

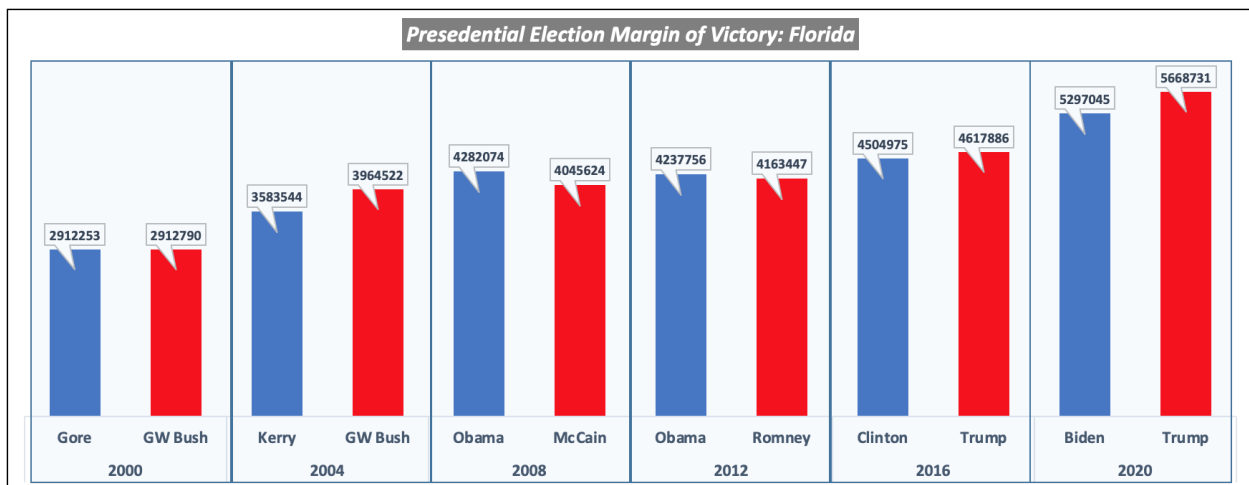
# Forging Personal Connections that Drive Change Through a Pandemic

[According to the Florida Department of Corrections](#), Florida has the third-largest state prison system in the United States. And the state released more than 30,000 incarcerated people in 2016 ([Crime & Justice Institute](#)). Research has shown that these returning citizens are most successful when supported by a network of resources, from family and community support to employment and housing resources. That's where the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC) comes in.

The [Florida Rights Restoration Coalition](#) is a grassroots membership organization run by Returning Citizens (formerly convicted persons) dedicated to ending the disenfranchisement and discrimination against people with convictions and creating a more comprehensive and humane reentry system that will enhance successful reentry and reduce recidivism, and increase public safety.

In 2018, FRRC championed a critical ballot initiative that was enshrined into the state's constitution in 2019. This new provision in the constitution, [Florida's Amendment 4](#), was joined by legislation that was passed and signed into law which restored the voting rights of convicted felons in the state who completed their sentences and paid any outstanding legal financial obligations (LFOs). The changes meant that 700,000 people with prior felony convictions were eligible to register to vote in the 2020 presidential election. Returning citizens became a critical group of voters overnight in a state that often has close returns, famously selecting George W. Bush in 2000 by just 537 votes.

The restoration of the fundamental right to vote was a seismic win for returning citizens, but it also



presented a new challenge. How do you connect returning citizens who are finishing their sentences with information about their voting rights?

FRRC worked tirelessly to help returning citizens register to vote and settle any outstanding legal fees and fines to ensure everyone who wanted to vote could do so. Their efforts led to **more than 67,000 new voters registering** to vote before the 2020 election.

## An Overnight Pivot

The success and momentum of registering thousands of returning citizens across Florida was challenged in early 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic hit Florida as hard as any hurricane to come ashore. Just as the pandemic shuttered businesses and schools, Florida suspended in-person visits in [early March 2020](#) – meaning incarcerated people lost a critical lifeline to family, loved ones, and their communities. [Research has shown](#) that "the level of closeness or attachment that appeared to be a significant factor in individuals' reentry outcomes," a fact that made FRRC's efforts to keep impacted communities connected to incarcerated loved ones all the more urgent.

Shortly after in-person visits were suspended, FRRC partnered with Flikshop to provide \$20,000 in Flikshop credits to help people incarcerated in Florida prisons stay in touch with their loved ones during the pandemic with access to no-cost communications through Flikshop postcards. The partnership aimed to impact 2,000 families across the state.

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*"We launched this partnership to show support and solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are presently in jail or prison during these challenging and uncertain times," said Desmond Meade, Executive Director of FRRC and a MacArthur Fellow. "We wanted to help people stay connected with their families and know that we are with them, and Flikshop was a natural choice given their existing infrastructure and extensive experience helping impacted communities stay connected."*

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The program was a huge success, with more than 3,000 people signing up for credits. Many of the people who signed up for the program were themselves formerly incarcerated, underscoring the critical importance of maintaining communication with family and loved ones.

This program was so successful that the FRRC sent a second round of 5,000 mailers to currently incarcerated Floridians. These Flikshop postcards shared information on the Flikshop/FRRC partnership and encouraged recipients to have family and friends sign up for the free credits.



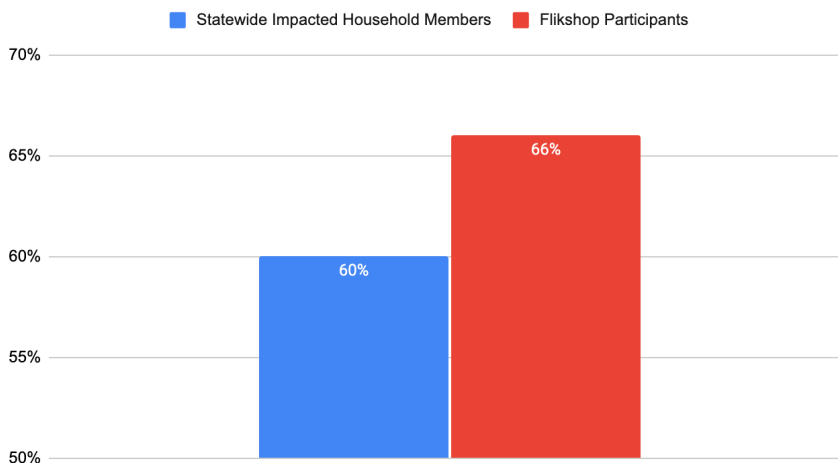
### **Building Generational Advocacy**

According to the FRRC, Flikshop postcards that they send are often passed from person to person, staying in circulation long after the original recipient has returned home. The direct line of communication provided by Flikshop has proven critically important as FRRC continues its work to advocate on behalf of returning citizens across Florida and ensuring these individuals are supported and that they understand their rights when they come home.

Building on the success of their partnership with Flikshop, FRRC sees several ways to grow their work and build advocacy on issues like removing barriers to employment, housing, and opportunity for returning

citizens. FRRRC found that Flikshop users that FRRRC engaged had a higher voter turnout than other impacted households they communicated with – **two-thirds of those who FRRRC engaged through Flikshop turned out to vote, a rate 6% higher than impacted households statewide.**

Voter turnout: statewide impacted households vs. Flikshop participants



The power of helping returning citizens build and maintain personal connections proved a clear winning strategy for FRRRC. Today, the FRRRC continues to engage returning citizens through Flikshop to ensure they are both connected to resources to support their reentry and that they understand their voting rights under Amendment 4.

### What's Next

The success of the FRRRC and Flikshop partnership proves a powerful example for those wanting to reach new audiences and foster advocacy around issues important to all citizens, like ensuring full access to democracy.

A political candidate's campaign, for example, could engage Flikshop to reach returning citizens and impacted communities who will be eligible to vote in time for an upcoming election. A community organization could similarly engage these communities around critical policy issues, building advocacy at the local, state, or national levels. Companies can also leverage this winning formula to reach returning citizens who may be future employees or customers.

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*"Flikshop enables us to connect with, inform, and engage with returning citizens while they are still incarcerated. I have a stack of letters on my desk from individuals that we communicate with, some who are surprised and deeply moved that we reach out on issues that matter to them," said Brandon Walthour, Web Design Coordinator for the FRRRC.*

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"In prison, getting mail is like winning the lottery. Even short notes from friends and family remind you that there is life, a good life after incarceration. Mail keeps you connected to what's happening in the

world and the people and issues that are important to you," said Marcus Bullock, founder and CEO of Flikshop. "At Flikshop, we aim to help individuals and organizations connect with returning citizens to foster meaningful relationships and drive change."

Are you interested in learning more about how Flikshop can help your organization reach its goals by engaging returning citizens and impacted communities? Contact us today to discuss how we can build a program together!