

# Restoring Voting Rights in Tennessee

## Part 1: How many Tennesseans have lost voting rights due to a felony conviction

In most of the country, including Tennessee, voting rights are lost after a felony conviction.<sup>1</sup> Policies for when and how rights may be restored vary widely, with Tennessee's process among the most complicated in the country.

### The Voting Rights Restoration Process in Tennessee



#### VOTING RIGHTS LOST

Voting rights are lost **after a felony conviction** is received in Tennessee, another state, or federal court<sup>2</sup>



#### ELIGIBILITY TO RESTORE

**Eligible** Convictions **as of May 18, 1981** where the sentence is complete or the person has received a pardon and where **financial obligations** have been met

**Not Eligible** Permanently disenfranchising convictions\*

**Not Necessary** Convictions prior to May 18, 1981 or when a record is expunged



#### HOW TO RESTORE

**Petition circuit court**

• Pay filing fees

**Demonstrate eligibility**

**Demonstrate merit**

\*After July 1, 1986: Voter fraud, treason, 1st degree murder, aggravated rape; After July 1, 1996: Any degree of murder or rape; After July 1, 2006: Sexual/violent sexual offenses where victim is a minor, bribery, public official/employee misconduct, interference with government operations

### We do not currently have a clear picture of how many Tennesseans have lost their right to vote.

Nationwide analyses by the Sentencing Project are often used to estimate how many Tennesseans have lost voting rights and how many may be eligible for restoration. Yet, their numbers are estimates based on (a) totals for those on probation and incarcerated drawn from national reports and surveys and (b) using state death and recidivism rates to calculate how many of those may be eligible for restoration. From 2020 to 2024, their estimates average over 400,000 disenfranchised Tennesseans.<sup>3</sup>

In this *Restoring Voting Rights in Tennessee* report series, we instead use state and county-level data to provide more specific numbers for **how many Tennesseans have lost their voting rights** due to felony convictions, **what eligibility for restoration looks like**, and **how many have had their rights restored**. With this state-specific data, policymakers and advocates can better understand where additional focus could help those who may be eligible to have their voting rights restored but who have not yet completed the process.

In part one, we look at how many Tennesseans have lost their voting rights because of a felony conviction.

## Key Takeaways

**From 1996 to mid-September 2025, 321,942 people lost their voting rights due to a felony conviction.**

- White and male individuals and lower-level felonies accounted for the overwhelming majority of convictions.
- The highest number of convictions occur in the larger counties, but over time most counties' convictions have increased.

**From the November 2008 to November 2024 election cycles, 96,167 registered voters were removed from voter rolls due to a felony conviction.**

- Felony convictions account for 2.9% of the total voters removed in this time period.
- Counties saw varying levels of removals due to felony convictions, ranging from 0.81% to 11.1% of total removals.
- Total removals for felony convictions fluctuated from cycle to cycle and have been increasing since 2020.

## How many Tennesseans have lost their voting rights?

It is difficult to quantify the total number of Tennesseans currently without voting rights—because we cannot account for factors such as those who have moved to Tennessee with an out-of-state conviction or those who moved out of Tennessee after an in-state conviction.

However, looking at state and local data, we can quantify two distinct data points:



**321,942 Tennesseans have lost their voting rights because of a felony conviction from January 1996 to mid-September 2025, and**



**96,167 registered voters were removed from voter rolls because of a felony conviction from November 2008 to November 2024.**



## How many Tennesseans have lost their voting rights because of a felony conviction?

Using data from the Tennessee Department of Correction and the Administrative Office of the Courts, we identify the total number of felony convictions, the demographic characteristics of those convicted, the classes of felonies, and where convictions are occurring.

**Since January 1996, 321,942 Tennesseans lost their voting rights because of a felony conviction.**

From January 1996 to mid-September 2025, **321,942 people were convicted of felonies in Tennessee.**<sup>4</sup>

While some of these individuals may have moved out of Tennessee after their release or may not have been registered voters at the time of conviction, all lost their right to vote in Tennessee.

**Total felony convictions increased from 1996 to 2011 but have since been decreasing.**



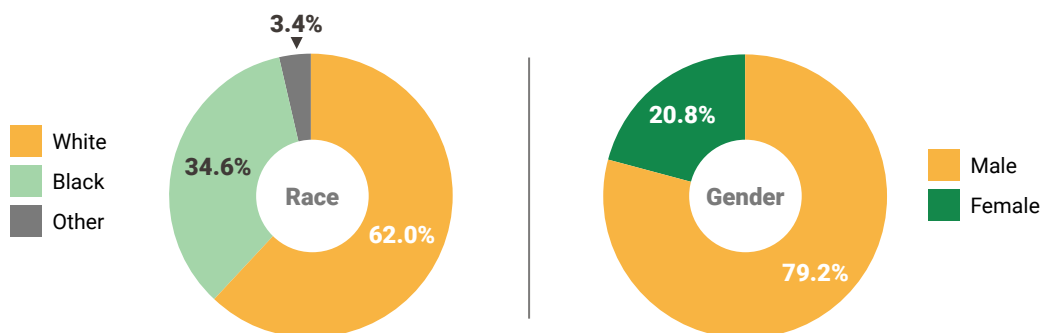
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction, Research and Planning Department, Tennessee Offender Management Information System.

THINKTENNESSEE

**The majority of those convicted were White and male.**

The demographics of those convicted show that **62.0% were White** and **79.2% were male.**<sup>5</sup> Tennessee's population has historically similarly been majority White (75.2%), but conversely majority female (51.3%).<sup>6</sup> While Black Tennesseans account for 34.6% of total convictions over this time, they historically have made up just 16.2% of the state's population.<sup>7</sup>

**Demographics of those convicted show 62.0% were White and 79.2% were male.**



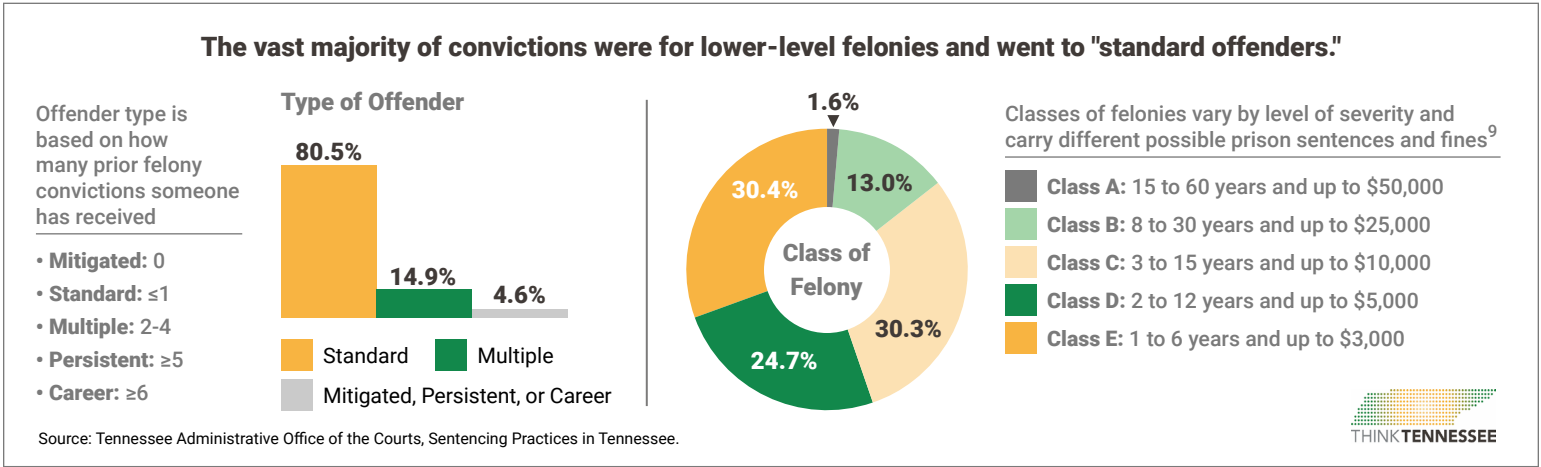
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction, Research and Planning Department, Tennessee Offender Management Information System.

**Total convictions: 321,942**

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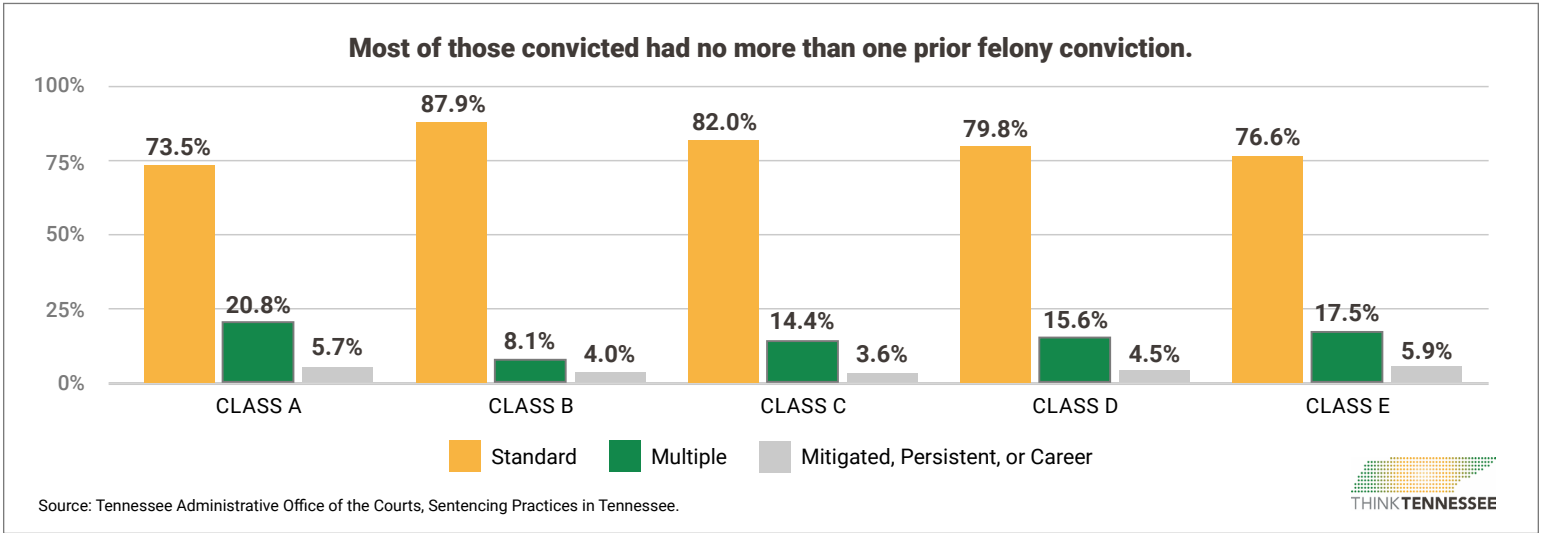
Criminal sentencing statistics show most convictions were for lower-level felonies and went to "standard offenders."

Sentencing statistics from FYs 2016-2023 show that 85.4% of convictions were for Class C, D, and E felonies and 80.5% of convictions were for "standard offenders"—individuals with no more than one prior felony conviction.<sup>8</sup>



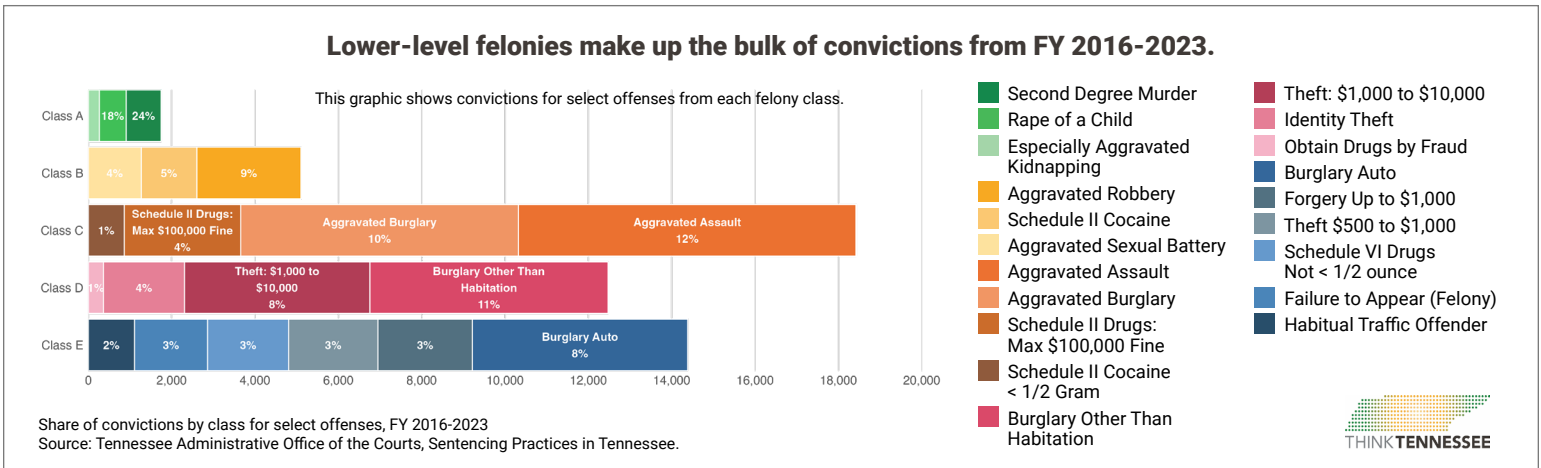
"Standard offenders" made up the majority of overall convictions as well as the majority within each class type.

Individuals with no more than one prior felony conviction accounted for the majority—from 74% to 88%—of convictions within each class type.<sup>10</sup>



Higher-level Class A and B felonies accounted for just 14.6% of convictions.

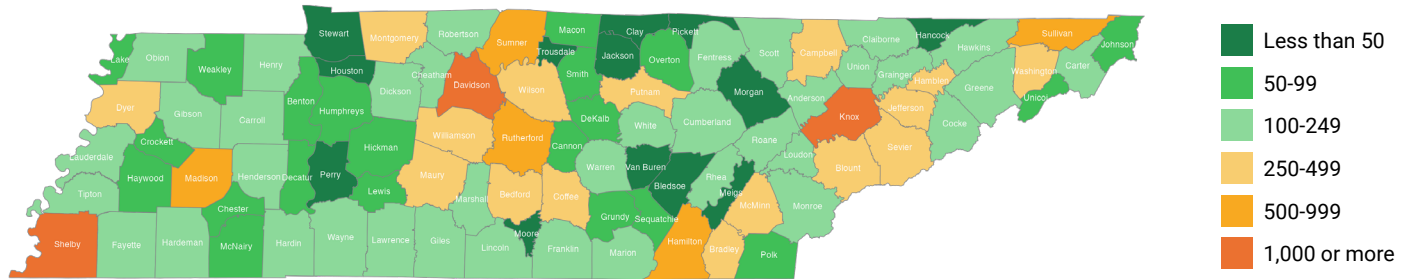
The majority of offenses—lower-level classes of felonies (Class C, D, and E)—include habitual traffic offenses and schedule VI drugs under half an ounce. While examples of higher-level classes (Class A and B) such as second-degree murder and aggravated robbery account for 14.6% of convictions.<sup>11</sup>



## The highest number of convictions occur in the state's larger counties.

The Tennessee Department of Correction's Annual Statistical Abstract reports share data on the **county of conviction of those currently incarcerated**. Larger counties have both higher populations and generally higher crime rates, so it is not surprising that they also see the highest number of convictions. Taking an average of those reports from FYs 2008-2025, counties range from a low of 15 (Pickett) to a high of 4,865 (Shelby).<sup>12</sup>

The most populous counties contributed nearly a quarter (24.7%) of Tennessee's incarcerated population.



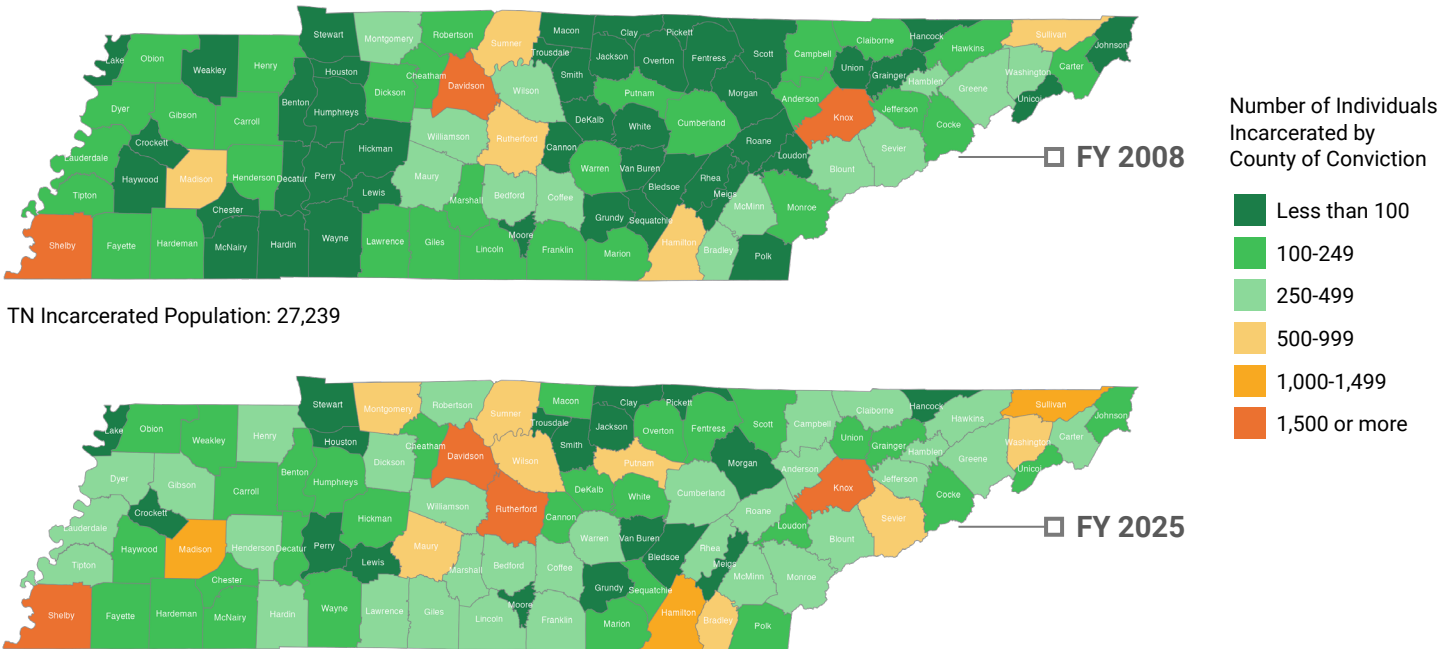
Source: Tennessee Department of Correction, Annual Statistical Abstracts.



## Most counties have seen convictions increase over the last 17 years.

In FY 2008 (the start of the available data), 44 counties had fewer than 100 convictions. By FY 2025, only 18 counties remained in this category. Meanwhile, the number of counties with 500 or more convictions nearly doubled, growing from 8 to 15 within the same time period.

Counties have seen increased numbers of conviction over time.



Source: Tennessee Department of Correction, Annual Statistical Abstracts.





## How many registered voters have been removed from voter rolls because of a felony conviction?

While everyone convicted of a felony lost the *right* to vote, not everyone may have been a registered voter. By looking at voter “list maintenance” data reported to the federal Election Assistance Commission by Tennessee county election officials, we can see the impact of felony convictions on registered voters.<sup>13</sup>

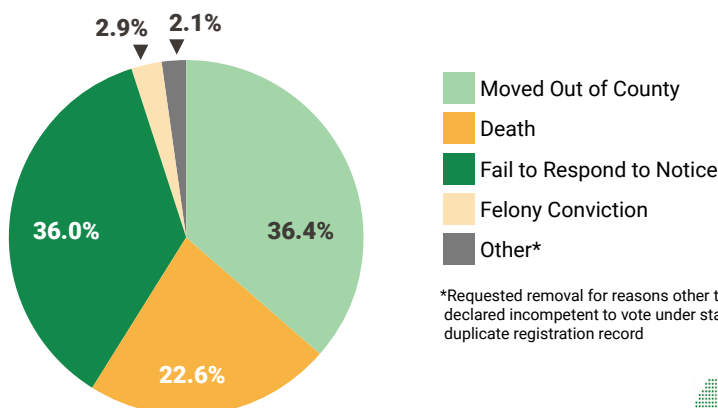
Only a small proportion (**0.25%**) of registered voters are removed from voter rolls due to felony convictions.<sup>14</sup> Yet we can look to county data to see how many voters have been removed and what removal trends look like over time.

**From the 2008 to 2024 election cycle, 96,167 registered voters were removed from the rolls because of a felony conviction.**

Fewer than one in ten registered voters (8.8%) were removed from voter rolls in this period, with felony convictions accounting for 2.9% of the total removals.<sup>15</sup> Moving out of the county, the main reason for removal, accounted for 36.4% of the removals.

### Felony convictions account for 2.9% of all voter removals between November 2008 to November 2024.

County election officials regularly perform list maintenance to remove voters for reasons such as they have moved, died, been convicted of a felony, requested removal, or their citizenship status is in question.



\*Requested removal for reasons other than those listed, declared incompetent to vote under state law, and duplicate registration record

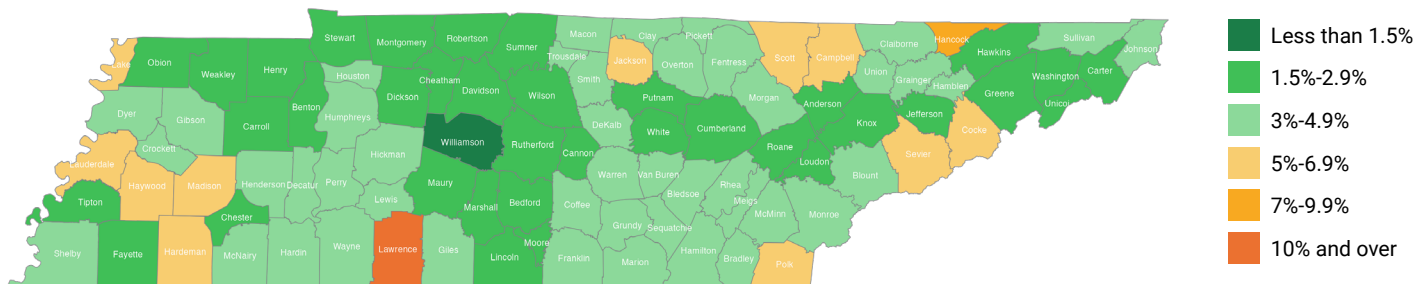
EAVS data do not include citizenship as a category for removal  
Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS).



### The proportion of total removals due to felony convictions within counties ranged from 0.81% to 11.1%.

Statewide, 2.9% of voter removals were due to felony convictions, though the share varied by county, from a low of 0.81% in Williamson County to 11.1% in Lawrence County. In 59 counties, the proportion of removals that were due to felony convictions exceeded the state average.

### The share of removals due to felony convictions varied widely by county, with 59 exceeding the 2.9% state average.



Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS).



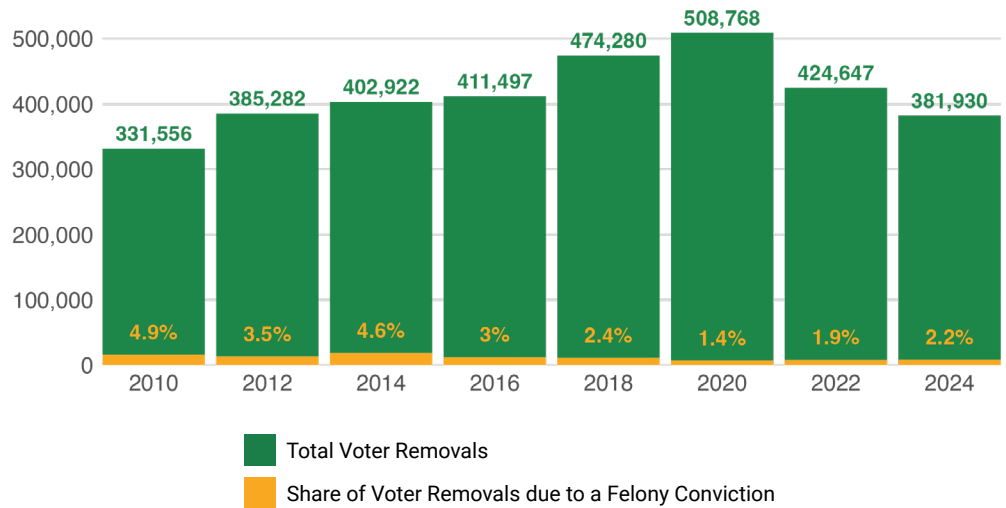


## Total removals for felony convictions fluctuated from cycle to cycle but have been increasing since 2020.

Over time, overall voter removals—for all reasons—in the state increased from 2010 to a high of over half a million in 2020. Since then, overall removals have been decreasing, reaching its second-lowest level in 2024.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the proportion of those removals that were because of felony convictions fluctuated. The largest proportion of felony conviction removals (4.9%) came in 2010, and the lowest proportion (1.4%) in 2020. The share of removals due to a felony conviction have since begun to increase again, though it remains below its 2010 peak.

### Total voter removals trended upward to 2020 and have since decreased, while the share of felony removals are slowly approaching pre-pandemic levels.



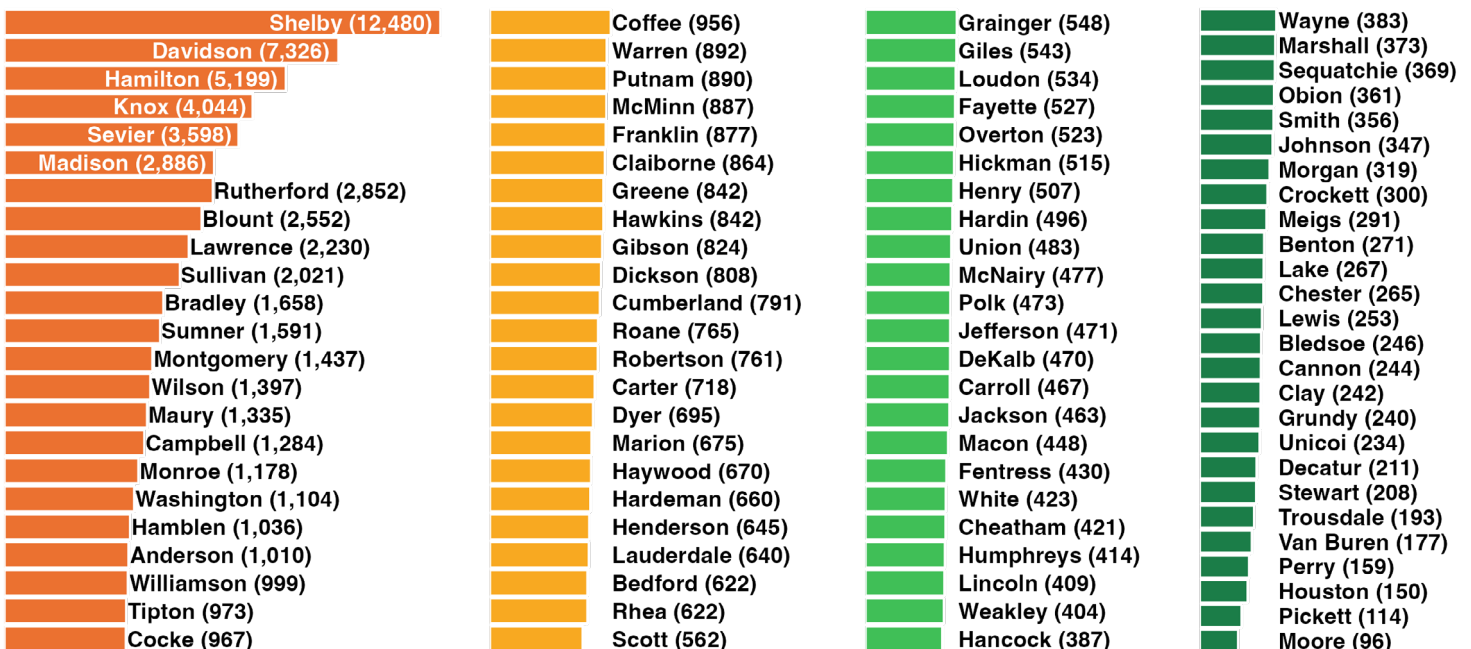
Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS).



## The number of voters removed in a county due to a felony conviction ranged from 96 to 12,480.

While **96,167 registered voters statewide** were removed from voter rolls between November 2008 and November 2024 due to a felony conviction, at the county level, that ranges from **96 in Moore County** to **12,480 in Shelby County**. With two exceptions, the 15 counties with the most registered voters in this period align with the 15 counties with the most felony conviction removals. Williamson County ranks 6th in registered voters but 21st in removals, and Lawrence County ranks 38th in registered voters and 9th in removals.<sup>17</sup>

### Counties removed from 96 to 12,480 voters from voter rolls due to a felony conviction from November 2008 to November 2024.



Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS).



This analysis using state and local-level data provides new insight on how many Tennesseans have been convicted of felonies and how many have been removed from voter rolls because of a felony conviction. Yet, because the data for each category span from different time periods, they are not directly comparable. Additionally, we cannot expect the two to align as a Tennessean could be a registered voter in Davidson County and receive a conviction in Sumner County.

Yet, we now know more about how many Tennesseans have been impacted due to convictions over the past 30 years, how many have been removed over the past 17 years, and where they may be in our state.

In part two of our *Restoring Voting Rights in Tennessee* series, we will look at what we know about eligibility to have voting rights restored based on sentence completion and the three elements of legal financial obligations—restitution, court costs, and child support.

Primary Data Sources Used

- **Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC), Research and Planning Department, Tennessee Offender Management Information System:** The total number of unique individuals convicted of felonies and their demographics from January 1996 to mid-September 2025.
- **Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts, Sentencing Practices in Tennessee:** The count of criminal sentences by felony class and offender class for FYs 2016-2023.
- **Tennessee Department of Correction, Annual Statistical Abstracts:** The number of incarcerated individuals due to a felony conviction by county of conviction for FYs 2008-2025.
- **U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS):** Voter list maintenance data from 2010 to 2024 (covering the period from November 2008 to November 2024).

For those interested in examining the underlying data, files can be found [here](#).

References

1. Most states automatically restore voting rights after completion of a felony sentence, while Maine, Vermont, and the District of Columbia never revoke voting rights. Tennessee is among nine states that require individuals to complete additional steps before regaining eligibility. *ThinkTennessee*. (January 2024). [Tennessee’s Voting Rights Restoration Process is Overly Complicated](#).

2. People convicted of an “infamous crime” are barred from voting in Tennessee. Tenn. Const. art. I, § 5. Since May 18, 1981, state law has defined “infamous crime” to include any felony conviction—meaning someone loses voting rights after any Tennessee state felony, any federal felony, or any out-of-state conviction that would be a felony in Tennessee. Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-20-112.

3. The Sentencing Project’s series of reports (2020, 2022, 2024) provide state-level felony disenfranchisement estimates. For each state, the authors construct demographic life tables that combine national correctional data (e.g., BJS prison, jail, probation, and parole statistics) with national recidivism and mortality studies to estimate how many people remain under supervision or post-sentence but still disenfranchised, then apply each state’s voting laws to those modeled populations. The totals for how many Tennesseans are disenfranchised—and how many of those are disenfranchised post-sentence—are included below.

	2020	2022	2024
Total Disenfranchised	451,227	471,592	399,684
Total Post-Sentence	360,103	377,157	300,166

4. The Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) provided data from the Offender Management Information system that includes all unique individuals that were convicted of felonies from January 1996 through September 16, 2025.

5. Ibid

6. The historical averages for Tennessee’s overall population by race and gender were calculated using U.S. Census data from 2000, 2010, and 2020 US Census. Note that all are “White/Black not-Hispanic” except for in 2000 there was no value for Black not-Hispanic, so the value for “Black” was used.

7. Ibid

8. Administrative Office of the Courts. (March 2024). [Sentencing Practices in Tennessee](#).

9. Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-35-111(b).

10. Sentence lengths are only reported for standard offenders, multiple offenders, and all offenders combined. As a result, we found “mitigated” and “persistent/career” offenders by subtracting standard and multiple offenders from the total. Because of this, sentence lengths for these categories are reported together.

11. Administrative Office of the Courts. (March 2024). [Sentencing Practices in Tennessee](#).

12. Tennessee Department of Correction. [Annual Statistical Abstract](#). Reports are available from FY 2008 to FY 2025.

13. Election Assistance Commission. [Election Administration and Voting Survey \(EAVS\)](#). Removals data for Tennessee counties is available from 2010 to 2024.

14. Election Assistance Commission. [Election Administration and Voting Survey \(EAVS\)](#). Total number of Tennesseans removed due to felony conviction divided by the total number of registered voters between election cycles 2008 to 2024.

15. Voters are routinely removed to maintain accuracy of voter rolls for reasons like moving, death, requesting removal, or other reasons.

16. Election Assistance Commission. [Election Administration and Voting Survey \(EAVS\)](#). Removals data for Tennessee counties is available from 2010 to 2024.

17. Ibid

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