

The Future of Democracy Ep. 20 - English

[00:03:03] Welcome to The Future of Democracy, a show about the trends, ideas and disruptions changing the face of our democracy. I'm your host, Sam. With election 2020 bearing down on us, perennial questions about accessing the right to vote have been intensified by the ongoing pandemic. Earlier this spring, we heard from experts across the political spectrum about the unique challenges of ensuring a free, fair and open election amidst ongoing restrictions to movement the deep public anxiety about health. We also heard particular concern about how this situation could exacerbate existing inequities in the right to vote. Historically, marginalized communities have emerged from some of the forms of de jure disenfranchisement of the first half of the 20th century. But changes to formal rights did not put an end to de facto discrimination. Today, many election commentators and civil rights advocates continue to fight against efforts to exclude some Americans, too often on the basis of race for access to this bedrock democratic right. Civil rights lawyer Nicole Loston. Hillary has been at the forefront of these debates throughout her career. The head of the U.S. program at Human Rights Watch. She's been a key commentator on a range of critical issues. Today, we're delighted to have her on the program to help orient us in the countdown to what could be among the most contested and challenging elections of our time. So without further ado, my great pleasure to welcome to the show, Nicole Austin Hillary.

[00:04:26] Hi, Sam. It's so good to be here with you today. Thanks for having me on.

[00:04:29] Thank you for joining us. Thank you for joining us. And I'd love to just dove into it. We there's been a lot of attention, you know, reasonably focused on the mechanics of pulling off an election in a time when many Americans won't want to go to the polls or can't safely go to the polls.

[00:04:50] But I think we'll be a fiction to assume that before February of 2020, everybody who wanted to vote was able to exercise that. Right. And so can you just orient us around some of the issues that you've been working on before, Kofod about access to the right to vote or so, Sam, as you just articulated?

[00:05:09] You know, we in this country have made many changes over the last couple decades to try to ensure access to free and fair elections. And there are a lot of people who know the stories, particularly recently with the passing of my mentor and personal hero, Congressman John Lewis. Lots of people have been re-familiarizing themselves with that struggle. And with that history. And there are some folks who believe that after the Voting Rights Act was passed, after the Civil Rights Act was passed and the early 1960s, that things were copacetic, but they weren't there has ever since that time still been efforts to make it difficult for certain groups of people to engage in our electoral system.

[00:05:54] If you talk to individuals and black and brown communities, if you talk to individuals in poor communities, they will tell you their stories. They will tell you how often times they don't get the information they need to know how to engage in the electoral process. They will tell you that polling places sometimes are inconvenient for them to access.

[00:06:14] They will tell you how the fact that they are in minimum wage jobs means that they can't stand in long lines for hours before they can cast a vote. So that means for some of those people, they have to make a choice between do I go to work and get a paycheck so that I can feed my family and keep a roof over their heads? Or do I stand in a

long line and cast a vote for those people? It's an either or. So these are issues, Sam, that had been prevalent long before COVID.

[00:06:44] And what we see as a result of the pandemic is that these issues are exacerbated because now individuals have issues around safety and health that they have to contend with on top of those same issues that they've been trying to deal with and manage all along.

[00:07:02] And so one thing I kind of want to striptease out a bit is, is this is covered.

[00:07:10] Is it coded exacerbating these inequities simply because it's making it harder to pull off an election, or is it actually providing sort of new means of active exclusion or both? How are you as someone who's on the forefront of this, what are you actually seeing?

[00:07:25] It's a little bit of both, Sam. And I will tell you, we actually have a new report, Human Rights Watch, that's going to be coming out on September 22nd on coalbed and how it's impacted the ability of individuals to engage in our electoral process. We looked at voters in four states, Wisconsin, Arizona, South Carolina and Pennsylvania, and we looked at their primaries and what happened during the primary season. And what we saw was that elections officials in those jurisdictions, in some instances used coalbed as a pretext, if you will, to make change. It is to. Taurel system, under the guise of saying that due to COVID, we've got to make these changes. One of the things that we saw and many people saw this in the news, particularly Wisconsin, was it was very big in the news when the Wisconsin primary came along. But elections officials, for instance, made decisions to close some certain polling locations. They made decisions to move certain polling locations. And they said that this was all done under the guise of it to make things safer and to keep people healthy.

[00:08:30] But what we saw as part of our research is that often times those decisions had a disparate impact. For instance, let's staying with the Wisconsin example. Polls were closed, polling locations were closed in areas that had high populations of black and brown individuals and high populations of working-class communities where if we did a comparison to some areas that were wealthier and whiter, fewer polls, polling locations were closed. And when we talk to voters in locations where there was more wealth and versus where there was less, well, we had voters, for instance, in the white wealthier areas tell us we had no problems at all voting in those primaries. We had, you know, polling places to get to. They were easy to get to our polling locations for change. We didn't have long lines.

[00:09:16] When we talked to individuals in the blacker and browner communities and where they were more working class, they told us we stood in long lines at polling location that I used to go to was no longer there. So I had to travel farther. So even though those elections officials said we're doing this to really respond to the needs around covered, what we found was that in essence, they made it harder for people who were in some of the most disenfranchised and disadvantaged communities to participate in the electoral process. And again, Sam, that relates to the history in this country where we've seen those difficulties in place and we've seen elections officials make decisions that continue to make it harder for these individuals and these disenfranchised and disadvantaged communities to vote. What's the time-honored public health principle? You know, you're less likely to get infected in a bar than a high school gymnasium or as of right now, I'm trying to figure that out.

[00:10:14] It's a really good example, too.

[00:10:15] I think, you know, in we're in a moment in our country where I think a lot more Americans are trying to grapple with what it means to call something systemic. And it's these sorts of vulnerabilities, right? It's that there really, really is a need to be thinking about elections. And the question is, is that rethinking exacerbating a vulnerability and giving an opportunity for malicious intent or neglect, or is it an opportunity to actually expand rights for four individuals? But let me ask you about that, because how good is that? Is there a reason this isn't going to be an opportunity or how could we make it an opportunity? Because many of the things that many of the ways that we can make voting safer are also many of the reforms that voting rights advocates have long forwarded as ways to lower the barriers of entry to voting more early voting so that people don't have to be clustered at the polls but works better for work schedules. More mail-in voting you more automatic registration is how is there is there any possibility that this election can actually be an opportunity for expanding the franchise?

[00:11:17] This is a perfect opportunity, Sam, to expand the franchise. And the fact that we are now trying to provide and encourage Americans to utilize more mechanisms to vote means that there are more opportunities for people to engage in it. Just like the example I gave earlier in our conversation, I talked about working-class people who don't have the privilege to stand in long lines. That means that if they have mail in ballots, that that gives them another resource and a resource that allows them to engage in the electoral process while also keeping their jobs and taking care of their families so extensively that these additional mechanisms should be helping us to expand the franchise. The problem that we have right now is that there are certain groups and I'm just going to call it out because, Sam, you and I have known each other. I call it out. People in and some of the Republican corners in this nation are now saying that there are problems with mail in ballots, even though these are the same individuals who probably a decade ago, when I was also working on voting rights issues, were touting the viability and the ease of a mail in voting.

[00:12:32] But if we as a nation really tried to say to keep these options open and secure, we have an opportunity to bring more people into the system and say, look, one of the things I tell people is this and that. I've said for years the biggest problem that we have in the United States is really not voter suppression, even though we do have voter suppression. As we're talking about now, the biggest problem we have is getting people to engage. In the process, so the easier we make it. That means we can up those numbers of people who are actually voicing their opinions at the polls. And I tell people, you know, everybody is not like you and me, Sam. Everybody doesn't have an opportunity to get on a podcast or get on a show and talk about these issues and voice their concerns. I remind people that the best way you can get involved in our democracy is by casting that ballot. No matter how big your individual voices, it is not bigger than what it is collectively. On Election Day. So this is an opportunity for us to deal with that big problem of just getting people to the polls and having as many people involved and engaged as possible. And let me also say this, Sam. We also have an opportunity to try to address some of the what I like to call forgotten groups in this country, people with criminal histories. They're one of those groups. One of the things that we've also seen in some of our research in Florida, where they passed a proposition to ensure that people with criminal backgrounds, once they've paid their dues and have been released, can engage in the electoral process. One of the things that we've seen is that there's so much confusion in every state around this group of individuals. People come out of serving their time and they don't know what the rules and regulations are in their state. And no one is necessarily telling them we have an opportunity across the board to do a better job of educating all Americans about how you

can get engaged. We have an opportunity to provide more mechanisms or getting engaged, and we have an opportunity to level the playing field, if you will, so that we don't have swaths of people feeling left out of the process. We need to create a system wherein everyone feels as though they have an opportunity to be engaged and have a hand in it and a stake in the outcomes of our elections. And that's what this moment is giving us.

[00:15:02] I think at this point that you bring up, I think is sometimes lost in this discussion, which is denying someone the opportunity to vote, who is actively trying is obviously a grievous injustice. But it's such a grievous injustice that I think it sometimes blinds us to the real disenfranchisement, which is everybody who doesn't bother. They don't bother because they don't know. They don't bother because they're worried. They don't have an idea. They don't bother because they're worried it will be safe. And for those people, doubt, you know, is really the instrument of suppression, doubt and anxiety. I think the other point that's lost is that we tend to focus on the race for president. But there's so many other elections where those dynamics take hold that matter so much more to our to our daily lives. And I think many people don't realize that if we're worried about people not being able to vote for president, then we should be really worried about people not being able to vote for school board or initialized district or all of these other pieces. But it just it gets lost in the politicization, I think, of this conversation sometimes.

[00:16:00] It does. But, you know, again, Sam, looking at this moment that we're in regarding covered. This is the perfect example and underscores perfectly why being focused on the down-ballot races is so vitally important. I'm sure, like me, you have been involved in so many conversations with friends, colleagues, neighbors who have children in school and all of the decisions that go into. Do the kids go back to school or do they go back to school virtually? Do they go in person? How do we provide meals for the kids who need food and who aren't getting it if they're at home? The people who make those decisions are the school board members or the county executives or the mayors.

[00:16:44] We see that come to life more vividly now than maybe we've ever seen before. So this moment of COVID, it is a great example for everyone to have a better understanding of why it is vitally important to be focused on your leadership at all levels of government, because they are the ones who really are impacting day to day how you live your life, how your children live their lives, and how safe we all are or aren't during this moment of a global pandemic.

[00:17:17] And we had we're Knight Foundation is based in Miami and we had municipal primary in August with record turnout. And I sort of thought, well, you know, it does matter who's in charge. It's sometimes it's really clear that it matters who's in charge.

[00:17:31] So tell us on those along those lines, you pointed to some of the states where we're not where we're seeing people real race to the bottom. Are there examples that we're seeing of state election administrators or local election, Missouri? Those who are putting these pieces together that you articulate, they're not only working to expand the franchise, but they recognize the informational imperative, the educational imperative. What? Any bright spots?

[00:17:55] Yes. You know, I'm going to stick to those same states that I mentioned that we're focused on in our report. Wisconsin, Arizona, South Carolina and Pennsylvania, because even though we saw some problems in those states, we also had examples where there were elections officials who we interviewed and who whose voices will be represented in our report who were working very diligently to ensure that they were

protecting the right to vote for all of us citizens in their jurisdictions. We, for instance, see that in Wisconsin, even though they had some of the issues that we all saw and saw on the news and read about and heard about during the primary. Our report also documents some of the changes that Wisconsin has made. For instance, some of those polling places that they removed and some of those more disadvantaged communities, they put those back and they've tried to put them in places that are more convenient for people in the struggling communities to access. So I do think that that's the good news. That's the good story, Sam. And part of it is that people like you and me, organizations like Human Rights Watch, the fact that we do this research and try to expose the problems. Often it helps to serve as a catalyst for those elections officials and those other leaders to make the changes they need to make. Sometimes it's a matter of simply documenting what's happening and putting it in front of them and saying, do you realize that there's a disparate impact coming from the decisions you've made? And not only do we point out the problems, but we as researchers and as policy advocates make recommendations. We don't have to expect and wait for those leaders across the country to make these decisions alone. Those of us who have expertise in this work, we can make recommendations to them to help them implement the kinds of changes that are going to make it easier for more people to vote. So so that's the good news. You know, we've identified some problems, but there are elections officials in each of those jurisdictions who are heeding to some of these issues and who are making changes.

[00:19:55] I think it does that for what you're describing, though, which is really exciting. I mean, I think it's it should give us hope that that win exclusion is unintentional and people are provided with information and that they have an affirmative desire to take action more than merely an obligation, but an affirmative desire to do their job well, which means enabling people to vote.

[00:20:18] It does raise for me some sort of philosophical questions about the racial dimension of the right to vote that I want to get into with you, which is, you know, I the discussion that we've been at, the perennial discussion about fraud, which has been particularly pronounced recently, but comes back, you know, with regularity, it reminds me of when you and I got to know each other, which was around the time that the Supreme Court invalidated Section five of the Voting Rights Act, which for people listening, is the section that for a certain set of districts that have historic rates of disparate access to voting, had to get approval if they were gonna change election procedures. But at the time, I felt and I still feel now this sort of unease that is this really a question of evidence? You know, is there really a there is no evidence of fraud at any level?

[00:21:12] Look, if a vaccine performs as well as our mail and voting system performs, we're all going to take it and add those rights at point. And and and and I felt the same way about the coverage formulas.

[00:21:26] The part is, you know. Well, but for our audience, a big part of the argument to invalidate Section five was that the coverage formulas were out of date. But there was always me was why don't we update the coverage formula? You know, why? Why is it that doesn't strike me as a is a genuine gesture. That evidence ought to matter. And I just as someone who is on the frontline, I mean, this is a this is a racial justice issue for so many for Human Rights Watch. It's not one that's on everyone's radar. What is going to change people's minds? It's not clear to me that it's evidence about disparity.

[00:21:56] You know, one of the things that we really depend on as Human Rights Watch is telling stories, Sam.

[00:22:05] And I think at this critical moment in the country, we see that telling stories has had a huge impact.

[00:22:13] And it's not just telling stories about boating. It's telling stories about race and about the experience of racial groups who've been marginalized in this country for four hundred and one years.

[00:22:26] When people got to see the tape. George Floyd's killing. It was as if it told a story.

[00:22:37] When people learned about Briona Taylor and her life and the life she was living and the way that she was trying to, you know, be a credit to her community by working in law enforcement herself.

[00:22:52] That was a story. I think that's how we're going to be able to better secure our voting rights, Sam. To be frank, people right now are open not just in this country, but globally. People are open to hearing the stories and the experiences of people. And it's really difficult to turn away from hearing stories and understanding what an individual's own personal experience has been. So when you hear someone, for instance, say, you know, I tried to vote and this is one of the stories that we are telling of a woman who said, I tried to vote. I went to a polling place. It was the polling place I used to go to. I asked them where I should go next. I went to the place where they told me I should go next.

[00:23:49] And when I went there, they said, no, that's not the right place. Here's where you need to be. By the time I got there, it was too late. I couldn't vote.

[00:23:57] People, we're all human beings. That's what's at the heart of human and civil rights and social justice that all human beings. And when you hear the struggle that people have, I think it helps people to empathize and to have a better understanding. And I think this whole moment that we are in globally around systemic racism, around injustice, around trying to understand the plight of different groups, is about knowing those stories and understanding and empathizing and putting yourself in those positions. I think that's part of, Sam, what's going to make the difference? You know, the evidence that the courts have said we need that. That's the evidence. Well, telling you what, they've not been able to do. People telling you how they were, you know, stopped from being able to engage in our electoral process. And, you know, that's our stock in trade. Human Rights Watch. We believe that the data is important. The research is important. But you've got to have the voice, not voice. It's not the voices of the so-called experts and the academics, but the voices of people who are actually on the ground, who are living and breathing these experiences every day. That's what's going to make a difference. And that's what's going to make a difference as we talk about injustice, whether it's about voting, whether it's about housing, education, health disparities. That's what's going to make a difference. And that's what we see at Human Rights Watch is what's happening globally. You know, I. I do a race and justice discussion every week at Human Rights Watch. And I have people from around the world, you know, because we're a global organization. I have people from around the world who are part of these discussions, Sam, and they're all saying the same thing. I don't care if you're in Geneva, Switzerland, if you're in Egypt, if you're in Nairobi, if your.

[00:25:48] And, you know, Arkansas, everyone's experiences around understanding, around personal strife, around safety and around health are the same. And that's the starting point, Sam. And that's what's going to make a difference, whether we're talking

about voting rights, whether we're talking about health disparities, whether we're talking about economic inequality. That's the starting point.

[00:26:12] I want to agree, but I want to push on this a little bit more to concerns voting because I think so the story you told. I think there is a lot of power to its it's evocative for me of the other kind of urtext, which would be the scene at the opening of Selma. You know, I think it's Oprah Winfrey, right. You, which combines both the earnest effort to undertake the right and the deep humiliation of being denied. And that certainly comes through in the story you told us. But as we were discussing earlier, so much disenfranchisement is the person who sort of doesn't take the step to try because, again, they're unsure. They're scared. They've they've effectively been softly talked out of it. And there I fear that. And I would think, for example, reinforce the enticement of formerly incarcerated populations, fits that sort of mold. It's someone who does it to realize maybe that they have the right. My fear there is that plays into so many tropes we have about how hard you are supposed to be to try to exercise your rights. And in so how do we use stories to push that next frontier of really expanding access to the right to vote of our affirmative obligation to enable formerly incarcerated populations? Just some of the viewers are sending questions about, you know, people have barriers because of literacy or because of intellectual ability or these places where it's really our work that we've got to do to respond to that individual.

[00:27:40] Well, you know, Sam, I look, it has to be it has to be multifold in terms of what the response is and what the solutions are. We have to put these individuals in the forefront so that they can tell their stories, because if their experiences that matter. We also have to use and leverage the power of advocacy, of community organizing, of grassroots organizing and of the law. All of those variables have to come together to help create a system in which everyone feels like they can engage and is not fearful of engaging. So, for instance, if you talk about individuals who perhaps have literacy issues, are learning disabilities, well, then it's up to those of us who are in the advocacy community to be working with groups on the ground who can provide services and support to those individuals. We have to be knocking on doors. We have to be reaching out to these individuals and saying here's how we can provide support to you if you need it. And we have to engage with these communities and find out what are your needs. We can't make assumptions. We need to find out what those needs are and then meet them. And that's why it's so important, Sam, for there to be. Intersectionality between national advocacy groups and voting groups, community groups, grassroots organizations, community service organizations. It's going to take that kind of collective action to try to dispel the fear, to try to assuage people's concerns and help every person in this country feel as though they can actually get out there and engage in our electoral system. But that means, you know, being on the ground, knocking on doors and working directly with these groups. You know, again, with respect to the research that we did, we talked to some national groups, but we were on the ground in Wisconsin and South Carolina and Arizona and Pennsylvania talking to the elections officials. We were on the ground, talking to the community groups, talking to the advocates who work on behalf of voters. That's where we have to do so much of our work. That's what's going to help dispel the fears and the concern. Because imagine, Sam, if you have a concern about something, what's going to matter to you more is going to matter to you. More than Nicole Austin-Hillery with whatever her title is, is on a national program telling you about the importance of voting and telling you why you should feel confident in doing it.

[00:30:14] Is that going to matter to you more or is it going to matter to you more that, you know, the president of your local boys and girls club, where your kids go every day, where

you see them doing work, where you see them engaging in the community? If that's someone who's involved in get out the vote efforts, if that person knocks on your door and says, Sam, you know, here's why you can vote and here's why. You can overcome any of the barriers that might be in place. What's the matter to you more?

[00:30:43] I think I think hearing from that person, who is your neighbor, who's your trusted community leader, the person who you trust your children with. I think that's going to make the most difference. And so that's what we have to get behind and engage in more.

[00:30:58] Having those people really serve as the leaders for connecting with the community and helping to dispel those fears and myths.

[00:31:06] Well, I know you. So that would actually be really good if you were the one, too. But I. But I'll bet I'll vote. I'm going to vote to help other people vote. But.

[00:31:14] But so let me ask you kind of some forward-looking questions. One is the sprint to the election through the prism of racial justice in and the imperative to make this election as much a force as it can be to advance racial justice. What's what are the top priorities around voting over the next 90 days effectively?

[00:31:38] That's a great question, Sam. And I think it's important for people to keep in mind the nuts and bolts of what it's going to take to actually have your vote counted. One, everyone needs to make sure that they are aware of what the rules and regulations are in their particular jurisdiction. And everyone knows this. But I have to underscore, it's different all across the country.

[00:32:06] You know, I live in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.. What my rules and regulations are for me. I'm in Maryland. What the rules and regulations are for me in Maryland are different than they are right across the bridge going into D.C. and are different than what they are across the Potomac River from my friends who live in Northern Virginia. Everyone must make sure that they are aware of what the rules and regulations are in their jurisdiction governing their elections. That's number one. Number two, please, please, please, everyone, make sure you're registered.

[00:32:40] If you're not registered, get registered. And if you believe you're registered, double-check it.

[00:32:46] Double check and triple check it. We all have to be citizen advocates right now, Sam, and that means advocating on behalf of yourself, your loved ones, your neighbors, making sure that everyone knows that their registration is up to date and ballot and that they can actually vote. And then the last thing is determine how you're going to vote. If you have access to early voting in your jurisdiction, determine now are you going to be someone who engages in early voting? Are you going to be someone who engages in mail in voting because there's a ballot available to you? And if that's what you want to do, then find out what are the steps I need to take to make sure I get a ballot from my jurisdiction.

[00:33:29] But there's a different everywhere. So, again, sticking to my example of the DMV, as we call it, the district, Maryland, Virginia region in the District of Columbia, everyone is being mailed a ballot. Do you request one or not? In Maryland, where I live, you have to first request back a mail in ballot and then it gets sent to you. I'm not getting it sent to me automatically. So I implore people, find out what it is you need to do to. Age in the election in the way that you are most comfortable engaging in the way that you feel is

going to be safest and healthiest for you and your family. And finally, find out what the options are for Election Day. There are lots of communities for various reasons, Sam, as you and I know, who want to engage in voting on the ground on Election Day by going to the polls. You know, research has shown that the African-American community particularly likes to be engaged in voting at the polls. And a lot of that we know has to do with history because we are from a group of people who have been historically disenfranchised where people had to bleed and die in order for us to get that right to vote. So for many people, it is symbolic and it is purposeful to go to a poll on Election Day. If you're one of those people and that's your choice. Find out what's available to you. Don't be like the individual that I talked about in my earlier example who went to one polling place and found out on Election Day that she needed to be some where else you find out ahead of time so that you are going to the right place. Find out how you get there and if there are issues around getting there, questions about it. Now is the time to suss those issues out. Ancestors' questions out with your elections officials. Those are the main things, Sam, that people can do. And those are the main things you can do to empower yourself.

[00:35:19] Don't wait for other people to give you the power. You have the opportunity to have the power yourself to ensure that you can cast your ballot and that it will be counted.

[00:35:28] How confident are you that every American will have at least one safe option to vote in November?

[00:35:36] I'm very confident, Sam. I am.

[00:35:39] I know that there are issues. But I think as we've seen in the work that we've been doing, jurisdictions are really working hard to try to deal with the problems now to have less of those problems on Election Day. I believe in the systems that elections officials and community members and leaders across the country have been putting in place. I think we all collectively, despite the fact that there are some people who do want to make it more difficult for certain groups to vote. I do believe that the majority of people in this country and the majority of leaders want us to be true to our democracy and have voting that is safe, free and fair for everyone. So I'm confident that the system's going to work. We all just have to make sure we do our part. And we also have to make sure that we're holding elections officials collective feet to the fire. Sam, we can't just sit back and wait for everything to be done swimmingly. Well, we have to make sure as advocates that the people who are in charge are doing their job the way they're supposed to. And we have to make sure that the checks and balances that are in place to ensure that are actually working. So we all have a job to do. But I think if we all do the jobs that we're supposed to do, I'm pretty confident that Americans will have their voices heard and we'll have their votes counted. We may not know when Election Day president is, but I think we will. We won't we will get to that. And this whole myth of voter fraud is just that. You know, I've said and you've heard me say time and time again, there's been so much research done. Voter fraud is almost nonexistent in this country. Instances that some people claim are voter fraud have often been deemed to be administrative errors or the fact that an individual didn't understand or had a misunderstanding about where they should vote or whether they were registered. You know, I just heard on CNN last night Ginsburg, who was the attorney for George W. Bush in 2000 during the vote recount, say that this idea of voter fraud is really nonexistent in this country. So when you have people like that say that, that that should tell us something. I think across the board we're coming to a greater understanding that, you know, this is hyperbole and we shouldn't buy into it and we shouldn't allow it to keep us from the polls.

[00:38:17] So I want to get you out of here on a similar question.

[00:38:20] But longer time horizon, which is what is the what is the longer term agenda around the right to vote? As a question of racial justice in this country, what are the what are the what let's say we get through this election.

[00:38:35] What are the big picture issues that you're going to be tackling?

[00:38:42] Well, we're going to be tackling a couple things, Sam. And you know, and I want to remind people the right to vote. Is a human rights issue. It is not just a right in the United States. It is a global right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights lays that out very clearly, that every individual and every country has the right to engage in the political process and choose their leaders. We're going to be continuing to work to ensure that that right that is laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is indeed adhered to in the United States and across the globe.

[00:39:20] You know, I oversee the U.S. Division of Human Rights Watch. But my colleagues who oversee the European division, who oversee the African divisions and Asia divisions, they're all doing the same thing. We are all collectively trying to make sure that this right is guaranteed and is respected.

[00:39:36] The other thing that we're doing, Sam, is that for our U.S. program, we have a main goal. Of working to. And systemic racism in the United States. And that means looking at all of the different mechanisms that add to systemic racism. That means not just looking at voting. And our democratic processes. That means looking at policing and how our system of justice works. That means looking at economic inequality and how money and class determines how people get to engage in our American society. It means looking at education and disparities in education. It means looking at housing. And that means looking at health disparities. We are taking a look at all of those systems, because when you talk about voters and the power of voters, it's about what the boat can get you. It's not just about going to the election, going to the poll on Election Day and electing a leader. It's about trying to ensure that you have the support mechanisms in place, that you have the economic mechanisms in place so that you can live freely and and in a way that your family can thrive and that your community can thrive.

[00:41:08] So that means taking a close examination at how all of these systems work together towards that goal or how these systems work together to make it harder to reach that goal, that that's what we are focused on. And so when we talk about voting and elections, that's what that's all about. That's about ensuring that people have the opportunity to determine how their communities are run. What support mechanisms they have and what's being put in place to keep their families and their jobs and their homes all safe and secure. We also, Sam, are going to be looking at and I let's come back on and talk to you about this. We're also going to be looking at the issue of reparatory justice, because if you really want to deal with the history of the United States and the aftermath of the four hundred and one years of systemic abuse, you also have to talk about how do you make people and communities whole again? And so reparatory justice has to be a part of that conversation. That's a big part of what we're going to be looking at. And I want people to know that reparatory justice is not about. I know some people, they freak out when they hear that term. They think it's about writing a check to every black person in America. That's not what it's about. That's a simplistic way of looking at it. Reparatory justice is about making communities whole again. You know, we've done research in and actually did a report that came out in June of this year on reparations, looking at Tulsa, Oklahoma,

where the 1921 massacre happened as a result of that race massacre, Sam. That black community has been decimated. Used to be a black community before that race massacre that was considered the black Wall Street of America. They had banks, they had housing developments. They had lawyers, doctors, they had thriving communities. And as a result of that race massacre, all of that was decimated. And the result of that decimation have carried through all of these ninety nine years later. So reparatory justice is looking at how do we make communities whole again, despite the fact that systemic racism and systemic abuse. Perhaps took away opportunities for advancement, opportunities for those communities to thrive. Opportunities for those children, those descendants to have the education that they need to have the housing that they need. So the conversations that we're having right now around our democracy have to be inclusive of all of these things, Sam, because democracy is not just about voting. Voting is a tool that we use to get us to a point where we can make as many people whole as possible.

[00:43:47] Well, a discussion about repair to our justice would be fasting. So we're going to take you up on that offer. No question.

[00:43:52] But in the meantime, folks can follow you on Twitter at Nicole Austin Hill. We'll send that out via e-mail. So you've got that call. Thank you so much for joining us.

[00:44:04] Sam, thank you so much. It's been my pleasure.

[00:44:07] All right, folks, we've got some great episodes coming up that I hope you'll tune in for on September 17th. We'll welcome Professor Kathy Cohen from the University of Chicago, an expert on race in America on September 14th. We'll have Alondra Nelson, president of the Social Science Research Council and October 1st. We'll have Nick Pickle's from Twitter, who leads the platform's work around misinformation. You won't want to miss any of those episodes. As a reminder, this episode will be up on the Web site later. You can see this episode in any episode on demand at [caf dot org slash F2 show](http://caf.org/show/F2). You can also subscribe to the Future of Democracy podcast on Apple, Google, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts, email us at [F.T. Show at KFT Dorjee](mailto:F.T.Show@KFTDorjee.com) or if you have questions for me, just send you on Twitter at the Sam Gilb. Please take the survey that's on your screen now. It's extremely helpful feedback for us. And as always, we will end the show to the sounds of Miami songwriter Nick County. You can follow him on Spotify. Thanks, everyone. And until next week, stay safe.