

Probable Causation Bonus Episode 10: Hannah Walker

David [00:00:08] Hello and welcome to Probable Causation, a show about law, economics and crime. I'm your host, David Eil, and my guest today is Hannah Walker, assistant professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin. She holds a master's in public policy from Rutgers University, a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Washington and is the author of "Mobilized by Injustice, Criminal Justice, Contact, Political Participation and Race," which is the subject of our conversation today. Welcome.

Hannah [00:00:35] Thank you so much for having me, David.

David [00:00:37] So let's first start with a little more background on you. How did you first get interested in political science and then how did you come to this kind of work in particular?

Hannah [00:00:44] Yeah. Well, I came to the study of political science because I was generally interested in working on issues for the public good. I think I initially thought I wanted to work in government or for a nonprofit, and then along the way discovered a love of research. And at that point, I was getting my master's in public policy at Rutgers, and I was focusing on American social policy and I was very interested in working on issues around poverty and inequality. And so at that point when I sort of discovered, oh, I like research, I knew political science was the most natural fit for me. I think also during that time, as part of the program in public policy, we had to go, you know, do real things and so I was working for the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, which is located in Newark. And they were really focused and they saw very, very much focused on issues related to prisoner reentry and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice has kind of a three pronged approach where they do legal advocacy, they also had direct services arm and then they also have a research component.

Hannah [00:01:50] And, you know, I was bottom of the rung and very much like a little policy intern and so they kind of had me running around doing all kinds of different things. They had me writing lit reviews for their advocacy arm. They had me working in direct services and doing intakes and talking to clients and sharing their stories and hearing about their experiences. And then they also had me doing some original data collection for a grant that they were working on. And so during that time, I really got a data download around issues related to the criminal justice system, and I sort of realized for came to the conclusion that the criminal justice system is at the center of ongoing poverty and inequality in the United States and in particular, racialized poverty and inequality.

Hannah [00:02:30] And so at that point, I knew that I was going to be working on issues related to criminal justice, no matter what direction I took and I kind of never looked back. So that's how I ended up both working on political science in a research capacity and also focusing on issues raised criminal justice.

David [00:02:46] And it sounds like you through that experience developed a lot of skills that you use for your research. I mean, the research draws on a lot of different kind of sources of information, which we'll get to. Let's go straight to talk about the book. So as the title suggests, it's about contacts with police and the criminal system and how that affects people's political behavior. What was kind of the lay of the land before you got into this research, what did people know or thought they knew about the relationship between context and political behavior?

Hannah [00:03:16] Yeah.

Hannah [00:03:17] Well, I think the first thing to say is that political scientists are kind of late to the game when it comes to studying issues related to criminal justice as I'm sure you and your listeners are aware, sociologists, economists and legal scholars have been thinking about these issues for quite some time. But political scientists didn't start really taking it seriously until maybe the last ten years and one major reason for why the field and the discipline started to really take issues related to criminal justice seriously is because of the handful of scholars who were working hard on this issue and who really pushed it to the forefront of the discipline. And so the work that I'm thinking about in particular, that's most strongly related to my own is work by Lerman and Weaver, their 2014 book "Arrested Citizenship" and associated articles, the sort of article that both set the agenda in political science for the study of criminal justice and then also was an early iteration of the book "Arrested Citizenship: the Political Consequences of the Carceral State" came out in 2010.

Hannah [00:04:19] It came out like during the summer that I was working in Newark and that sort of set the stage both for research that I would do, subsequent research that I would do and how, as political scientists, we think about these issues. But because of that, they really are building on a wide body of work and sociology that demonstrates the deeply negative consequences of experiences with the criminal justice system, not just for individuals who personally become incarcerated, but for those who have less intense types of interactions and for their families and communities. And so building on that sort of deep body of work that demonstrates that experiences with the criminal justice system have all of these negative consequences in one's life that are related to like trusting government resources, socioeconomic status and all of this.

Hannah [00:05:07] They were mapping out the ways in which those experiences also led people to withdraw from politics. And so that was really the lay of the land when I started conducting my research is that the overwhelming message that was sent by the emerging work in political science on this topic is that experiences with the criminal justice system lead people to become alienated from the political system and leads people to politically withdraw.

David [00:05:33] And of course, in your research sounds like you not only use sources that were already available to you, but also built up a lot of data that you collected yourself. And so one of those was a survey that you feel is the specifically for this project. How did that come about and how did you think about what questions you wanted to include and what information you wanted to get out of it?

Hannah [00:05:53] Yeah. So when I started my Ph.D. at the University of Washington in 2011 and when I started working there, the University of Washington had a survey center. They had the Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, and then they also had the Washington poll, which was kind of a companion to the Center on Race and Ethnicity. And so through the survey center, they enlisted the help of graduate students to work in the lab in exchange for being able to put questions on the poll. And my advisor and the working group that I was a part of was really like, jump into the deep end feet first kind of crew and so they really encouraged me to put questions on the poll in that first year. So I was already thinking about issues relate to criminal justice. But one thing that no scholars had raised for us was that it's hard to study the intersection of criminal justice and political science because the types of surveys that we normally draw on the sort of standard surveys and political science thinking here about, in particular, the ANES.

Hannah [00:06:51] It's our Fields premier survey. It's the gold standard, and survey research didn't start asking about experiences with the criminal justice system, you know, until 2016. I think so. Standard surveys and political science didn't ask questions about contact with the criminal justice system or other kinds of criminal justice experiences. And then the sorts of surveys that we're asking about experiences with the criminal justice system weren't also asking about politics, political attitudes and behaviors. So I saw an opportunity and just went ahead and put a couple of questions on that first poll and started digging into the data. And in that first year, I had terrible questions because when you first write survey questions, they're never good. I repeated the exercise in 2012 refining my measures. And in that 2012 data, as my measures became more refined, this is when I started to observe that very interesting counterintuitive finding that there was actually a positive association between proximal contact in particular, which for your listeners, proximal contact basically just refers to instead of thinking about individuals who have personally had experiences with the criminal justice system instead at that time, what I was really focused on was thinking about how the friends, family members, loved ones of people who had that experience, how they thought about politics or thinking about the spillover effects of the criminal justice system.

Hannah [00:08:14] And so I was beginning to observe this positive relationship between proximal contact and political behavior, which was very counterintuitive. So then I spent a bunch of time trying to see if I could corroborate or break the finding and also trying to think about, OK, theoretically, what explains this outcome? And so in 2013, we fielded a national version of the poll through that working group that allowed me to field a broader suite of questions that included a battery of items inquiring about contact with the criminal justice system, a battery of items asking about downstream participation.

Hannah [00:08:51] And then, perhaps most importantly for the book, also included a battery of questions that tried to tap this idea of injustice and tried to tap the kinds of grievances that people might have that arise from experiences with the criminal justice system that the sort of sociological literature and social movements literature suggests should lead to mobilization.

David [00:09:11] And when you're talking about context here, you mean broader than just incarceration rate. It's also a number of other things.

Hannah [00:09:19] Yes, absolutely. So again, it includes proximal contexts. So that sort of second order group of folks. But it also includes things like have been stopped on the street and questioned by the police. It includes things like having been arrested, even if that ultimately doesn't lead to conviction, having been on probation, parole and so forth. It's very widely construed and.

David [00:09:39] You're also thinking about political participation, fairly widely construed. In other words, you know, more than voting. And what are the other kinds of things that you're interested in terms of how people participate?

Hannah [00:09:51] Yeah. So back to that question of what was the lay of the land when I started, when I first started, people were really focused on voting. And I think there are good reasons for that. A lot of the literature beyond even just "Arrested Citizenship" developed as an exploration of voting and did so outside of the survey research space. But what I was observing in the surveys is that, OK, well, people maybe are withdrawing from voting, but maybe they feel compelled to do other things like protest. So I think protest is

like the clearest example where we could imagine people becoming mobilized and channeling a sense of anger and frustration into political participation. They may join the various protests that have been happening around issues related to policing over the last several years.

Hannah [00:10:35] But I also observe that people were doing all kinds of other things as well. They were doing things to engage in their community, so maybe they were doing things like attending city council meetings or signing petitions or joining a community support group. So that then feeds into sort of behavior that is what we would really, as political scientists squarely think of as political. So I tried to take a broader view of what we mean by political participation. Voting is very important, but lots of institutional barriers to voting, particularly for people with criminal, with criminal backgrounds or who come from highly placed communities. But if we widen the scope of what we think of as political, we then observed that folks may be engaging in ways that we didn't expect.

David [00:11:22] And then I think the last piece of data that goes into your findings are you use dozens of intensive interviews with activists and the like. How did you select people for those interviews and as you approach each interview and think about what to ask and each conversation?

Hannah [00:11:39] I started doing the inner. I included the qualitative component because I had some ideas about what might compel people who have experiences with the criminal justice system to participate. I think there are some findings in the literature, a few scant findings in the literature that suggested sort of why people might start to mobilize. But I really felt like it was important to hear from those folks directly folks who were themselves impacted about what compelled them to participate. I felt like we had a little bit of theory, but not a lot. I had an opportunity to start developing some theoretical insight around these issues. And then the last piece is that the interviews really helped flesh out how we think about racial differences or in places where we don't observe difference, why we don't observe difference.

Hannah [00:12:33] So that's what I was after with the interviews trying to sort of construct a narrative around the relationships that I was observing in the large and quantitative data and then see if I could develop some richness around how we should think about race. So that's what I was after the other piece that you asked is How did I identify people. So I started by reaching out to nonprofit organizations and social service organizations and community based organizations in Seattle, where I was initially doing the work that work with individuals who have had experiences with the criminal justice system or sort of work with marginalized communities more generally, where folks who have had some overlap with those who have had experiences with the criminal justice system.

Hannah [00:13:19] So I started there and I reached out to those organizations, developed relationships with those organizations in some cases, even spent a lot of time volunteering in the space of those organizations and then identified folks who might be willing to be interviewed that way. And then once you sort of start with your initial point of contact, I tried to build a snowball sample out from that. That snowball sample in Seattle spilled over to Portland, where I was able to conduct about 10 additional interviews. And then I ended up going to L.A. because what I found out, my sort of first initial batch of interviews was that I was having trouble identifying Latin folks to be interviewed for the project. And the comparison between whites, blacks and Latinos is core to the book. So I then repeated the process in L.A. and was able to conduct several additional interviews with individuals who

identify as Latin X. And I guess just the other thing to say is that part of how I chose the cities that I worked in had to do with convenience.

Hannah [00:14:21] I was a grad student in Seattle where I started again spilled over the snowball, spilled over to Portland, which is, you know, nearby. And then I ended up in L.A. because I had an advisor at UCLA who supported that effort and helped provide the infrastructure for me to be able to carry out those interviews.

David [00:14:37] Did you find that most people were eager to talk to you, suspicious of you? Tentatively open at the beginning and then opened up or all different.

Hannah [00:14:46] In Seattle when I first started, they were pretty suspicious of me, and I did have a couple of organizations that I reach out to and tried to build a relationship with. I had them basically turned me down. And so that was difficult, but particularly through volunteering with organizations, spending time becoming a known quantity that helped build trust there and opened up some doors. And then the situation when I went to L.A. was completely different. Folks were really, really eager to talk to me and to share their stories. There's just, I think, a different activist culture there that helped that made people sort of think it's really important for us to share these narratives and to share the narratives of our lives. Like, you know what, I kept hearing when I would ask folks like, You know what compelled you to respond to the query? What they said was like, Our experiences don't get talked about enough people don't know what we experienced. And so it's we wanted to take the opportunity to share our stories with you.

David [00:15:44] So let's dig right into the main findings. You previewed them a little bit, but what are the one or two kind of main takeaways from the book?

Hannah [00:15:51] Yeah. So as I said, you know, sort of lay of the land was that experiences with the criminal justice system are demobilizing.

Hannah [00:15:59] The book is called "Mobilized by Injustice." So it takes us a central question under what conditions to experiences with the criminal justice system lead people to become mobilized and under what conditions do these experiences lead them to become demobilized, with a particular emphasis on trying to trace out that process of mobilization? And the answer is kind of in the title, you know, again, it's called mobilized by injustice. So people become mobilized when they view their experiences through a larger narrative that helps them connect those experiences to group based grievances. So when instead of thinking about their experiences as a product of their own poor choices, a product of their own personal feelings or the feelings of a loved one, I or they broke the law, they deserve to have this experience when they switch from thinking about it that way and instead start thinking about it as this happened to be because I'm X because, you know, policing is targeted towards people of color.

Hannah [00:16:56] This happened to me because I'm Latino and the cops profile, you know, people who are Latino when they start to think about and connect their experiences to these larger, group based narratives that can provide impetus to them become mobilized. I think the second piece that's really important is the role that community based organizations can play in helping facilitate that process. So, you know, community based organizations, service based organizations are a natural point of contact for folks who have had criminal justice experiences because they very often help meet the needs that arise from experiences with the criminal justice system. They help people negotiate the

legal space. They maybe they help people who've been incarcerated get a piece of ID so that they can try to, you know, find a job and build their lives.

Hannah [00:17:44] Maybe they just provide support services or they provide mentorship. But these organizations, because they're natural points of contact, then become a space where people can start to develop those narratives. They can start to develop that sort of understanding of their experiences as part of a larger collective struggle for justice. And then they also very often provide routine opportunities for people to participate, to go to a rally, or they're going to go protest out in front of a detention center. They very often invite their members to come along. And so that's sort of an institutional explanation that accompanies the sort of political psychological explanation for how people become mobilized when they've had these kinds of experiences.

Hannah [00:18:27] And then I think the last piece that's worth noting is the comparison across whites, blacks and Latinos, where perhaps surprisingly, I think based on the literature, I find that across all three racial groups, when individuals hold perceptions of injustice, they become mobilized and that holds across all three groups. That doesn't mean race doesn't matter. Race obviously structures the likelihood that individuals will have contact the nature of that contact and then what I try to convey and what comes through, I think most clearly from the qualitative interviews is that racial groups have really different narratives that they draw on to explain their experiences as systemically unjust, where white folks tend to draw on sort of class based narratives or sort of narratives that focus in on the political economy of prisons and the extent to which they view prisons as driven by profit. Black Americans draw on what I refer to as the narrative of the new Jim Crow, which connects the criminal justice system backwards to previous iterations of racial control. And then LatinX folks become mobilized when they sort of view their experiences with the criminal justice system as having developed from issues related to immigration, where they perceive that they've been targeted for reasons related to immigration.

Hannah [00:19:43] So I would say those are sort of the three big themes that are developed throughout the book. People become mobilized because of a larger narrative of, of injustice that they connect their experiences to. They become mobilized through the assistance of community based organizations that can help provide the infrastructure and opportunity structure for participation and then racial nuances where there are really different avenues and racialized avenues and pathways that people take to sort of develop a sense of injustice, but that whatever sort of path that they take to arrive there once they've arrived at a sense of injustice, it has a similar mobilizing effect across all three groups.

David [00:20:22] Picking up on that, the last point about the differences across races. Do you think there's kind of a trade off in accentuating those narratives in the public conversation? Like, I guess I'm imagining there's a lot of energy around reforming the criminal justice system because of the racially disproportionate effects. But it might give the sense to white people that it's kind of an issue that doesn't concern them or that they're protected from the criminal justice system by virtue of their race. Whereas as you point out in the book, a couple of times in the United States, even white people are imprisoned at rates many times the incarceration rates in Europe and other industrialized countries. Is there a risk that some groups who are in fact impacted gets the wrong impression that they're not?

Hannah [00:21:13] I think this is such an important question, and unfortunately, I don't think there's a clean answer, so I'll try to give some answers and put some things on the

table. But I don't have a like a real clear, succinct soundbite for you. But on the one hand of what I want to start by saying is yes, and we can kind of see that in the data now where when I'm thinking about is, you know, after the George Floyd protests, we saw this extreme rise in white public opinion that was supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement in a way that we had not seen in previous years.

Hannah [00:21:51] And the question on everybody's mind going into the fall of 2020 was, is this a genuine change in white people's attitudes. Is it a lasting change or not? And what we've seen in the last few months are some data points indicating that that's gone back down, that white folks have sort of retreated to a lesser support for the Black Lives Matter movement. And so that's discouraging. And I think it's reflective of that dynamic that you've raised, which is that there's a risk that white people might think they're not affected by the system and in certain respects, they are protected from the violence of the system relative to their black and Latino counterparts. But I think the other point that's that comes from my book specifically is that the pathways to a sense of injustice really matter. That proximal contact is itself like a learning experience.

Hannah [00:22:48] Right? So white people with proximal contact whose attitudes change as a consequence of that contact are not the same people that we're capturing in these larger aggregate polls, right. They are people who have learned about the injustice of the system through first hand experience or in the case, proximal contact, second experience watching a loved one negotiate the system. And I think that is real lasting attitudinal change with political behavioral consequences. And I think it's not an insignificant group of folks for whom that is true. In my research shows that 30 percent of white folks say that they know someone who's had experiences with the criminal justice system. That's not a majority, but it's also a lot. It's not insignificant. So I'm going to put that on the table. The other thing that I want to say, that's kind of a bit of a mess, but is nevertheless comes out in the research is that it's a mistake to position race as an alternative narrative to class based injustices.

Hannah [00:23:51] When we listen to the narratives of black and Latino folks, they're talking about race, but they're also making reference to the same kind of political economic themes that white folks center. And they're talking about the same set of phenomena. With black folks race is at the center and they overlay that sort of class based analysis and that political economic analysis with references to race. But that does not in any way shape or form mean that it's not class.

David [00:24:19] Well, one things I wanted to ask about is you mentioned that, you know, a lot of people are affected by proximal contact. In other words, know somebody that they're close with has some kind of contact with police or from a justice system. Do you think that there are differences across races and how willing people are to talk about those kinds of experiences like I could imagine know in some groups, people might be kind of embarrassed to say that that they were arrested or that they're interrogated by the police because there's such a strong norm in some communities that the police are the good ones and that if you're under suspicion by the police, then you must be one of the bad ones. Whereas in other communities, that's much less of a strong presumption and could even be a presumption in the other way that the police are often. The wrongdoers, and that's if you've been interrogated by the police doesn't mean that you're a bad person, it just means that you were living in that community, basically. So does that kind of like either fan out or restrict kind of the range of people who get proximal contacts in different communities.

Hannah [00:25:22] Or at least their willingness to talk to me about it?

David [00:25:25] Yeah.

Hannah [00:25:26] Yes.

Hannah [00:25:26] I think that is definitely true, that white folks are a lot more inclined to defer to the system and less likely to say that they think they're aspects of the system that are unjust or less likely to arrive at that conclusion. I think this comes out also in the interviews a bit and in work that I've done subsequent to the book that maybe didn't quite make it in. But like I think when it comes to incarceration, it's a lot harder for white people to defer to the system. Like if you have a parent or brother or an uncle who becomes incarcerated and you talk to that person, you know, you communicate with that person, maybe you go to prison and you visit with them, or when they come, they return from prison and they tell you about their experiences. That particular experience can be so intense that it really changes the way that white people think about the system, even if they're sort of willing to say, like, Oh, policing is fine, or if they're willing to say, you know, I did those drugs or my loved one did those drugs, they deserved to be in prison, what they usually step back on, as they say, like, but did they deserve to be there for that amount of time?

Hannah [00:26:29] Did they deserve to be treated in the way that they were treated when they were there? Did they deserve to be subjected to the deeply degrading and inhumane conditions that characterized American prisons?

David [00:26:39] But as you say, like a lot of activism around criminal justice reform is rooted in these group level injustices. But within the identified group, you know, it's by no means a monolith, whether it's white, black or Latino. Within all of those groups, there's really wide divergence of views about all sorts of issues, but in particular, the criminal justice system. Does that kind of limit the power of those group based narratives of injustice when some people within the group are saying that they don't think it's an injustice or that they just don't have the same view of it as other people within that same group?

Hannah [00:27:16] I think that phenomenon is probably, yes, that the sort of the heterogeneity that exists within a group around their attitudes towards a given issue and what kinds of interests should be prioritized versus not. And I think with criminal justice, the rub with criminal justice comes through, not in terms of do we think there should be reform because I think for the most part, there's a strong sense for folks who have had these experiences for communities that are organizing around issues related to criminal justice, that there should be reform. But what should that reform look like? I think there's a lot of heterogeneity there. Is that a challenge for the movement? Yeah, for sure. Is it a challenge that's unique to issues related to criminal justice? No. I think those are the same kinds of challenges that movements have always faced.

David [00:28:05] So speaking about this kind of changing public opinion. You use surveys from different time periods in your data. And just looking at the years, I was thinking back on the landscape back then, as you said, the survey you did for the book was from 2013, I think another one years from 2006. And just thinking back, I was struck by how different people's views were on these issues in 2016, 2013 and then to now she doesn't. 2013 was after Trayvon Martin was killed, I think before Ferguson and then 2006 was, of course, before Trayvon Martin was killed. So do you see like big shifts across those datasets that

you're using? And do you think that these relationships you've identified are kind of long lasting and robust over time? Or are they particular to certain moments?

Hannah [00:28:52] Yeah, it's hard to answer that specifically with the data that I have.

Hannah [00:28:56] And the reason for that is, you know, I pulled in all these different data sets because no dataset is perfect, right? Every dataset has weakness. So like the oldest dataset that I draw on is the African-American MEN survey, which was conducted in 2006, as you noted. And I use that survey because it's got them the most robust over sample of Black Americans and asks a large suite of questions about attitudes towards the criminal justice system. What it doesn't ask about at all really is political participation. So it's hard for me to draw comparisons across in terms of the participatory outcome. It's hard for me to try to compare 2006 to 2013 to 2015. But we can say is that in 2006 in the AAMS, we do see a significant relationship between experiences with the criminal justice system and holding a racialized group consciousness, which is sort of part of the theorized mechanism that then leads to participation.

Hannah [00:29:56] So I think I guess part of that is to say that I don't think that the phenomenon that I'm observing are limited to this particular moment in time. I do think there's evidence that it predates. This moment in time, but I do think that we see over time people becoming more and more critical of the criminal justice system in that critical position becoming more normalized over time, particularly in the post-Ferguson era.

David [00:30:20] So the non-voting kinds of political participation that you talked about, why do you think that they're important if they don't lead to votes? I mean, do they have a value in themselves? Or is the theory just that, like, you know, protests and other forms of community participation will eventually lead to either voting behavior by the people participating or changing the votes of other people?

Hannah [00:30:42] I think the value of these kinds of participation lie in recognizing the value of the political lives of marginalized people themselves.

Hannah [00:30:51] Right. We want to connect it to voting. We want it to lead to voting because we live in an electoral system where that's a primary way that you make change. And so we want to ascribe importance to whether those kinds of activities lead to voting or not. But I think it's important to say that part of what the early work of political scientists like, Vesla Weaver. She and Joe Soss, come out with this wonderful piece in 2017. I think where they really talk about the failure of political science to ascribe importance to the political lives of marginalized communities. And that's sort of part of what I'm doing here is trying to say that like to give it its own importance, even if it doesn't lead to electoral outcomes in the way that we would maybe would like it to that the work that those individuals are doing in their communities and the voice that they're trying to express through those activities, it is in and of itself worthy and worthwhile and important for us to listen to on its own terms.

Hannah [00:31:55] Having said that, I do think that for some folks, voting is a downstream outcome that, like protesting and becoming civically engaged, is kind of like a gateway to more sustained participation, which then can lead to engagement with voting, particularly when there are organizations on the ground that are trying to help people understand. I think you have a question about this later, but are trying to help people understand, like you might think that your voice doesn't matter at the national level, but in the citywide election, we can really make a difference like it really matters who's on the city council? It

really matters, who holds the position of prosecutor. And so that's where community based organizations can come in to try to convert that community level, that latent electoral power into expressed electoral power.

David [00:32:40] Let's go straight to that because it's striking to me that, like our politics now are so nationalized. Like there's an old saying in politics that all politics are local. But I think that's backwards now. I think now all politics are national. I mean, basically, everybody votes a straight ticket, the dominant by far determinant of how people vote is just their partisan alignment. But as you say, like a lot of these, criminal justice issues are really controlled at the local level and not even at the state level, but at the level of cities and counties. So is it a challenge that the kind of levers of change are not aligned with the national political stream, which is now the dominant one? Or is that an opportunity that you can kind of build some unlikely coalitions that at levels that aren't the national one?

Hannah [00:33:32] Yeah, this is a great question. One that I've been thinking about for a while and someone asked me this question, I think a few months ago or so, and I was just like, The more that I think about it, the more I think the answer is that it presents opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. And so what you have rightly pointed out is that ok part of the rub with politics being national is that at the national level, it's deeply, deeply polarized along partisan lines. There's not a lot of hope for bipartisan reform at the national level. I think maybe there was a glimmer, a moment of hope in the sort of last few years of the Obama administration. But beyond our national politics have degraded beyond the point of bipartisan reform. But at the local level, that's not the case. So, for example, I'm new to Texas city, I'm coming to you from Austin, Texas.

Hannah [00:34:24] I came here just last summer. And what I've come to appreciate when I've heard about the criminal justice reform landscape here is that there is some opportunity for bipartisan reform when it's focused on decriminalizing issues related to poverty, right? That Republicans at the state level have kind of been amenable to those kinds of reforms. And so that's an opportunity that's important. Those kinds of reforms are hard, reductive and they're really important ends and opportunity that we wouldn't have at the national level. I think what the local context does is it shapes the kinds of reforms that are possible and that we might pursue. So, you know, another good example would be the passage of Amendment four in Florida in 2018, where again, at the top of the ticket, the governorship went to a Republican. There was a hotly contested Senate seat that we where we thought Amendment four might go the way of that Senate seat. While the Senate seat went to the Republican, but amendment four still passed.

Hannah [00:35:17] It doesn't pass without bipartisan support. And so I think what the local context does is it opens up these kinds of unique opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be available. And what kind of reforms that we pursue then are shaped by that context.

David [00:35:32] Yeah. Amendment four is a good example because as you say, it's passed in a referendum and with strong support from voters in both parties. And then the Legislature kind of gutted it, which was really disappointing to see for me. But it was kind of a lesson and how much consensus that kind of every level of government you need to get things done sometimes. Maybe that's different on the local level, so the amendment four is state level. So for listeners that don't know amendment four, this is the Florida referendum that restored right to vote for people who had been incarcerated.

David [00:36:08] And what the Legislature did is said that it only allows you to vote once you've also paid off all of your court fines and fees anything you could have accrued as a

result of your case, which was impossible for most people, in part because the courts can't even figure out how much money people owe. So it's started out, I think, as a real inspirational moment for a lot of people when it passed and has led to disappointedly like few people actually getting the right to vote back. But as you say, it's, you know, voters from both parties endorsed it.

Hannah [00:36:40] Yeah, absolutely. And I think it became it started as a product of this really rich and vibrant energy around criminal justice reform. But it very quickly became after it was passed, it sort of became part of the ongoing battle at the state level, particularly in states that are Republican controlled, but maybe, but maybe not solidly in control, became part of the fight over voting rights, which I think has its own set of dynamics at work. But I find room for optimism there because, you know, not everything is at the state level. You know, when I was in Seattle, I was doing the ethnographic work there. The thing that those activists were pushing for was they were pushing for the county wanted to refurbish a juvenile detention center. And in addition to refurbishing it, they were going to expand the number of beds that were available and they were going to combine the juvenile detention center services with services for homeless youth. So the local activists there were mobilizing against that and trying to push for alternatives to incarceration and funding for other kinds of programing and setting a goal of zero incarceration of youth.

Hannah [00:37:51] And they ultimately were successful in my book, I say at the time of the writing of this book. They're not successful. They're still going to build this juvenile detention center. But in the last year, that's changed and they're no longer going to to build that detention center. So they were successful there. In the city of Austin you know, it's that same kind of energy that allowed for the election of a very progressive prosecutor. So I find reason for hope at the local level, even as I don't find much reason for hope at the national level.

David [00:38:21] That's one thing that comes through in the interviews that you quote in the book is that a lot of the people we've interviewed are optimistic, which is kind of counterintuitive given that they're mobilized by injustice. But they do seem to have an underlying hope and belief that change is possible and that even marginal small victories can motivate people to continue to get involved. And it seems to me like that is probably necessary that people have to believe that what they're doing has some impact. Is that inexhaustible? Or at some point, are people going to be kind of just so distraught by the injustice they face? They become cynical and demobilized.

Hannah [00:39:05] Yeah, I was going to mention this also in the question about voting and how do we think about it relative to other kinds of activities. I think that there's a real danger there. There's that people will become fatigued and disengaged when they are not successful. And I think I was just reading a paper that came out like in the last month in Perspectives on Politics in the companion piece in APSR where the scholar Sally Nuamah, who's at Northwestern, is examining participation in marginalized communities in Chicago and a handful of other cities where those communities were facing mass school closures.

Hannah [00:39:41] And so they were mobilizing to protect the school services and their communities, and in certain instances, they were successful. But they became even given that success, they became fatigued and disillusioned by the fact that they were engaging with a system that was really strongly stacked against them. So I think there's a real danger there. I do think, though, that other research emerging. In research in criminal justice and political science, it's qualitative, so I think there's more work to be done here,

but this work really suggests that, OK, even for people who become really disillusioned and deeply alienated from the political system and who think that they cannot create change through engaging with political structures, even as they sort of withdraw from those institutions, their political energy doesn't go away. Instead, they turn around and they start channeling it into building strength within the context of their own communities, building up indigenous institutions within those communities and so forth. And so that is still a form of political expression, even as as it's a disengagement with the dominant power structure.

David [00:40:51] So what are you working on now? Are you extending these ideas into a new project or do something different? All the above.

Hannah [00:40:57] No, I'm definitely still working on issues related to criminal justice and working on some of these questions. I have two projects that I'm pretty excited about. One that's a solo author project that picks up on what I did in Chapter five of the book. So for those who haven't read it in Chapter five, I really dig into like what's happening for the Latino community, but and that centers on the intersection of criminal justice and immigration. But that's a set of questions that it's worth its own sort of book length project.

Hannah [00:41:26] And so when I'm working on there, what I found when I was writing the book was like it was pretty straight forward from secondary literature to talk about the sort of historical racialized antecedents to the current iteration of criminal justice policy. It's harder to do that with Latinos when we're sort of really trying to narrow in on how do local law enforcement agencies become roped in to the project of immigration enforcement? How does that policy develop over time? What are the racialized historical institutionally decisions to that development? So I'm working on that and then trying to see if I can sort of then spell out some expectations for how that might lead to racialized outcomes in policing and communities where there are those collaborative relationships. So that's a project that I'm really excited about, that I'm working on.

Hannah [00:42:16] And then the other project that I'm working on that I'm very excited about, and full disclosure is coauthored with Jen Doleac, who is your co-host.

David [00:42:26] Don't know her.

Hannah [00:42:27] Don't know her yeah I've never heard of her is a Duo TV project where we've undertaken a series of large scale field experiments to try to understand, OK, we know there's this little political energy out there. There are a lot of people in the United States with felony convictions who are not explicitly and institutionally barred from voting. They're eligible to vote, but nevertheless don't participate. And so we've undertaken a series of field experiments to try to understand, OK, what can we do to support the political reintegration of those folks and to amplify their voices. So that's with a whole bunch of co authors and is on its way to sort of being evaluated right now.

David [00:43:08] Great. Look forward to seeing it.

Hannah [00:43:09] Thanks so much.

David [00:43:10] My guest has been Hannah Walker. She is the author of "Mobilized by Injustice, Criminal Justice, Contact, Political Participation and Race." Hannah, thanks so much.

Hannah [00:43:19] Thank you again, David.

David [00:43:26] You can find links to all the research we discuss on the show on our website probablecausation.com. You can also subscribe to the show there or wherever you get your podcasts to make sure you don't miss a single episode. Big thanks to Emergent Ventures for supporting the show, and thanks also to our Patreon subscribers the show's listeners supported. So if you enjoy the podcast, please consider contributing via Patreon. You can find a link on our website. Our sound engineer is Jon Keur, production assistant from Hayley Greishaber. Our music is by Werner and our logo was designed by Carrie Throckmorton. Thanks for listening, and I'll talk to you soon.