within the context of post-election analysis that have followed custody-based voter registration campaigns within adult correctional facilities aimed to explain why the inmates and all people with a history of imprisonment based on felony accounts should not vote. For instance, a study evaluation conducted by Kiefer (2019) concluded that any citizen who violates the law does not have the right to enjoy any right and their fate should only be based on the decision of the deciding judicial body. However, this is such an unfounded claim. Kiefer's position means anyone who commits a crime can undergo capital punishment right away after they are suspected. This aligns with Wojcik's (2018) postulation that stated that anyone can be on the bad side of the law, but the decision of fate should only be done within the constitutional guideline. This constitutional context is what seeks to protect the idea of democracy and human rights. One of the rights protected is the right to vote.

More studies within the United States and other nations have followed the right-forfeiture theory when withholding the right-to-vote privilege. However, this has only ended up in explaining why the right to vote is forfeited when one becomes a felon and still holds when one is out of the correctional facility. There have been no sufficient studies that have ended up proving why it is necessary to allow everyone to vote, more importantly, prisoners when they are in the facility and when they are out of the facility. White (2019) argued the right to vote should only be limited to those incarcerated for a misdemeanor but the status should be disregarded when the individual is finally free. Pleggenkuhle (2017) suggested that withholding rights is necessary, especially when protecting society from the vices of a criminal who might make political choices just to harm the outside society while they are incarcerated. However, it does not mean the individual will always make such a psychotic decision to harm society (Kaur, 2019). Everyone can change the political faces to what they deem as perfect political leadership. In light of these assertions, few studies have supported the idea of partial disenfranchisement. However, there lacks potential support from these studies, which aimed to explain why it is necessary to give voting rights to prisoners.

Specifically, Ohio lacks such support from studies. Therefore, based on the gaps that exist in explaining the relevance of the right to vote of all detainees, this study provides a clearer envision of the reality in Ohio. It avails support to the other existing studies and campaigns for judicial and legislative changes that will ultimately favor the conceptualization of the greater good (Taylor, 2017). This study provides an addition to the existing knowledge on the state of the matter in question. It can also act as a tool that

campaign or disregard to the discrimination of the former and existing felons. A positive influence of this study is that it helps fill some of the existing research gaps regarding proving why it is necessary to protect the rights of everyone regardless of their judicial status.

Conclusively, the study relied on the perspectives of the people of central Ohio. The findings of the study may bolster political empowering concerning legislative changes that will favor prison voter registration. The findings obtained in this study based on the research objectives and key variables help establish a clearer image of the state of affairs regarding the right to vote among ex-convicts and current prisoners. My ability to select respondents through an unbiased selection protocol provided the opportunity to understand the opinion of the main players in regard to the study of interest. I explain this further in the methodology section.

Summary and Conclusions

As seen, the concept of democracy and practicing constitutional rights can only be deemed perfect and practical when all citizens, regardless of their judicial status, are given their right to vote. This study provides insight into a society of Ohio that considers all initially incarcerated individuals and current inmates to be equal citizens with human rights. This forms an important adherence to the global guidelines postulated by the International Union for Human Rights and Democracy. The major concept obtained from the idea of the right to vote among incarcerated individuals is still not favored in the United States. The nation is far away from prisoner suffrage. Only a few states have been able to consider the right to vote as an essential life right to all citizens. Still, most human

rights activists have not been able to pass forth the concept that all individuals who have not had the opportunity to have a clean judicial record can practice the human rights they have failed in convincing the rest of the judicial and country heads those prisons and imprisonments form a critical aspect human rehabilitative care.

Former and current inmates should not be denied the freedom to enjoy the right to vote and select leaders whose agendas favor their general political, social, and economic growth. This is based on the postulation that imprisonment firms a part of life for all individuals who have been at loggerheads with the judiciary system, and it should not be held against the human rights of any individual in the country (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Hence, the legislators and judicial leaders must reconsider that all convicted and ex-convicted individuals get to enjoy their normal lives while in and out of rehabilitative facilities.

Attaining prisoners' suffrage is dependent on the contribution of all, ranging from normal citizens to the top-ranked legislators, to drop the tag attached to current inmates and ex-convicts (Root & Kennedy, 2018). This will attain a global situation that will significantly impact changing the negative perceptions attached to prisoners. More so, it is understandable that anyone can be on the wrong side of the law. This means the discrimination from voting can befall anyone who has been incarcerated. However, the concept of being a current or former felon should not decide whether an individual has the freedom to vote for a leader in a political position who has the ability to negatively affect the life of each citizen. Chapter 3 includes in-depth discussions of the

methodology, participants, setting, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to describe the facilitators and barriers that incarcerated individuals experience in voting and registering to vote from the perspective of nonprofit organizers in central Ohio. Efforts to allow previously convicted individuals to vote in states such as Mississippi, Alaska, and Alabama have not reached the incarcerated population. Offenders' civic rights end once they break the law (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Social and voting rights activists have championed for the withdrawal of restrictions to voting rights for previously and currently incarcerated individuals (Root & Kennedy, 2018). However, scholarly positions and political influences have merely aided in championing for the privilege of the right to vote among incarcerated individuals. Nearly the entire United States prohibits at least some felons from participating in local and federal elections, and a few states continue to disenfranchise ex-felons after they have ended their sentences (White, 2019). The more than 4,000,000 Americans who are not able to vote because of a felony conviction involve individuals in prison, those on probation or parole, and in some states those who have served their felony sentence. Most inmates in local jails, however, are lawfully entitled to vote (White, 2019), including individuals in pretrial detention awaiting trial and those serving misdemeanor sentences. Even though numerous custody-based individuals are eligible to vote, comparatively few vote because of the logistical difficulties. For example, it is difficult for convicted felons to acquire voting registration forms from the office of the registrar. Additionally, for those who are in prison who are already registered to vote, it may be difficult to obtain an absentee ballot. The Hispanic and African American populations are disproportionately

incarcerated, making up approximately 68% of the incarcerated population nationally (World Atlas, n.d.). People of color are particularly vulnerable to these difficulties. In recent years, social and voting rights activists have undertaken campaigns to inform incarcerated individuals of their voting rights and encourage prisoners to register to vote.

Stances on permitting convicted felons to vote have been varied with numerous states currently allowing ex-felons who have served their prison terms to participate in elections. For example, voters in Florida recently decided to permit ex-felons to have their rights to participate in elections restored upon ending their sentences (Kiefer, 2019). The current study was designed to explore the barriers and concerns about voting registration campaigns while being in jail or custody. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the research design and rationale for the study, my role as the researcher, the methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

To answer the research questions, I used a general qualitative design. There are five qualitative designs: grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative research, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative designs involve the collection of rich textual data from interviews, observations, and researcher notes to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' feelings or perceptions about a particular issue. The goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory that is grounded in the data. Phenomenological designs are used to describe how individuals assign meaning to their lived experiences. Ethnography produces an in-depth account the research problem rooted in the cultural context from which data are collected. The narrative design

is used to understand an individual's experience using their individual stories. For the present study, I used a general qualitative design to answer the RQs.

The literature review focused on disenfranchisement barriers post release from incarceration. The purpose of this study was to explore the barriers individuals experience during a voter registration campaign while in jail or custody. Previous research focused on collateral sanctions upon sentencing and post release. Incarcerated individuals are generally removed from the rest of society, leaving them with little to no interest in voting and exercising their civic duty. Most of the inmates are ignorant of their rights to participate in the voting exercise. This creates an opportunity for authorities to provide incarcerated individuals with the necessary linkages through voter registration campaign information. Pauls et al (2015) argued that the participation of incarcerated individuals in voting has been limited by internal and external factors relating to the knowledge of individuals about their rights. Some examples of these factors as they relate to the research are that stakeholders are unable to communicate face-to-face or otherwise with this population while in local custody like they can with other registered voters in the community. An external factor could be the accessibility and education of these individuals upon their release and return to the community either through the completion of their local sentence or a release on bond.

A general qualitative approach provides insight into the outer-world content of the research question (Percy et al., 2015). In the current study, this approach was used to explore the barriers and facilitators that incarcerated people face with regard to voting from the perspective of nonprofit organizers. Nonprofit organizers were positioned to

provide insight on this topic because of their proximity to incarcerated individuals through their efforts to organize and advocate for voting rights among this population. According to Bevan (2014), qualitative research methods are used to explore feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of the target population. A qualitative approach, when compared to a quantitative approach, was suitable for the current study because it aligned with the study's goal to explore the participants' outward experiences. I acted as the research instrument used to conduct qualitative interviews with participants (see Yilmaz, 2013). The primary data source for this study was semi structured telephone interviews with 15 nonprofit social service employees working in central Ohio. I used a general qualitative approach to describe the phenomenon as it exists in the current state of jails in central Ohio.

Role of the Researcher

The research was executed through a general qualitative approach in which I sought to collect data from nonprofit community organizers to understand their perception of voting registration and voter engagement among incarcerated people. My primary role as the researcher in this study was as an observer. As an observer, I obtained informed consent from participants, collected interview data, and analyzed the data.

I explained the study procedures to participants prior to obtaining informed consent. I revealed any personal and professional relationships I may have had with participants, emphasizing any supervisory or instructor relationships involving any authority over participants. If I experienced any potential biases or power relationships,

they were managed through consultation with committee members for resolution prior to moving forward with the study.

Methodology

Population and Sample Selection

In the present study, the unit of analysis was individuals who work in nonprofit social service agencies in central Ohio. Participants were included in the study if they met the following inclusion criteria: (a) willing and available to participate in the study, (b) age 18 or over, (c) speak English, and (d) currently employed with a community partner in central Ohio. According to Malterud et al. (2016), there is no prescribed sample size for qualitative studies; instead, the researcher should aim to achieve a sample that is sufficient to attain data saturation. The current sample size was contingent on the number that yielded data saturation. Previous research illustrated that data saturation is achieved within 12 interviews in most qualitative studies (Guest et al., 2006). For the present study, I intended to recruit 12–15 participants to ensure that enough qualitative interviews were conducted to reach data saturation. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to select individuals who have qualities, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the topic being studied (Etikan et al., 2016; Kandola et al., 2014). For the present study, purposive sampling allowed me to recruit nonprofit social service workers who had experience engaging with incarcerated people in the context of voting and voter registration initiatives.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument for this study was in-person or virtual face-to-face semi structured interviews. A semi structured interview protocol guided the data collection (see Appendix A). The interview guide was designed to identify barriers of civic awareness in most of the local custody facilities in central Ohio. King et al. (2018) indicated that interviews allow researchers to obtain more detailed information concerning participants' feelings, opinions, and perceptions about a particular issue. Respondents in the current study had the opportunity to explain the structures that are in place to support civic engagement through the voting of incarcerated individuals.

Prior to completing the qualitative interview, participants were asked to provide their informed consent and complete a brief demographic survey (see Appendix B). Underrepresented groups have been impacted differently by the criminal justice system. The qualitative interviews addressed the ways in which the criminal justice system impacts individuals. The demographic survey provided additional context regarding participants' experiences and feelings regarding voting and the criminal justice system.

Procedures for Recruitment and Data Collection

The sample was recruited from one nonprofit community partner organization in central Ohio. Consent to approach nonprofit workers was obtained from the director of each of these organizations. The first step of recruitment was obtaining permission from the target sites. To obtain permission to recruit employees to participate in the study and access employee contact information, I wrote an email to the director of this site. The email included a statement about the purpose of the study, the participants' role, my role

as the researcher, how results would be used, privacy and confidentiality procedures, and a consent form. Once I received permission to conduct the study at this site, I began recruiting participants. To recruit participants, I asked the site director for access to employees' emails. Recruitment procedures included direct emails to employees and informational sessions with administrators.

Data collection in the present study was completed through recorded telephone conversations with individual participants. Participants became engaged with the study through direct email from their employer. Participants received an email from me inviting them to participate in the study and providing them with the consent form and demographic survey. To express interest in the study, prospective participants responded to the email stating their interest and attaching their completed consent form and demographic survey. When a potential participant contacted me to express interest in the study, I scheduled the interview by allowing the prospective participant to select their preferred interview time. The interview was scheduled for 30 minutes to ensure in-depth conversation. During the interview, I audio-recorded the session using Google Voice. Upon completion of the interview, participants received a \$25 Visa gift card for their participation. After conducting the interview, I downloaded the Google Voice transcript of the interview. No in-person interviews were held.

Data Analysis Plan

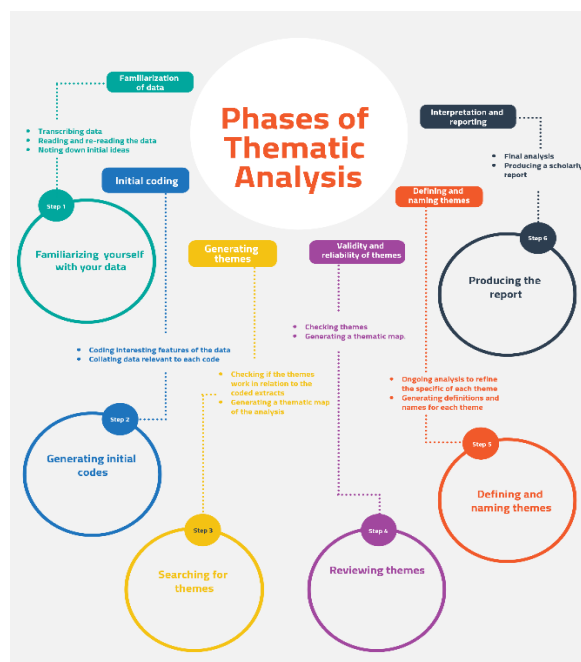
Upon completion of data collection, I reviewed each transcript to ensure it captured what was recorded in the interview by checking for any spelling or grammatical errors. Next, I contacted the participant to give them the opportunity to review the

transcript to ensure that it accurately captured their statements. Prior to data analysis, I audited the interview transcripts to remove any identifying information such as participants' names, places of business, or counties of residence. To further protect the participants' identity, I labeled participants' documents by ID numbers ranging from P1 to P15. I used NVivo, a data collection software program, to organize, code, and analyze the data to identify common themes. I used thematic analysis to code and analyze the data (see Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thematic analysis involved a six-step procedure by which I became immersed in the data.

All interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo. In the first step of the thematic analysis, I became familiar with the data. In this step, I read and reread the interview responses and reviewed the audio recordings. The purpose of being familiarized with the data was to ensure that I was immersed in the data and personally familiar with its content. Step 2 of thematic analysis involved the initial coding phase. I used NVivo to code data line by line, condensing excerpts with common meanings into codes. The third step involved reviewing the codes to identify themes. To accomplish this, I examined the codes for similarities that may have contributed to overarching themes. In this step, initial themes that answered the RQs were generated. In Step 4 of thematic analysis, I examined these initial themes and revised them as necessary to ensure they were sufficiently responding to the RQs. In the next step, I created short titles for each theme and working definitions. The final step of thematic analysis was contextualizing the themes that emerged by describing their significance to the RQs. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the thematic analysis process (see Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Figure 1

Illustration of Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis Approach



Note. From “What Can ‘Thematic Analysis’ Offer Health and Wellbeing Researchers?” by V. Braun & V. Clarke, 2014, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 9(1), p. 87 (<https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.26152>).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The four major characteristics of trustworthiness were upheld in this study to ensure that validity was established (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). These four characteristics are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were provided with consent forms prior to completing the interviews. Participants were first taken through the content of the consent form systematically to ensure they understood the terms of the research, what was required of them, and that the information would remain confidential. The potential

candidates for the investigation were given adequate information concerning the study. They received an explanation of the study's purpose, duration, risks, benefits, and experimental procedures that would be involved in the research. In addition, candidates were given the opportunity to ask questions concerning the study and have them answered to their satisfaction as they considered all of the options available for them to be as comfortable as possible. Informed consent provides the subjects with sufficient time to think about the study and consider participating (Cho et al., 2015).

The informed consent form was written in a nontechnical language, which is easy to understand, and everything was explained to the potential participants to ensure they had a complete understanding of the study (Grady, 2015). They were assured that the information would be treated as anonymous and allowed enough time to think about it before signing the informed consent. Data collected for the research study were deidentified to maintain participant anonymity. Data collected from the study are stored in a locked and secure location in a password-protected file, where they will remain for a period of no more than 5 years. I will permanently delete digital copies and shred all hard copies thereafter.

Ethical Procedures

The sample was recruited from community partner nonprofit organizations in central Ohio. Consent to approach nonprofit workers was obtained from the regional director of this organization. The first step of recruitment was obtaining permission from the target site. To obtain permission to recruit employees to participate in the study and access employee contact information, I wrote an email to the regional director of the site.

The email included a statement about the purpose of the study, the participants' role, my role as the researcher, how results will be used, privacy and confidentiality procedures, and a consent form. Once I received permission to conduct the study at the site, I began recruiting participants. Recruitment procedures included creating an informational flyer that was distributed to employees and the site administrator, direct emails to employees, and informational sessions with administrators. Data collection in the present study was completed through telephone conversation with individual participants. Participants became engaged with the study through email from their employer. They had access to my contact information to express interest in participating in the study. When a potential participant contacted me to express interest in the study, I sent them the informed consent form, demographic survey via email, and then scheduled an interview for 30 minutes to ensure in-depth conversation.

During the interview, I audio-recorded the session using Google Voice. Upon completion of the interview, participants received a \$25 Visa gift card for their participation. After conducting the interview, I downloaded the Google Voice generated transcript of the interview. No in-person interviews were held, I audio-recorded all the interviews using Goggle Voice. The informed consent form was written in a nontechnical language, which is easy to understand, and everything was explained to the potential participants to ensure they had a complete understanding of the study (Grady, 2015). They were assured that the information would be treated as anonymous and allowed enough time to think about it before signing the informed consent. Data collected for the research study were deidentified to maintain participant anonymity. I explained the study

procedures to participants prior to obtaining informed consent. I revealed any personal and professional relationships I may have had with participants, emphasizing any supervisory or instructors' relationships involving any authority over participants. I did not experience any biases and or power relationships, this was managed through consultation with committee members for resolution prior to moving forward with the study. Being in this study could have involved some risk of minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study posed minimal risk to participants' wellbeing. I provided participants with contact information for a free or low-cost support resource via www.lssnetowrkofhope.org.

Participants who agreed to participate in the study were provided with informed consent form prior to completing the study procedures. They were first taken through the content of the consent form systematically to ensure they all understand the terms of the research, what was required of them, and that the information would remain confidential. The potential candidates for the investigation were given adequate information concerning the study. They received an explanation about the purpose of the study, including the duration, risks, benefits, and experimental procedures that would be involved in the research. In addition, they were given the opportunity to ask questions concerning the study and have them answered to their satisfaction as they considered all the options available for them to be as comfortable as possible. Informed consent allows the subjects to acquire sufficient time to think about the study and consider participating (Cho et al., 2015). I included verbal audio-recording consent as an option just before

beginning interviews with individual participants. Their identities will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. I assured participants that I would not use their personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, their responses are not associated with their name or any potentially identifying information. Data will be stored securely and destroyed after 5 years.

Upon completion of data collection, I reviewed the transcripts to ensure they accurately captured what was recorded in the interview, carefully checking for any spelling or grammatical errors. Next, I contacted each participant to give them the opportunity to review the transcript to ensure they believed it accurately captured their statements. Prior to data analysis, I audited the interview transcripts to remove any identifying information such as names, places of business, or counties of residence. To further protect the participants' anonymity, participants' documents were labeled by ID numbers ranging from P1 to P15. I used NVivo, a data collection software, to organize, code, and analyze the data to identify common themes. I used thematic analysis to code and analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thematic analysis involves a six-step procedure by which the researcher becomes immersed in the data. Data collected for the research study were de-identified to maintain participant anonymity. Data collected from the study are stored in a locked and secure location in a password-protected file, where they will remain for a period of no more than 5 years. I will permanently delete digital copies and shred all hard copies thereafter. This researcher shall mask the organization's identity in published reports and presentations. I explained the study procedures to participants prior to obtaining informed consent. I revealed any personal and professional

relationships I may have had with participants, emphasizing any supervisory or instructors' relationships involving any authority over participants. I did not experience any biases and or power relationships they were managed through consultation with committee members for resolution prior to moving forward with the study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I detailed the methodology and research design I used to answer the research questions of the present study. A qualitative research methodology with a general qualitative study design was used for this study. This methodology and design aligned with the research problem, purpose, and research questions. Data collection was completed through a brief demographic survey and an individual interview of nonprofit organizers with the goal of exploring their perceptions of the barriers that incarcerated people face in voting and voter registration. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo to identify common themes across participants. In Chapter 4, I present the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore what nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio. Allowing previously convicted individuals to vote in states such as Mississippi, Alaska, and Alabama has not been enough. The central issue is that experiencing democracy and civic rights ends once an individual breaks the law (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Therefore, social and voting rights activists have championed for the withdrawal of restrictions to voting rights for previously and currently incarcerated individuals (Root & Kennedy, 2018). Scholars have argued why prisoners should be allowed to vote. However, scholarly positions and political influences have merely aided in championing for the privilege of the right to vote among incarcerated individuals.

Ohio has allowed certain offenders to vote once they complete their terms in correctional facilities (American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, n.d.). Once voting activities were completely satisfied, postelection analysis showed that only a few offenders took part in the voting activities. The current study aimed to explore why offenders should take part in pre-election voting registration campaigns during their period of detention. I sought to identify the barriers offenders experience through social and political influences on why restrictions to voting registrations campaigns should not be placed on incarcerated individuals. Information collected from the study may help emancipated prisoners take part in voting activities and help increase prisoners' participation in election activities by better understanding the barriers to voting and

registering to vote for formerly and currently imprisoned individuals. The following RQs guided this qualitative study:

RQ1: What do nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting or voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio?

RQ2: What impact do nonprofit social service organizers believe voter registration among incarcerated individuals has on the communities into which they will reintegrate?

Chapter 4 presents the procedures used to conduct the in-depth interviews and collection and analysis of the data. Chapter 4 also includes the study's setting, participant demographics, and study results.

Setting

I recruited a willing nonprofit community partner who had knowledge of facilitators and barriers that incarcerated individuals experience in voting and registering to vote from the perspective of nonprofit organizers in central Ohio. The community partner's responsibilities were providing me with contact information for potential participants. Through qualitative methodology, I made use of rich textual data from interviews, observations, and my notes to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' feelings or perceptions about the issue under study.

Personal and organizational structures that impacted participants' individual experiences and comments in this study were shared as part of their varied responses. The data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the global

community, altering people's everyday lives and complicating their life tasks. The partnering community agency afforded me the opportunity to contact individuals to participate in the study with privacy and confidentiality. Those recruited and willing to participate in this study were provided with telephone and email information and asked to indicate privately their willingness to participate in the study. Fifteen out of 16 individuals responded to and provided consent forms agreeing to participate in this study. I informed the participants of their right to decline or terminate their participation during the interview process.

Demographics

The study participants self-identified as African American males between ages 45 and 71, African American females between ages 32 and 60, White males between ages 48 and 52, White females between ages 52 and 60, and one other male age 54 all working with the community partner while having an interest in voting registration and civic engagement of individuals in jail or custody with impactful barriers. Participant selection relied on commitment from the community partner along with the willingness to collaborate in my study. This targeted sample was selected simply because it included participants who met the selection criteria of over the age of 18, speak and understand English, and employed as part of the selected community partner (see Table 1).

Table 1*Demographic Description*

Participant	Age	Sex assigned at birth	Ethnicity	Longevity at community partner
P1	58	Female	African American	4 years
P2	59	Male	African American	13 years
P3	54	Male	Other	2 years
P4	71	Male	African American	2 years
P5	58	Female	African American	8 years
P6	56	Male	African American	15 years
P7	48	Male	White	4 years
P8	32	Female	African American	4 years
P9	59	Male	White	4.5 years
P10	52	Female	White	10 years
P11	41	Female	African American	13 years
P12	60	Female	African American	10 years
P13	60	Female	White	5 years
P14	45	Male	African American	20 years
P15	46	Female	African American	24 years

Note. Level of engagement in civic duty as it relates to voting registration of the participants. All 15 participants were working with this community partner at the time of the study.

Data Collection

The 15 participants from whom the data were collected were men and women of various races and ages between 32 and 71. Participants were employed with the community partner and engaged individuals with facilitating the custody-based voter registration campaigns within adult correctional and residential facilities. The interviews were conducted using telephone technology. The data collection consisted of 15 in-depth interviews lasting 30 minutes maximum. The participants agreed to participate from a location of their choosing. This method assured confidentiality and privacy for the participants. The interviews were electronically recorded to ensure clarity and accuracy for data analysis. The participants exited the study by participating in a brief voluntary feedback session to attend to their questions or concerns. The data collection did not require significant deviations from the method and process outlined in Chapter 3. The interviews were transcribed using the NVivo transcription service and edited twice to ensure accuracy and clarity. The NVivo platform was also valuable in data coding and sentiment grading.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to code and analyze the data (see Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thematic analysis was a six-step procedure by which I became immersed in the data. All interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo. In the first step of the thematic analyses, I became familiar with the data. In this step, I read and reread the interview responses and reviewed the audio recordings. The purpose of being familiarized with the data was to ensure that I was deeply immersed in the data and personally familiar with its content.

Data analysis was performed as detailed in Chapter 3 by organizing the data gathered from in-depth interviews. This was accomplished by transcribing the recorded interviews into text using NVivo transcription. Data cleaning included determining accuracies in the transcript, record matching, and ensuring accurate translation. I used NVivo to move data inductively from coding units to categories and themes based on several topics such as text search, word frequency, and matrix query with sentiment grading. Then, I used the NVivo platform to develop and construct coded frequency charts to create a comprehensive visual representation of the interview data. The codes and categories that emerged from the data were as follows: barriers to registering to vote while in jail or custody, whether voter registration initiatives targeting those in jail or custody meet the needs of offenders, existing supports to individuals in jail or custody that help them engage in voting, complexity of registering to vote while in jail or custody, perception level of engagement in civic duty relating to voting registration, and what motivates individuals in jail or custody to vote or register to vote. These codes were combined to develop four themes: in-custody registration campaign, voting challenges knowledge and interests, and ballot box (see Table 2).

Table 2*Description of Themes*

Priori code ¹	Open code ²	Sentiment grading ³	Categories perception ⁴	Theme/ Participant ⁵
In-custody registration campaigns	Civic duty and engagement	Negative Mod neg Very neg Neutral Positive Mod pos Very pos	Voting registration	Interest as it relates to voter registration P1, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P14, P15 (n = 10)
Voting challenges	Barriers and facilitators	Sentiment of the civic process	Outcomes and results	Experiences trying to register P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15 (n = 10)
Knowledge and interest	Perception and impact	Sentiment of individual registrant	Motivations	Information obtained about registering to vote P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15 (n = 13)
Ballot box	Resources needed for improvement	Sentiment of impact within population	Supportive initiatives	Outcomes in this target population P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P14, P15 (n = 11)

Note. ¹Codes developed before examining the current data; ²open codes were generated during the examination of existing data; ³sentiment identified during the analysis of existing data; ⁴categories developed during examination of combining codes and sentiment; ⁵themes created by combining codes, categories, and sentiment.

Theme 1: Interest as it Relates to Voter Registration

The in-depth interviews resulted in unique responses from each participant. All 15 participants shared their individual knowledge, and four participants commented from personal experience through their democratic voice of voter registration. For a few participants, this act of civic engagement is lifelong from the enactment of eligibility, and for other participants, it is a right as an adult and citizen. This theme revealed that participants were concerned about civic engagement through voter registration. I found that each participant was able to articulate their varied interest. Four participants shared points that supported the research questions. For example, P5 said

well, I've always felt like I was born 10 years too late when I grew up and I learned about the civil rights with Martin Luther King Jr. growing up, I had always been kind of curious about our civil rights and learning about. Just being. Equal, I should say. And I think that kind of like would draw me into it and so I've just been. Been curious ever since then, and so I've been in pursuit of and wondering why there had always been like. Certain disadvantages for some people, while others have advantages, so I guess that's what kind of like control me.

P11 said "oh, that was a good question. Just making sure that our voices is heard as far as voter registration, making sure that our clients know their rights as far as their ability to vote." P15 shared

So as a career educator, voting and civic engagement is important because on so many levels for education, because laws and policies are created in the voting

booth. And if we can't get the right people in the seats, then education suffers because education doesn't have the resources that it needs to help students grow. And so, it's an important component. Well, people talk about education being under funded and under-resourced and under prioritize. When we when we when we use our voting rights to get the right people in to see students win.

These participants shared comments that were indifferent about the interest to voter registration. The overall interest was not meaningful to the process of voting registration in custody that's included as part of an individual's civic engagement. P2 commented

actually, because I was incarcerated, and I think people have got it wrong and most prisoners got the wrong idea about what they got incarcerated. They couldn't vote. So, I got a lot of reasons why I was incarcerated about the voting rights.

P12 said "well, I don't I don't get into all. I work a lot, but I could even answer that question. Okay."

Theme 2: Experiences Trying to Register

Participants shared their experiences when asked about the complexities to in-custody registering to vote. An analysis of these data indicated that the challenges differed regarding barriers and facilitators as related to this theme. I found that barriers could be accessibility to information or voter registration material to the offenders while in custody. Participants explained that facilitators to the process could be improved communication by stakeholders and administrators within the facilities. P1 commented

I believe it impacts them while they're in jail. They don't get the opportunity to know why they're voting. They don't understand it's a barrier for them because they're in prison. So, for those who are running for president or vice president or any of the state senators, they don't understand why their vote matters. But it does. They should be able to vote for the person so that they can make sure that the right person can see it stops them from voting. If you don't talk to them, express them from voting. They don't know. They don't understand. They need a who, what, when and why. And they don't have that.

P2 said

What barriers do you think individuals experience trying to register to vote while in jail custody? How do you think these barriers impact? Voter engagement among individuals in jail custody. I break the barriers are one thing because they don't have the knowledge of what's going on the outside because they don't have the same information as somebody being outside for who to vote for, who not to vote for because they really have literature on the TV itself. And with that being said, if you don't have your own TV, you don't have to have that accent to look at who to vote for because you're going on to share TV while you're incarcerated in prison. In your opinion, what impact, if any, does voter engagement among incarcerated individuals have on local community issues, for example, social justice concerns, educational initiatives, legislative representation? I think one thing else in the justice system had a great impact on people have been concentrating.

P11 said:

I think it's a big impact. I personally believe that they should be able to register while incarcerated and then once they get released, they are able to voice their opinions. Um yeah, I don't know if that was your question.

P15 commented:

Yeah, I think the barriers I've mentioned a little bit about that around not knowing your rights, not having access, not being treated as if you even have a voice or a matter or if you matter. I think that that those are the biggest barriers we're not accessing and going to those particular institutions to ensure that they are they are voting in how to vote. How exactly does that happen if we don't go and make that a priority? And so, I think that's the biggest. Biggest barrier, and the other thing is again. Is it a favor I don't even know, is it a state-by-state thing? Is it county by county? To some people, though, some infractions. Some offenses are able to still vote. Some are not. Did you lose your voting altogether for the rest of your life? Like, it's just a lot of misconceptions and a lot of we are as a country, severely overstepping. Authority and admitting a big faction of people, we are ignoring them in this process and their votes and in their opinion should matter is will. The biggest barrier? We don't make it a priority and we have made they are voting important for whatever reason.

Theme 3: Information Obtained About Registering to Vote

The theme of information obtained about registering to vote developed in the data analysis. The in-depth interviews revealed what the participants believed motivated the

individuals in jail-custody to vote or register to vote. This was a significant issue establishing motivations of beliefs of personal experience, interactions with the criminal justice system, and a particular social justice issue. This significant finding is important in understanding the overall impact in-custody jail perceptions have on individuals. I found through the research that 3 of the 15 participants indicated in their comments that motivation to obtain the registration material was the essential factor with completing the registration process. In-custody voter registration is a challenging process indicated by this research along with the comments shared to this researcher. I discovered that participants shared various levels of interest by offenders in exercising the ability of civic engagement.

P12 said, “Probably with the criminal justice system and maybe motivated with that, maybe the guys, they talk to one another and this and that and you know, I just don’t know.”

P14 commented:

Wow. Yes, I believe that because of those, I’ve also heard people say those closest. To the problem, is the solution something to that nature? I just believe, yes, they would be more involved. If it has more, if it relates more to what they’re dealing with as it relates to the judicial system, it’s in the nature.

P15 commented:

Right, so you are treated unjustly and in places and you don’t have things like your sleep machine, and you don’t have, you know, you’re not treated fairly, you are again over consequence for behaviors in the air when you don’t have you have

your basic liberties taken away from you. You know that that drives people to a point of wanting to do better and wanting to advocate for their own personal lives and their personal rights. Right. And so, I think that a lot of bad things are happening in the criminal justice system that people are getting away with a lot of things. And again, we are not listening. So, I think that they're very much driven by the things that are happening day to day in the criminal justice system.

Theme 4: Outcomes in This Target Population

Social action at the ballot box resulting in the success of individuals in jail-custody registration campaigns is the result of this theme. The combining of the codes and categories thematically analyzed the participants' responses to develop the outcomes. This process provided the participants the opportunity to candidly share if the needs of this population are being satisfied or not. The participants in this theme were given the opportunity to respond to any existing supports along with if additional resources are needed to support voter registration outcomes in this population. I found out through this research that outcomes shall vary due in part to cooperative and collaborative efforts of community partners involved in registration campaign. This theme as this researcher discovered was explained by participants was one of opportunity to improve the overall outcomes of voter registration.

P1 commented:

They need the actual information so that they can see who they are voting whether it's on paper or whether it's on TV, if they're allowed to watch it. That gives them a chance to see who they're voting for or if that person is the right person they

should be voting for or should be in that seat. Just because they're in prison doesn't mean that they shouldn't be able to vote because if they weren't in prison, they will be part of the population. They will be able to vote anyway. But because they are behind bars and them in prison, I think they have a right to vote. I believe their vote matters. It counts. I don't think they should limit them from that voting. So, they need that information in person to help them.

P11 said, "Yes, I believe that their caseworkers are their case managers should have them have an option to vote prior to being released and have the information there so that they are able to sign up and register to vote."

P2 commented:

I feel that we have more people to come in and talk to these guys or women, old females, or males, and we have more people coming here to talk to them about voting, registration and what their rights have now become another prisoner. I think there will be a great help. OK. Is there any question or anything you'd like to add or anything that I did not ask that you like to include or wish to share? One thing I would like the feedback on is that people have access to get into the system, to talk to these guys, women, and guys about voter registration. I think that would be a great help if they can do that not only the time of voting, but year-round. Okay. That's it, I'm going to report it, yes, but I am going home.

P15 said:

Yeah, I don't think that education. Resources that allow voting to happen inside the facilities, I think multilingual materials, right, because we have a variety of

language being spoken access, I think definitely needs to be included in this clean-up of understanding your rights, voting rights, and removing barriers to voting rights. I mean. What, what type of. Cleaning up the process of okay, because federally, they come from all over the nation, so is just a lot to clean up around. That's where they're voting. When are they voting? Just really understanding and coming up with a protocol in a system that makes the most sense to reduce opportunities for barriers and misconceptions and confusions, I think is important. Access education and to honor their rights right, we have to make a commitment to change when you make a commitment to change the way we treat them as fairly as human beings and citizens of America. And I think that we can do better by them in this particular way.

The data reviewed revealed a couple of discrepant cases simply indicating that those participants remained misunderstood regarding the ability to vote in custody versus the opportunity to register to vote. The voter registration campaigns analyzed in this study examined several factors and participants shared responses that furthered the continued action of civic engagement.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The four major characteristics of trustworthiness were upheld as part of this study to ensure that validity was established (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). These four characteristics are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In this study, the implementation of credibility strategies, including the additional conversations with participants, was extremely limited. As part of these strategies, as it relates to credibility, I conducted an additional analysis of each interview using the NVivo software program. As part of the process to further utilize the platform, I performed a review both by visibly and audibly conducting several screenings of the collected data. Finally, I used member checking during the interview process to understand and reviewed responses clearly for accuracy and clarity.

Transferability

The act of civic engagement through the process of registering to vote is transferable to each individual in custody subsequent to release. Transferability is a precise description of this study's question and design with the basis for aligning with participants' experiences (King et al., 2018). The following are examples of participants' responses:

P10 said, "I don't believe that the people have that people believe they have the right to vote, especially the people that are in custody or getting released from custody. They may struggle with their rights."

Awareness

P14 said,

That's a good question. I want to say that I believe. It's a high awareness regarding civic duty prior, during and after. Yeah, I almost forgot that, yeah. Yeah. Okay. Yeah, I think there's a high level, I think that that's big.

Civic Engagement

P8 said,

OK. From the conversations I've had with residents prior to their legal issues, a lot of them did not vote. They said they either were never interested in voting. They didn't know what they were voting about or where to vote during custody. Honestly, I'm not. I've never been to prison or to jail, so I'm not sure. I don't think you can vote while you're in custody, but I do know I think they changed the I think they changed rules to some people being allowed to vote after they've been released from custody and. We've had voter registration cards come to the House before I passed about, and not very many people are still willing to vote or learn about how to go about voting.

Guidelines established by Walden University's Institutional Review Board were also used to establish transferability for this research study.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established by paying close attention to detail, documenting the data collected, and analyzing the information in this research study. Detailed information, interpretations, methods, and theories were provided to show how these findings were developed. Sentiment grading was included as part of my interview process. Grading sentiment included a level of personalization that each participant added to their response. Each participant response had a range on a scale of emotion that was included utilizing the NVivo software platform. Upon completing sentiment grading, I documented the findings from the participants' responses within each code. Those

participants who were conflicted or undecided in their responses received the appropriate indication on the scale within the range of emotions.

Dependability

According to King et al., (2018), dependability within a research study is satisfied with reliability; the researcher utilizes established protocols to display that, if the study was duplicated in the same manner, with the same methods, and with the same or similar participants, it would achieve comparable results. I used a methodology that achieved detailed recording and documented the processes I used to select the participants and gather the data. The methods and tools I used helped transcribe and code the data so future researchers can duplicate this study.

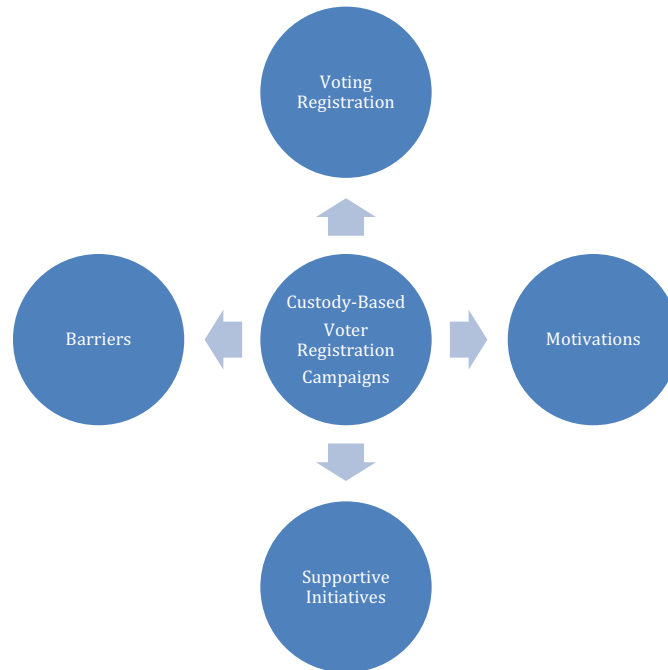
Results

In this section, I discuss the final step of thematic analysis utilized as part of this study and contextualize the themes that emerged by describing their significance to the research questions. These codes, categories, and themes revealed themselves from the observed data from the participants' responses during the in-depth interview process. The specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data were personal and invaluable. The codes and categories represented relevant material current to the research that impacted the participants' responses. The themes that emerged were voting registration, barriers, motivations, and supportive initiatives (see Figure 2). To maintain continuity in the themes, clustering and thematizing procedures were utilized to explain the necessity to be representative of and accurate to the participants' responses. These specific codes, categories, and themes detailed an ample selection of distressing areas of

significance that produced four significant themes directly addressing the research questions and its complex confluence (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Custody-Based Voter Registration Campaigns



Theme 1: Interest as it Relates to Voter Registration

Voter registration campaigns are a social action in the exercise of an individual's single democratic voice. This study remained focused through the participants' responses to the research questions. Barriers and or facilitators are perceived phenomenon that individuals acknowledge through the participants trying to register to vote. Registering to vote while in custody was demonstrated through the participants' responses as a key component of reentry toward citizen restoration.

P1 said:

I believe it impacts them while they're in jail. They don't get the opportunity to know why they're voting. They don't understand it's a barrier for them because they're in prison. So, for those who are running for president or vice president or any of the state senators, they don't understand why their vote matters. But it does. They should be able to vote for the person so that they can make sure that the right person can see it stops them from voting. If you don't talk to them, express them from voting. They don't know. They don't understand. They need a who, what, when and why. And they don't have that.

P11 commented:

I think it's a big impact. I personally believe that they should be able to register while incarcerated and then once they get released, they are able to voice their opinions. Um yeah, I don't know if that was your question.

Theme 2: Experiences Trying to Register

Participants' responses to the research questions were unique and varied demographically and in longevity with the community partner. I recorded the participants' responses and kept notes that provided a range of emotions regarding voter registration. I developed an understanding of how the voter registration question, along with the impact to community for an individual who is released from custody returning to central Ohio, was significant on local community issues.

P1 said:

My opinion? I really don't know. I believe that because of the local community, there are a lot of issues. They are probably. Don't know why they feel like justice

has been served. I'm not really sure how to really answer that question for you. They do need education, though they have no education there. They do have education; I believe in prison. But I believe it's only to a certain extent so they don't learn as much as they should in prison as they would do one out here outside of being behind bars.

P11 commented:

I think they brought they will have a big impact. As far as all of the above that you mentioned, I think it is important for every. Every person, regardless of their background, have an opportunity to vote, especially after they did their time and stuff like that.

Theme 3: Information Obtained About Registering to Vote

Participants' levels of knowledge to the process of registering to vote ranged from word-of-mouth to the utilization of technology. I received responses that supported reasonings for barriers and facilitators to registering to vote upon release from custody. The participants, without being interviewed about the research questions for this study through individual experiences, significantly understood that knowledge is a key component to civic engagement and voter registration. I was able to develop a pattern to this theme that was impactful as it related to the level of knowledge participants comprehended about this democratic process.

P2 said:

Why actually, they have a lot more resources and stuff like that, because they can look up the computers and stuff like that. And so, I have secondhand information

from inmates themselves, so they have a lot of resources that comes in and out the prison system where they can engage you and find out if they could vote or not.

P13 commented, “Probably the internet they get on the internet or whatever that they can get on or they talk to people that come in. I don’t know how they get on there or what they do.”

Theme 4: Outcomes in This Target Population

I developed an analysis through the participants’ responses that the research question does this voter registration initiative meet the needs of this population resulting in a continued and improved effort needs to take place. The participants shared an awareness toward the research questions and explained that resources were not significant enough. One participant expressed that this issue is not raised or discussed enough. Concerning the overall outcome to improve voter registration, the research questions helped gather sufficient data to further the process of in-custody voter registration benefiting this population.

P14 said:

That’s a good question. I think I’m going to go back to what I said earlier. I believe that I believe that the consensus is eligible, but they feel that they excluded. So, I believe overall what needs to be done is a is a concerted effort to bring more awareness, education, and rights of celebrity to be more aware of that from the time they come in, from the time that booking into the time to sentence.

P6 commented:

I have a little difficulty with this. I just said I'm not sure if anything is being addressed for that population. As it relates to what is working and what's not working, I just don't think that there's enough information. Available for the inmates had to make a, you know, qualitative or informed decision on whether they want to vote, should vote, need to vote. You know, I can't, I can't.

P9 commented:

Go back to my original statement while I was incarcerated, and it was for a good bit, never once did this subject come up to any inmate, anywhere that I know of. So, it's not having an impact over in effect at the moment unless there's some change done.

RQ1

RQ1: What do nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting or voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio? An analysis of these data found that the challenges differed on barriers and facilitators as related to this theme. I found through the research that barriers could be accessibility to information and or voter registration material to the offenders while in custody. Participants explained that facilitators to the process could be improved communication by stakeholders and administrators within the facilities.

P15 commented:

Yeah, I think the barriers I've mentioned a little bit about that around not knowing your rights, not having access, not being treated as if you even have a voice or a matter or if you matter. I think that that those are the biggest barriers we're not

accessing and going to those particular institutions to ensure that they are they are voting in how to vote.

Facilitators for voter registration include the provision of voter education materials, the availability of onsite voter registration services, and the provision of legal assistance to help incarcerated individuals navigate the voter registration process. Different scholarly works that are described in Chapter 2 support these factors. They include: (Beck, 2017; Ebenstein, 2018; Gerber et al., 2017). In this case, the participants revealed the significance of having interest in the voter registration process. Having an interest in voter registration can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to participate in the democratic process. Registering to vote ensures that an individual's voice is heard and that they have a say in shaping the policies that affect their lives. It also encourages civic engagement and a sense of responsibility for one's community. On the other hand, lacking an interest in voter registration can lead to underrepresentation of certain groups in the democratic process, including those who are marginalized or disenfranchised (Beck, 2017). This can result in policies that do not reflect the needs and desires of these groups, perpetuating systemic inequalities. Furthermore, individuals who do not register to vote may miss out on opportunities to have their voices heard.

RQ2

RQ2: What impact do nonprofit social service organizers believe voter registration among incarcerated individuals has on the communities into which they will reintegrate?

P1 said: “My opinion? I really don’t know. I believe that because of the local community, there are a lot of issues. They are probably. Don’t know why they feel like justice has been served.”

The criminal justice system has various stakeholders, including the general public, who are affected by the actions of the incarcerated individuals. The interviewees highlighted that offenders are misunderstood by their communities. They are deemed a threat to general safety. This biased belief impedes convicts’ successful reintegration to society as demonstrated by the number of unemployed convicts. It was discovered that voter registration among the incarcerated can have a positive impact on the communities into which they will reintegrate. Scholarly evidence in Chapter 2 supports the identified benefits of engaging incarcerated individuals in civic processes. By allowing them to participate in the democratic process, incarcerated individuals can have a voice in shaping policies affecting their lives, promoting a sense of responsibility and civic engagement (White, 2019). In addition, voter registration can facilitate reintegration, reduce recidivism, improve self-esteem, and promote positive relationships in their communities.

Summary

Chapter 4 encompassed the participants’ demographics, the study’s setting, the data collection and analysis process, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results. Included with this chapter was a comprehensive summary of the main points of this study.

RQ1

RQ1: What do nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting or voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio? Further research is needed to identify the barriers to voting faced by incarcerated individuals, particularly among minority groups. This research can help inform policies and practices that promote greater access to the ballot box for incarcerated individuals. Moreover, research can help challenge the assumptions and biases that underlie the current system of disenfranchisement and promote greater understanding of the importance of voting as a fundamental right.

RQ2

RQ2: What impact do nonprofit social service organizers believe voter registration among incarcerated individuals has on the communities into which they will reintegrate? The study has also established that different factors impede the development of a sustainable process to support convicts' and prisoners' voting rights. Change is needed within the criminal justice system and at community levels to warrant positive transformation. Providing onsite voter registration services, legal assistance, and other forms of support can also help reduce practical barriers to voting and facilitate greater political participation.

Chapter 5 includes interpretations of the findings, study limitations, implications, recommendations, and my conclusion. The critical result of this study is that all participants in this research study indicated some form of interest or understanding of custody-based registration. The in-depth analyses of the custody-based voter registration

campaigns required a complex examination proposal with a solid theoretical and historical approach.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore what nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio. Voting is a fundamental right in a democratic society, and incarcerated individuals are not exempted from this right. Allowing them to vote ensures their voices are heard, encourages civic engagement, and promotes a sense of responsibility and connection to their communities. Scholars and politicians have failed to advocate for voting rights for incarcerated individuals in the United States due to a range of factors, including political expedience, historical biases, and lack of understanding of the importance of enfranchisement. Additionally, the issue is often overlooked or downplayed due to the stigmatization of those who are incarcerated. The semi structured face-to-face interviews elicited sufficient data to answer the RQs.

In this study, 15 participants met the inclusion criteria and were asked to volunteer in the study. Four themes emerged from the collected data, including interest as it relates to voter registration, experiences trying to register, information obtained about registering to vote, and outcomes in this target population. I discovered that incarcerated individuals in correctional facilities face several challenges to voter registration, including limited access to resources and lack of political will. These barriers can make it difficult for incarcerated individuals to exercise their right to vote, which can result in underrepresentation of their voices in the democratic process. Evidence-based research is essential in advocating for parity in voting rights among incarcerated individuals. Such

research may provide empirical support for policy changes, raise awareness about the issues faced by this population, and identify best practices for improving voter access and participation. By using evidence-based approaches, policymakers can make informed decisions about how to ensure that all eligible individuals, including those who are incarcerated, are able to exercise their right to vote.

Interpretation of the Findings

RQ1

RQ1 was the following: What do nonprofit social service employees perceive to be barriers or facilitators to voting or voting registration that incarcerated individuals experience in central Ohio? Participants revealed the significance of having interest in the voter registration process. Having an interest in voter registration can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to participate in the democratic process. Registering to vote ensures that an individual's voice is heard and that they have a say in shaping the policies that affect their lives (Ebenstein, 2018). Registering to vote also encourages civic engagement and a sense of responsibility for one's community. On the other hand, lacking an interest in voter registration can lead to underrepresentation of certain groups in the democratic process, including those who are marginalized or disenfranchised (Beck, 2017). This can result in policies that do not reflect the needs and desires of these groups, perpetuating systemic inequalities. Furthermore, individuals who do not register to vote may miss out on opportunities to have their voices heard and may feel disengaged from the political process (Gerber et al., 2017).

A myriad of factors can impede individuals from engaging in this civic procedure. Examples include structural barriers, age limitations, criminal histories, and citizenship. Previous studies supported these factors (Beck, 2017; Ebenstein, 2018; Gerber et al., 2017). In the current study, nonprofit social service employees perceived several barriers and facilitators to voting or voting registration, including limited access to information and resources, restrictive voter ID laws, and lack of outreach and support for voter registration. Facilitators include the provision of voter education materials, the availability of onsite voter registration services, and the provision of legal assistance to help incarcerated individuals navigate the voter registration process.

RQ2

The second RQ was the following: What impact do nonprofit social service organizers believe voter registration among incarcerated individuals has on the communities into which they will reintegrate? The criminal justice system has various stakeholders, including the general public, who are affected by the actions of incarcerated individuals. Current participants reported that convicts are misunderstood by their communities and are deemed a threat to general safety. This biased belief impedes convicts' successful reintegration into society as demonstrated by the number of unemployed convicts (Kiefer, 2019). I discovered that voter registration among the incarcerated can have a positive impact on the communities into which they will reintegrate. Incarcerated individuals who participate in the democratic process can have a voice in shaping policies affecting their lives, promoting a sense of responsibility and civic engagement (White, 2019). In addition, voter registration can facilitate

reintegration, reduce recidivism, improve self-esteem, and promote positive relationships in their communities.

By promoting greater involvement in the democratic process, incarcerated individuals can challenge the social stigmas and marginalization they face upon release, reshaping how society perceives them and reducing barriers to their full inclusion in society (Wojcik, 2018). Current participants emphasized that incarcerated individuals do not get the opportunity to know why they are voting. They do not understand that it is a barrier for them because they are in prison. Scholarly evidence supports the generated findings. The general perception of a conviction can have a negative impact on the likelihood of formerly incarcerated individuals receiving approval from community leaders for good conduct, which in turn can hinder the restoration of their voting rights (Kiefer, 2019; White, 2019; Wojcik, 2018). In Ohio, ex-convicts face additional obstacles in regaining their voting rights because they are required to obtain court approval, often through a judicial pardon or petition, which presents another barrier to voting.

Theoretical Framework

I used social acceptance theory as the theoretical framework. The theory posits that individuals are motivated to conform to social norms and expectations to gain social approval and avoid social rejection (Dermont et al., 2017). In the context of voting rights for incarcerated individuals, this theory was relevant in understanding the role of social stigma and marginalization in perpetuating barriers to political participation. Current participants revealed that incarcerated individuals face social stigmas and ostracization from their communities and society at large. Incarcerated individuals may be seen as

morally suspect, lacking in responsibility or civic-mindedness, and unworthy of political participation or enfranchisement. This stigma can create a sense of shame and self-doubt among incarcerated individuals, leading them to internalize negative attitudes about their worth and abilities. In turn, this can decrease their motivation to engage in activities that could challenge the status quo or increase their social visibility, such as participating in political activities or registering to vote. Social acceptance theory suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in activities that are socially supported and rewarded (Dermont et al., 2017). In the case of incarcerated individuals, the lack of social support and encouragement for political participation can be a significant barrier to exercising their right to vote. This lack of support can come from the broader community who may view incarcerated individuals as undeserving of political participation or those who may not prioritize voting rights as a pressing issue.

Limitations of the Study

The project's limitations were attributed to the data collection method and the research sample. One disadvantage of a semi structured interview is the potential for self-report bias. This problem occurs when participants provide inaccurate or distorted information about their experiences, attitudes, or behaviors. This bias can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as social desirability bias (the tendency to provide responses that are perceived as more socially acceptable), memory recall bias (the tendency to forget or misremember events), and response bias (the tendency to provide responses that are influenced by the interviewer's expectations or cues). Although this approach allows for flexibility and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, it also relies on

participants to accurately report their experiences and perceptions. If participants are not forthcoming or provide inaccurate responses, it can limit the depth and validity of the data collected in the interview. As the researcher, I was not impacted by this bias as part of the study. The participants answered my interview questions professionally, candidly, and honestly.

Second, the sample of 15 individuals limited the findings' generalizability. In qualitative research, a small sample size can limit the depth and richness of the data collected. With a small sample size, there may be limited variation in participants' experiences and perspectives, which can make it difficult to fully understand the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, a small sample size can limit the sample's diversity, which can impact the transferability of the findings to other contexts or populations. The impact on sample size limitations could be addressed in future studies in different counties in Ohio or other cities outside the state.

Recommendations

One of the study's strengths was establishing that disenfranchisement is a persistent problem among the incarcerated population. There is no stable system to promote their voting rights, resulting in political isolation. Racial minority groups are overrepresented in prisons, but they lack a voice to address this inequality. There is a pressing need for further research to investigate voting rights among racial minority groups in correctional facilities. This issue is of particular importance because racial minority groups are disproportionately represented in the prison population, and as a result are more likely to be affected by restrictions on voting rights for incarcerated

individuals. Given the history of disenfranchisement in the United States and the ongoing struggles for racial and social justice, it is critical to ensure that all citizens, including those who are incarcerated, have access to the right to vote. Further research is needed to identify the barriers to voting faced by incarcerated individuals, particularly among racial minority groups. This research may help inform policies and practices that promote greater access to the ballot box for incarcerated individuals. Moreover, research may challenge the assumptions and biases that underlie the current system of disenfranchisement and may promote greater understanding of the importance of voting as a fundamental right.

The current study also established that different factors impede the development of a sustainable process to support convicts' and prisoners' voting rights. Change is needed within the criminal justice system and at community levels to warrant positive transformation. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes legal, social, and educational interventions. Efforts to reduce stigma and social isolation may increase incarcerated individuals' sense of belonging and connection to their communities. Additionally, increasing awareness and education about the importance of political participation may help foster a sense of empowerment and civic responsibility among incarcerated individuals. Providing onsite voter registration services, legal assistance, and other forms of support may also reduce practical barriers to voting and facilitate greater political participation.

Future research can be conducted to circumvent the identified limitations. In the current study, the small sample size and data collection method emerged as limitations.

Future researchers may consider several strategies to mitigate the problem of a small sample size and data collection bias in research on voting rights among racial minority groups in correctional facilities. First, researchers may collaborate with correctional facilities and community organizations to ensure they have access to a larger and more diverse sample of incarcerated individuals. This can involve building relationships with facility staff, providing incentives for participation, and leveraging community networks to recruit participants. Second, researchers may use mixed methods approaches to data collection that combine quantitative and qualitative methods. This may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of incarcerated individuals while also allowing for a more nuanced analysis of the data. For example, researchers may use surveys to collect quantitative data on voting behaviors and attitudes while also conducting in-depth interviews to explore the social and cultural factors that shape these attitudes and behaviors. Third, researchers may use data linkage methods to combine multiple sources of data such as voter registration records, correctional facility records, and demographic data. This may help overcome small sample sizes by providing a more complete picture of the population of interest.

Implications

Social Change

The current study may benefit different stakeholders including incarcerated individuals, communities, the criminal justice system, and policymakers. First, the study may promote a sense of empowerment and agency among incarcerated individuals by affirming their status as citizens with a right to vote. This may help counteract the

stigmatization and marginalization that often accompany incarceration and may promote a greater sense of dignity and self-worth. Findings may help foster a greater sense of civic engagement and social responsibility among incarcerated individuals by emphasizing the importance of participating in the democratic process and having a voice in shaping public policy. This may help promote a sense of belonging and connection to society, even in the face of social exclusion and isolation. Findings may also contribute to efforts to reduce recidivism and promote successful reentry into society by providing incarcerated individuals with a sense of purpose and meaning and promoting greater social connectedness and engagement.

The study may inspire positive transformation within the criminal justice system. Findings may challenge the prevailing assumptions and biases that underlie the current system of disenfranchisement and may promote greater understanding of the importance of voting as a fundamental right. This may help shift the focus away from punitive measures and toward rehabilitative and restorative approaches to criminal justice, which prioritize the needs and perspectives of all citizens including those who are incarcerated. Findings may provide evidence-based recommendations for improving voting rights among incarcerated individuals, such as policy changes, procedural reforms, and community-based initiatives. These recommendations may inform legislative efforts aimed at restoring voting rights for incarcerated individuals and may help promote more equitable and just policies that reflect the needs and perspectives of all citizens. Research on voting rights of incarcerated individuals may effect positive social change in the criminal justice system by promoting more inclusive and equitable policies and practices

that promote the rights and dignity of all citizens regardless of their circumstances. By promoting a more rehabilitative and restorative approach to criminal justice, research may help build a more just and humane society in which the rights and needs of all citizens are respected and valued.

The study also warrants positive social change in policymaking within different U.S. states. In this case, it informs efforts to restore voting rights for incarcerated individuals by highlighting the barriers and challenges they face in exercising their right to vote, and providing recommendations for policy changes and procedural reforms that can promote greater access to the ballot box. This can inform legislative efforts aimed at restoring voting rights for incarcerated individuals and promote more equitable and just policies that reflect the needs and perspectives of all citizens. The study informs efforts to promote offenders' successful reentry into mainstream society by highlighting the importance of civic engagement and social connectedness in facilitating reintegration. Additionally, it informs efforts to challenge the prevailing assumptions and biases that underlie the current system of disenfranchisement and promotes greater understanding of the importance of voting as a fundamental right. By challenging the stigmatization and marginalization of incarcerated individuals, the study promotes a more inclusive culture in the criminal justice system.

Theoretical Implications

This study implemented the social acceptance model as the core theoretical framework. Consequently, the generated findings have established a powerful foundation for ways the theory can be utilized to comprehend complex political and social issues. In

this case, the study on voting rights of incarcerated individuals can contribute to the social acceptance theory by highlighting the role that voting plays in promoting social integration and acceptance among incarcerated individuals. The theory posits that individuals are motivated to seek social acceptance and avoid social rejection, and that this motivation drives their behavior and attitudes. In the context of incarceration, social acceptance can be a critical factor in facilitating offenders' successful reentry into society, as it can promote social connectedness, a sense of belonging, and a stake in the community. The study linked issues of voting rights to the theory by highlighting the importance of civic engagement and participation in promoting social acceptance among incarcerated individuals. By empowering incarcerated individuals to exercise their right to vote, the study can promote a greater sense of social integration and belonging, and ultimately contribute to efforts to promote offenders' successful reentry into society. The social acceptance theory highlights the importance of social connections and networks in facilitating social acceptance and inclusion. This means the criminal justice system must work closely with communities to build trust and relationships that will support the reintegration of convicts into mainstream society. By involving communities in the reentry process, the criminal justice system can help create a sense of ownership and responsibility for successful outcomes.

Practice

The study has a positive impact on public administrators and other social workers. Firstly, it highlights the importance of ensuring that public policies are equitable and just, and that they do not discriminate against marginalized groups. Secondly, it emphasizes

the need for effective policy implementation and enforcement to promote social justice and reduce inequality. Thirdly, it underscores the significance of promoting civic engagement and participation, which is a cornerstone of democratic governance. By studying the disenfranchisement of voting rights among incarcerated individuals, public administrators can develop policies and programs that promote inclusion, equity, and social justice. They can also work toward creating a more responsive and accountable public administration system that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of all members of society, including those who have been incarcerated.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a crucial need for further research surrounding voting rights for incarcerated individuals. Despite efforts to increase prisoner participation in electoral activities, there is a gap in understanding of the barriers that prevent them from engaging in the process. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the impact of voting and political participation on the reentry and rehabilitation process. One of the most significant barriers is the lack of information and awareness about voting rights and the registration process. Many offenders may not know that they have the right to vote or may not understand the process of registering to vote. Another significant barrier is the lack of access to registration materials and assistance. Offenders may not have access to the Internet or may not be able to obtain the necessary identification documents required for voter registration. In addition, many correctional facilities do not provide adequate resources or support to help offenders register to vote.

It is important for emancipated prisoners to take part in voting activities and help increase prisoners' participation in election activities for several reasons. Firstly, voting is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of democratic governance. By participating in the electoral process, prisoners can exercise their rights as citizens and contribute to shaping the policies and decisions that affect their lives. Secondly, voting can have a significant impact on public policy and criminal justice reform. By increasing prisoner participation in elections, policymakers may be more likely to consider the needs and concerns of this population when making decisions about criminal justice policy. Research in this area can help identify the specific challenges that offenders face in accessing their voting rights and develop strategies to address these barriers. For example, research can help identify the most effective methods for providing information and assistance to offenders during the registration process and the resources needed to facilitate their participation in electoral activities. Additionally, research can help identify the impact of voting and political participation on recidivism rates and the reintegration of offenders into mainstream society.

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Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked in this field?
2. What got you interested in voting registration and civic engagement?
3. What is your perception of the level of engagement in civic duty as it relates to voting registration?
 - a. **Probe:** prior to custody, during custody, and upon release from custody
4. How do you think individuals who are in jail-custody gain knowledge about voting registration?
5. How complex is it to register to vote for individuals while in jail-custody?
 - a. **Probe:** What contributes to the complexity?
6. What barriers do you think individuals experience trying to register to vote while in jail-custody?
 - a. **Probe:** How do you think these barriers impact voter engagement among individuals in jail-custody?
7. In your opinion, what impact, if any, does voter engagement among incarcerated individuals have on local community issues? For example: social justice concerns, educational initiatives, legislative representation.
8. What do you believe motivates individuals in jail-custody to vote or register to vote?
 - a. **Probe:** Are they motivated by personal experience?
 - b. **Probe:** Are they motivated by an interest in particular local issues and/or elections?
 - c. **Probe:** Are they motivated by their interaction with the criminal justice system?
 - d. **Probe:** Are they motivated by a particular social justice issue?
9. How, if at all, do voter registration initiatives targeting those in jail-custody meet the needs of offenders.
 - a. **Probe:** What is working?
 - b. **Probe:** What isn't working?
10. What existing supports to individuals in jail-custody have to help them engage in voting?
 - a. **Probe:** What additional resources are needed to improve voting and voter registration outcomes in this population?

Appendix B: Brief Demographic Questionnaire

- How old are you?
- What was your sex assigned at birth?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What organization do you currently work at?
- How long have you worked at your organization?