

# Should the Boston Marathon Bomber Get to Vote?

During a CNN town hall on Monday, a student asked Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Kamala Harris whether they [would allow felons in prison to vote](#):

*You have said that you believe that people with felony records should be allowed to vote while in prison. Does this mean that you would support enfranchising people like the Boston Marathon bomber, a convicted terrorist and murderer? Do you think that those convicted of sexual assault should have the opportunity to vote for politicians who could have a direct impact on women's rights?*

Sanders noted that prisoners in his home state of Vermont already get to vote and said the “right to vote is inherent to our democracy, yes, even for terrible people.” Sanders added that, “You’re running down a slippery slope [when] you say, well, that guy committed a terrible crime, not going to let him vote.”

One of these days, if Sen. Sanders ever gets around to reading the U.S. Constitution, he’ll stumble upon the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) and notice that it says in Section 2 that voting cannot be in any way abridged “except for participation in rebellion, or other crime.” While I can appreciate a “slippery slope” argument, I don’t think it applies in this case. Most states haven’t let prisoners since 1868, and it hasn’t led to further disenfranchisement of other groups.

Unfortunately, it’s not only socialists like Sanders arguing this point. Joe Setyon, an Assistant Editor at *Reason*, makes the case for why [libertarians should support letting prisoners vote](#):

*Again, imagine each of those convicts, like the Boston bomber, is in prison for a good reason. If that's true, then they're already paying their debt to society by being incarcerated. What good does it do the rest of the population to take away their right to have a say?*

We could also ask what good it does to keep people who are "already paying their debt to society" locked in prison. If they're paying their debt for, say, murdering a fellow citizen, why do they need to do it from a jail cell?

The reason, of course, is that the debt is paid by *forgoing the full exercise of their liberties and rights* they had before they committed their crimes. The reason they are being confined is to pay their debt. Similarly, the reason they can't engage in common aspects of civic life – such as voting – is because they've violated the trust of society and shown they are unconcerned about promoting the common good and the general flourishing of their neighbors.

Many of us already wonder if criminals are being given due time to pay their debt to society. Based on the [median time served \(1.3 years\) in state prisons](#), most convicts could be sentenced to prison for burglary and assault on Election Day and be out in time to vote in the next mid-term election. And if they commit robbery, rape, or negligent manslaughter, they could be out before the next presidential election. Considering the leniency of such sentences, it doesn't seem like an undue hardship for them not to get to vote.

There is a reasonable argument to be made, of course, that those who have *already paid* their debt and have returned to society should be allowed to vote again. But our republic is not going to suffer from not letting domestic terrorists like Dzhokhar Tsarnaev cast a ballot for Trump or Sanders.

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