**Abstract**

We examine the political consequences of conditioning ex-felon voting rights on the payment of legal financial obligations (LFOs). We study two states – Alabama and Tennessee – in which ex-felons cannot restore their voting rights until they have paid all court fees, fines, and restitution, plus child support in Tennessee. By randomly sampling court records of convicted felons in Alabama from 2005–2011, we estimate that the median amount of LFOs accrued is about $5,000 and that 85% have a non-zero balance. We expect that existing economic racial disparities will disproportionately reduce black ex-felons’ ability to restore their right to vote. Consistent with this, we find that blacks are about 10 percentage points (p.p.) more likely to have a non-zero LFO balance in Alabama. Blacks are also about 16 and 12 p.p. more likely to have their voting rights restored due to LFOs in Alabama and Tennessee, respectively.

**Court Records as Granular Public Records**

- Electronic state-level court cases offer rich, publicly available, and individually-identifiable information that can be systematically matched to other local administrative data.
- We collected Alabama court records through an online interface known as Alacourt.

**Sampling Court Records**

- We used systematic sampling to first collect a sample of 8,372 circuit court cases, 3,452 of which contained at least one felony conviction.
- For each of these records, we extracted the convicted felon’s full name and date of birth and used the party search query to find and download all related cases in Alacourt.
- Because our individual-level sample is drawn from our case-level sample, this means that people convicted of felonies in multiple cases will be also be overrepresented in our individual-level sample. However, if we know $\pi_i$ – the probability that convicted felon $i$ was convicted of at least one felony – and $\frac{1}{n}$ that all were ultimately selected into our individual-level sample, we can account for this overrepresentation by weighting observations by $\frac{1}{n}$ when conducting individual-level analyses.

**Alacourt Case-Level Results**

**Alabama Application Records Linked to Alabama Court Records**

- Court records help us understand restoration of voting rights decisions.