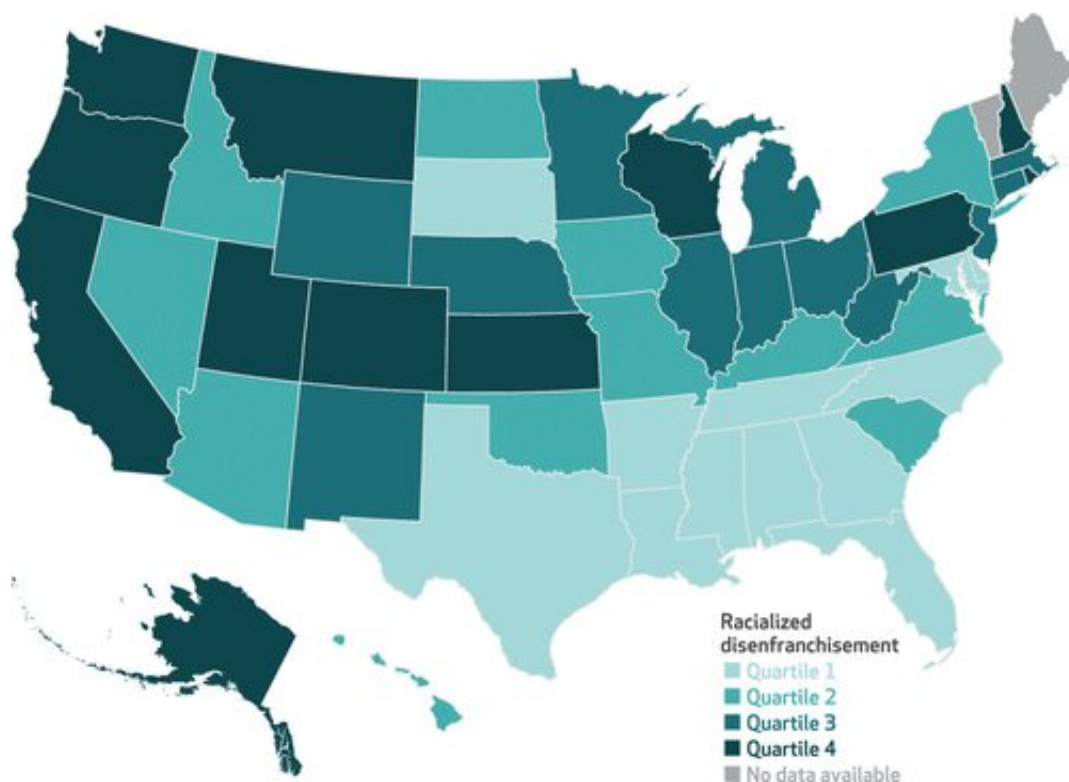


Study finds racialized disenfranchisement affects physical health of Blacks

February 15 2022, by Mark Blackwell Thomas



Map of racialized disenfranchisement across US states, 2016 SOURCE Authors' calculations based on data from the Sentencing Project and the Census Bureau. NOTES The racialized disenfranchisement measure reflects the disproportionate felony disenfranchisement of Black residents (that is, the proportion of a state's felony disenfranchised population that is Black divided by the proportion of the state's overall population that is Black). Quartile 1 is 1.55–2.61, quartile 2 is 2.62–3.76, quartile 3 is 3.77–4.23, and quartile 4 is 4.24–9.44. Higher values indicate greater disproportionate Black disenfranchisement. Estimates of racialized disenfranchisement are not available for Maine and Vermont. Credit: DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01414

Higher levels of racial inequality in political disenfranchisement are linked to negative health outcomes in Black populations in the United States, according to a new Florida State University study.

Assistant Professor of Sociology and Associate Director of the Public Health Program Patricia Homan, the study's lead author, said it revealed that racialized disenfranchisement is accompanied by [health problems](#) including depression, physical limitations and disability.

The study is published in the journal *Health Affairs*.

"Disenfranchisement is a really important issue in itself but it's also highly connected to other measures of Black exclusion like inequality in housing, education, income and residential segregation," Homan said.

Researchers found that, among Black Americans, living in states with higher levels of racialized disenfranchisement is associated with having more functional limitations like the ability to climb stairs, difficulty with instrumental activities of daily living like grocery shopping and more basic daily activities like eating, dressing and getting out of bed.

The study linked data on racialized disenfranchisement for each U.S. state in 2016 to individual-level, demographic and [health](#) data from the 2016 Health and Retirement Study (HRS), the most recent year for which both disenfranchisement estimates and HRS data are available.

Along with co-author Tyson Brown of Duke University, Homan found that living in an area where Black people are disproportionately excluded from the [political process](#) through felony disenfranchisement is an important factor that can harm the health of Black older adults.

"There is a growing body of research showing that states are very important actors in shaping health; we see life expectancies diverging between states," Homan said. "We can say that the amount of racism in your state-level environment really matters and in particular the level of racially inequitable rates of disenfranchisement."

While Black people face disenfranchisement across the country, Homan said that in some areas racial inequality is more extreme than others—and they're not necessarily the areas one might expect.

"Although the American South is known for its legacy of slavery and Jim Crow laws and has some of the highest rates of overall disenfranchisement, its current disenfranchisement policies are less racially unequal than other parts of the U.S., but they are still far from equitable," she said. "One thing we've learned from other research is where there are larger proportions of Black people, there tends to be lower structural racism and we see higher levels of certain types of structural racism in states with fewer Black people."

Homan added: "It's much more difficult to exclude a larger group of people from your important institutions but much easier to exclude and marginalize a smaller minority."

Enacting laws to dismantle felony disenfranchisement can help and Homan said that process starts by acknowledging the impact that disenfranchisement is having on Black communities and political power nationwide.

"The key implication of this study is that voting rights are not just relevant for political inclusion and social justice but also for public health," Homan said. "Voting rights policy is health policy."

More information: Patricia A. Homan et al, Sick And Tired Of Being

Excluded: Structural Racism In Disenfranchisement As A Threat To Population Health Equity, *Health Affairs* (2022). DOI: [10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01414](https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01414)

Provided by Florida State University

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