

Economic crisis could stop citizens from voting: research

October 9 2008

During election season, Americans are reminded of their freedoms and rights that allow them to vote for their leaders. As countless political polls try to predict how voters are being swayed, those polled may not be allowed to vote at all. A University of Missouri professor of law says that the current economic crisis could cause disenfranchisement, depriving citizens the right to vote.

S. David Mitchell, a specialist on felon disenfranchisement and the collateral consequences of felony convictions, has studied the impact of these laws, not only on ex-offenders, but also on the families of ex-offenders. In addition, Mitchell has reviewed how disenfranchisement contributes to the undermining of citizenship as a legal status. Recently, Mitchell explored the concept of citizenship and the detrimental impact on individual and collective or community citizenship when individuals are disenfranchised.

With the economic crisis, the ranks of the disenfranchised are growing and citizens who never had a brush with the law may soon find themselves without a voice. One criterion for voter eligibility is a permanent address. With the spate of foreclosures, citizens are finding themselves ineligible and stricken from the voter rolls. However, there are simple steps to ameliorate the situation. Yet, in much the same way that ex-offenders lack knowledge about their rights, many citizens previously registered to vote might find themselves at a loss.

His research revealed:

-- Disenfranchisement has a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities.

-- Disenfranchisement undermines citizenship and relegates individuals to second-class status.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Economic crisis could stop citizens from voting: research (2008, October 9) retrieved 13 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-10-economic-crisis-citizens-voting.html>

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