
Supplementary Appendix: Profiles of Interview Participants

Alan is a white prisoner in his thirties convicted of criminal sexual conduct. He became more interested in politics after he was incarcerated. He now watches state legislative proceedings and city council meetings on television. He has also become active and contacted a state legislator to let him know he supports specific bills. Alan says he is in favor of tougher laws against criminals, but the laws must also be fair. For example, he believes that lifetime registration of sex offenders is not beneficial and wastes government money. Instead, he suggests a ten-year period of registration that expires if the offender does not recidivate. He is well aware that sex offenders carry an extra “black mark,” and remarked that “a person would rather have a murderer living next-door than me.”

Alex is a Native American prisoner in his thirties serving time for a manslaughter conviction. He is an alcoholic who would like to speak in juvenile detention centers and to other youth about the consequences of drinking, which, in his case, contributed to his crime. He feels that getting involved with his culture and religion will help keep him away from drugs, alcohol, and crime. Alex further noted that it would be disrespectful to his victim if he were to start drinking again. His future plans include attending college, working as a counselor in a treatment program, or working in emergency services. Alex believes that voting rights should be restored as soon as an offender is back in the community because disfranchisement “just keeps people down.”

Andrew is a white probationer in his twenties serving a sentence for vehicular homicide, his first and only conviction. He is college-educated, single, and has no children. In college he was a lobbyist and served on several campus committees. Before his offense, he volunteered his time and money to local charities and he continues to do so. Andrew has voted in every election for which he has been eligible. He finds it easier to trust local government than federal government. He believes that voting is a responsibility, even if one has not been a “perfect citizen.” Although losing the right to vote makes him feel like a “fringe” and not a citizen, he also commented that the physical consequence of his offense was a much more definitive reality than any court-imposed penalties.

Craig is a white prisoner in his twenties, serving time for a burglary committed as a juvenile. He is single with no children and has a high-school education. Although his parents are politically conservative, he considers himself to have more liberal views. He likes independent political parties because he does not like what he feels are “polarized” party lines between Democrats and Republicans. He sees a general disinterest in politics among his fellow inmates, particularly among younger inmates. He thinks most feel “we’re going to get screwed either way.” He attributes this attitude to observations of prison programs being cut and a societal emphasis on punishment. Craig feels the general public is misinformed about criminal offenders—something he attributes to glamorization by the media—and this lack of understanding serves as a barrier to reintegration. He sees a greater need for education in prisons. Most inmates have a lot of good energy and potential, he explained, but they do not put it toward the right things because they lack direction. Craig suggested that voting rights may help close some distance between offenders and the rest of the public because they may begin to see offenders as “someone more my equal and not this non-voting human being.”

Daniel is a Native American prisoner in his thirties serving time for a burglary conviction. He is married with children, but commented that his wife was contemplating divorce. He is using this as a motivation to “work on himself” while in prison. Daniel feels that the state should make better use of house arrest as opposed to incarceration and he sees a need for a better work release program. He would someday like to speak with school-aged children about his problems with drugs and alcohol as well as the importance of a good education, which he never had. He commented that the majority of politicians take a “tough on crime” approach and no one seems to say “let’s educate our criminals.” Daniel believes that only people convicted of a violent felony should lose their right to have a gun. Before his conviction, he hunted year-round to provide food for his family, not for sport.
Dennis is a Native American prisoner in his twenties serving time for criminal sexual conduct, his first criminal conviction. As an adolescent, he was active in a community and volunteer program, which brought him into contact with local politicians. At one time, he aspired to be a politician. Currently, however, he feels that politics is a game and is more about money than people. Someday, Dennis would like to speak to kids about his experience, noting that he was involved in illegal activity as a teen before he “completely switched around” at age 18. At that time, he pursued an advanced degree and joined the military, but fell in with the “wrong crowd” after leaving the service. He is upset about many of the rights he lost because of his conviction, particularly his loss of privacy. He feels that registration laws make it more difficult to find housing and employment. While he disagrees with many of the collateral consequences of his conviction, Dennis still favors harsh penalties in some situations, commenting that habitual offenders should be “expelled” from the country.

Diana is a white inmate in her forties who is serving time for her first conviction, which she is trying to get it overturned in court. She is divorced and describes herself as a “Republican through and through.” The 2000 election was the first time Diana had not voted since she turned 18. She makes a distinction between her background and the “street life” of most of the “girls” in the institution. She has spent much of her time tutoring other inmates and explaining the political process to them. Diana regularly watches the news and tries to stay up on current events while in prison. She believes prisons need more extensive counseling services, and upon release she wants to help develop better halfway houses.

Dylan is a white prisoner in his late twenties who was convicted of murder. He has been incarcerated for many years but is working to make the best of his prison experience by taking advantage of every opportunity he can: education, development of job skills, and volunteer experience. He tries to distance himself from the prison environment and stay away from the negative “I don’t care” attitude of many other inmates. He credits the support of his family for helping him keep a positive attitude. Upon release, Dylan hopes to work as a computer programmer. Although he would like to do some public speaking either in classrooms or to legislators, he would particularly like to be a mentor because he feels he could make more of an impact on those with whom he works. He was too young to vote at the time of his conviction and initially, he did not care about losing his voting rights. Over the years, however, Dylan has become interested in politics. He disagrees with the Electoral College system and feels that it is difficult to trust the government because responsibility is spread collectively and no one is directly accountable. He finds disenfranchisement “asinine” because offenders are expected to reintegrate into their communities, but they are not allowed to have a voice in those communities.

Henry is an African American parolee in his twenties serving a sentence for sexual assault. He has no children, although his partner is expecting a child. He is currently working on his GED and on making a better life. Although he has done some volunteer work on his own, he feels that therapists push the idea of “giving back” to the community. He believes he owes himself a chance to do better and does not owe the community anything more than the time he is serving. Henry commented that his tastes have changed as he has gotten older and seen the consequences of “street life.” He began reading more and focusing on the positive role models in his family. He attributes staying away from crime to these changes. Although he has had some difficulty in finding a job, he said that he understands why an employer would want to know about the criminal background of a potential employee. Henry believes no one should lose the right to vote. He discovered he had lost his right only when he showed up at the polls and tried to vote.

James is an African American probationer in his twenties. He grew up out of state, but has been in Minnesota for several years. His time in jail “woke him up” and made him want to better his life. He has volunteered some of his time teaching youth basketball and feels that volunteering will facilitate desistance because it keeps people occupied and off the streets. Although he has a job, he initially had difficulty finding one because of his criminal record. He feels that such problems lead many back to crime. James had voted in one gubernatorial election and feels that a felony conviction should not
block someone who wants to participate in the electoral process. He also speculates about a racial motivation behind disfranchisement to limit the voting power of African Americans.

Jerry is a white prisoner in his twenties serving time for manslaughter. His first criminal conviction was at age eleven and he has not been “off paper” since. Despite a string of convictions and several bouts of incarceration, Jerry maintains that he has become “anti-criminal” since his most recent conviction and that he is “absolutely” in favor of harsher penalties. He believes that he would have been better off if the state would have certified him as an adult at a young age and incarcerated him. Losing the right to vote meant a lot to him because he grew up in a political household and often attended caucuses as a child. Jerry is now “learning to be responsible.” He is currently working on an Associate’s degree. Upon release from prison he plans to be as involved in his community as he can, and noted that community members need to hold each accountable for their actions. He has a job lined up through a family member and says that because he has a job, car, and insurance when he gets out, he will not return to an illegal lifestyle.

Karen is a white inmate in her thirties serving time for her first conviction, for a property crime. She is a divorced mother who has some college education. Before her conviction, Karen was very active in politics. She views voting as a “duty” and voted “every single solitary year” since turning eighteen until her felony conviction. She continues to read the newspaper daily and notes that her primary interest is in local politics that are “closer to home.” She worries about the education level of many inmates and is also frustrated about the ongoing stigma of the “felon” label that she will endure upon her release. She does not plan to return to her community and will instead settle in a metropolitan area where she feels there are better job prospects.

Kevin is a Native American probationer in his twenties. His first felony conviction was as a teenager and he has had one since that time. He is single with children, but he lost custody of one child because of his conviction. He said that his time in jail had been a turning point in his life and he made substantial changes by eliminating drugs and alcohol from his lifestyle. He quit hanging around his friends who were not supportive of him and he is back in school full-time after dropping out as a teenager. He has had trouble finding a job and said that four places turned him down within the month of his release from jail. He feels probationers and others who are “doing what they’re supposed to be doing” should have the right to vote. Before his conviction, Kevin had voted once. He commented that he is in favor of gun control because he grew up around gun violence.

Larry is a white prisoner in his thirties serving time for murder. He is the father of one child and described his family as a “middle-class, blue-collar family.” Larry has been incarcerated for several years and has seen changes in himself during that time. He values education and feels it is generally underrated. He thinks people should focus on getting a higher education, not just a GED. Before his conviction, Larry dropped out of school twice due to a drug problem. While incarcerated, he became interested in politics while taking classes in prison, particularly political philosophy and history. He feels that the general public does not know enough about American political history and he especially points to the change from many political parties to only two main parties. Larry believes inmates should not lose the right to vote just because some of their mistakes were greater than those of other citizens. He thinks that “98 percent” of the inmates in prison need to be there, but he also believes that the criminal justice system is flawed in two respects: the length of sentences people are given, and the lack of effort in promoting change to those who are in prison. Larry would like to see certain educational classes become mandatory. He considers the computer training he received in prison, to be “one of the best things in my life” and plans to continue with it upon release. Although he sees many positive changes in his life since he was first incarcerated, Larry remarked, “I don’t trust that I will necessarily do the right thing under any given circumstances.”

Lori is a white inmate in her thirties who has been in prison twice before. Although she is serving time for fraud, she has a history of substance abuse. She has one child, but lost custody because of her drug problems. She has completed one year of college and plans to return to school when she is released. She worries about program cuts within the prison and even wrote a letter to a major politician about
the problem because she feels that women benefit from the programs. Lori believes that having a mentor is beneficial to staying out of trouble. She thinks that the public is generally unaware of what occurs in prisons and believes that the correctional system needs to change its procedures of terminating parental rights.

**Louis** is an African American prisoner in his thirties serving time for a drug conviction, his first conviction after many years of crime. He is a single father who has had some college education. He describes himself as “the greatest salesman in the world” and says that, now, he wants to sell “life.” Prison made him realize that before he was merely surviving and not living. In his past, Louis “just had no respect for the law” but now, he “refuse[s] to try to buck this system.” Although he asserts a newfound respect for the law, Louis sees some problems with the current criminal justice system. He cites disproportionate sentencing of racial minorities and a need to help inmates develop viable skills that will help them stay away from crime. Although he never voted in the past, his time in prison has given him time to reflect and he now sees the importance of voting because “to not vote is to not be heard.” He likens disenfranchisement to of genocide in that it keeps minorities on the outside. He has been working on his speaking skills in prison and trying to network by writing letters to prison visitors. Louis sees a need to improve communities and relations within communities. He feels that society is truly missing a sense of community and that “we have all become separate and fearful of one another.” He also sees a need to provide a better education to certain communities, suggesting that excess funds be transferred from wealthier suburbs to urban schools that need funding.

**Lynn** is a white inmate in her thirties who is serving time for a probation violation on a property charge. She is a divorced mother from a small, “close-knit” town. She believes that losing the right to vote is one of the worst things about a felony conviction. She takes voting very seriously, a view she is working to instill in her son. Lynn was an active member of her community before her imprisonment and she plans to be even more involved when she is released. In prison, Lynn watches the news and keeps up on events outside of prison. Her community has been particularly supportive of her while she has been incarcerated and many write to her in prison. She also has received an offer of employment upon her return. As a woman who has struggled with a drug addiction, Lynn has detailed plans to stay away from that lifestyle when she returns home.

**Marvin** is a white prisoner in his twenties serving time for a sexual offense. While in prison, he is working to gather information about hate crimes. He wants to stop hate and violence within prison and eventually outside of prison. He also feels that there is discrimination and persecution on the basis of sexual preference in prisons. Although Marvin feels that restorative justice is a good idea because it can help an offender regain a community’s trust, he also believes that it will not aid desistance if an offender is doing it solely for the benefit of others. Marvin believes that it is particularly hard for sex offenders to reenter their communities because of media scrutiny. He has had offers of employment and housing from friends and family, but all have asked that he not talk about his past, something he does not want to hide.

**Mary** is a Native American inmate in her forties serving time for a drug offense. This is her first offense and she asserts her innocence, attributing the offense to her ex-husband and his friends. She his currently married with several children. Prior to her incarceration, Mary voted in every election, including every primary election. She continues to watch political debates and keep up on issues, but she is upset that she cannot vote or hunt—a family activity that she has enjoyed since she was twelve years old. When she leaves prison, Mary wants to help set up better transitional housing for inmates, particularly in more rural parts of the state.

**Michael** is an African American probationer in his twenties serving time for a robbery. He grew up in a large city and left home in his early teens. He has been involved in “street life” for over a decade and says he is “truly tired.” He struggles to find positive meaning in the word “community” because he sees no progress, just a discouraging cycle. Michael noted that he worked hard to get his GED, and took many classes while at a workhouse. He eventually would like to get married and raise a family and he wants to go to college to become an engineer. Despite a desire to become a positive role model,
Michael feels “stuck in the middle” of desistance and street life and is unsure of his ability to stay away from crime. At the time of the interview, he was facing new charges for a drug offense.

Nathan is a white prisoner in his twenties serving time for criminal sexual conduct, a crime that he denies committing. He has been active contacting his political representatives about his case. His family and the majority of his community have stood behind him in seeking his release. Before his conviction, Nathan attended college. He worked as a medical professional and held several other licenses, all of which have since been revoked by the state. He feels that the state needs to allocate more resources to the public defender’s office to enable deeper investigations, citing that his first lawyer, a public offender, told him he could not do much to investigate. Nathan is irritated about the lack of education in prisons and suggests that more money should be spent teaching offenders what to do when they are released and how to successfully reintegrate. He sees ignorance about prisons and prison programs and further thinks that the community “doesn’t want to care.” He believes people should be able to vote when they leave prison because they are “regular citizens when they hit the outside of this fence.”

Pamela is a white inmate in her forties who is described in the introduction. She has had several convictions in the past 20 years, all of which center around an addiction to prescription drugs. She is well-educated and a divorced mother whose daughter lives on the east coast. Other than her drug addiction, Pamela describes herself as “very responsible” in all other aspects of her life. She considers herself a conservative, but notes that as someone who actively demonstrated against the Vietnam War, she has changed over the years. She feels that being away from her daughter and mother are the biggest consequences of her conviction, and feels that losing the right to vote is like “salt in the wound.” Pamela has previously worked in a halfway house and upon released she would like to get involved in prison ministry and a program like DARE.

Paul is a white prisoner in his thirties convicted of criminal sexual conduct. He is well educated, with several children, and a military background. This is his first conviction. Before his conviction, Paul voted “ever since I was able to vote.” He commented that he may never get to vote again due to the lengthy sentence he received. He was formerly very active in his community. He tries to follow activities from prison and has subscriptions to several political and legal publications. He gets upset when he is told to “give back” to the community, noting that his community “doesn’t want a damn thing” to do with him and yet it expects things from him. He resents that he cannot vote even though he and his children are affected by election outcomes. Without the right to vote, Paul feels that he has “lost all voice or control over my government or my anything.”

Rachel is a white inmate in her twenties serving time for assault. She is single and has no children. After prison, she plans to attend college and eventually work toward an advanced degree. She is upset that many prison programs have been discontinued, and she particularly dislikes that inmates must now choose between work and school. Because she was convicted shortly after turning eighteen, Rachel has never been eligible to vote, something she looks forward to doing in the future.

Rita is a white inmate in her forties serving time for a drug offense. At the time of the interview, she was scheduled to be released in a few weeks. She is a divorced mother whose children live with their father. She was never an active member of her community, but has volunteered in prison as a way to pass the time. She has no immediate plans to volunteer upon release from prison and notes that her primary goal is to “get out and stay out.” One of Rita’s key concerns is finding a “decent job” as a convicted felon. She worries about making enough money through legal channels to support herself when she knows how to make large amounts of fast money through illegal means. She disagrees with losing the right to vote because she “didn’t do anything that would affect how I voted or anything.”

Roger is a white probationer in his fifties. He was convicted of fraud that stemmed from a gambling addiction. Before this conviction, Roger was a frequent voter. He believes that communities need to make it easier for offenders to reintegrate instead of putting up barriers. In his opinion, too many laws are wide-reaching and black-and-white and essentially treat citizens like children. He sees the country
becoming “a big jail” and sees a need to make better use of alternate forms of rehabilitation that do not result in incarceration. He wants the public to recognize that anyone can make a mistake and asserts that many of the collateral consequences of a conviction, such as employment restrictions, result in a “waste of talent” for many otherwise skilled people.

Sally is a white inmate in her thirties who has had several convictions related to a gambling addiction. She is a single mother, but her parental rights were terminated by the state. Sally takes an interest in local politics and has been active in volunteer work outside of prison. She is particularly concerned about the difficulties of finding a good job with a felony conviction on her record and has struggled in the past to find work that she enjoys and pays well.

Scott is an African American probationer in his twenties serving a sentence for a drug-related offense. He is currently engaged and has two children. As a teenager, he wanted to go into law enforcement, but noted that he did not have a lot of support in that direction. Scott participated in a crime prevention course in adolescence and received his GED a few years later. He feels he can contribute to his community by not getting in trouble again, and he believes that right now he “is going towards the right thing.” Being a “family man” and focusing on his children are Scott’s priorities now. He has saved all of his criminal justice paperwork because he wants to teach his children the consequences of crime. He likens a felony conviction to being “branded” and commented on the difficulties offenders have in finding housing and employment.

Steven is a white male probationer in his fifties serving time for sexual misconduct. He is divorced with two children. He describes himself as a “pure alcoholic” and he suffers from a mental illness. He is a veteran and spent many years in government service. Currently retired, Steven spends most of his time attending various self-help groups. He said that his fellow Alcoholics Anonymous members had been particularly supportive and they help him. As a former voter, Steven says not being able to vote makes him feel like an “outsider” and causes him to lose a sense of patriotism. In addition to all of the consequences of a conviction, he places losing the right to vote “on top of the whole messy pile.”

Susan is a white inmate in her thirties who has been incarcerated for many years for murder. During this time, Susan notes that she has become more conservative in comparison to the “radical liberal” ideas of her youth. She tries to keep up on politics, but finds it discouraging when she cannot vote. Susan worries about the loss of privacy she may incur with her conviction and the public nature of her criminal history on the internet. Susan also sees a need for better reentry programs in the areas of housing, employment, and education. She further commented that society needs to be willing to reaccept the offenders they “kicked out” after they have served their sentences.

Thomas is an African American parolee in his twenties convicted of drug and weapons offenses. He is a former gang member and has had a felony conviction on his record since he was a teenager. He found it hard to reenter society upon release from prison because there were many expectations yet few options because of his record, particularly in a new and unfamiliar state. He has had trouble finding a job and eventually wants to use his experiences to his advantage and do social work and substance abuse counseling. Thomas attributes his move away from the “fast life” to his children with They were a source of change because he wants to be a good father—something he says that he did not have.

Travis is a white parolee in his twenties with a history of drug abuse. He is single and has no children. While incarcerated, Travis took advantage of educational opportunities and credits them with giving him the structure that he previously lacked. He is currently employed and continues to gain experience in his field while working on an Associate’s degree. Because of his conviction, he struggled to find a landlord willing to rent to him. Although his conviction did not prevent him from finding employment, Travis feels that he was forced to settle for a lesser position. As an avid hunter, he is upset about losing his right to firearms. He admits to losing some privacy because of his felony conviction, but he commented that the loss is minor compared to what he has gained since leaving prison.
Walter is a white male prisoner in his forties serving time for assault. He served in the military and eventually obtained a college degree. Overall, he describes his lifestyle as “nomadic.” He feels that he has less legal knowledge than most criminals, which enabled others to set him up. When he is off paper, Walter plans to leave the country because he feels that the U.S. government does not know that the common man exists and local government has too much discretion. Overall, he does not hold the American public in “high esteem” because he sees a lack of education, susceptibility to the media as a source of information, and high levels of incarceration, poverty, and illiteracy. He is upset that his criminal conviction can always be brought up, regardless of how many years have passed, and that it will diminish his credibility.