



A Human Rights Platform for the 2024 U.S. Elections

Human rights are universal principles that transcend politics and offer a roadmap to a better future, and elections in the United States have long held not only domestic but also global significance for human rights. All U.S. government officials and candidates for office should do their part to ensure that the U.S. government meets its human rights obligations, uses its influence to advance human rights globally, and engages other governments to do the same.

The U.S. government has the capacity to do this. It could remedy its legacy of structural racism; end the epidemic of gun violence; make quality healthcare universal and equitable, including reproductive rights; respect the rights of people seeking safety; ensure basic economic security; end its abuses in the criminal legal system and in the name of national security; take decisive action to stop the climate crisis; reign in harmful corporate power; promote freedom of expression and protect protest rights; and respect, protect, and fulfill everyone's human rights. What's needed is political will and a real commitment to making human rights a reality, here at home and around the world.

We, human rights voters and supporters, ask candidates and elected officials to advance a better future for all by committing to a Human Rights Platform that includes the following:

1) Advance Transformative Racial Justice: Societal and systemic racism in the United States today cannot be separated from historical injustices of chattel slavery and colonialism, and the racist laws, policies, and practices that followed through generations, and that can be seen replicated globally in power and economic imbalances. The descendants of enslaved African people and Indigenous Peoples live with intergenerational trauma and on-going human rights harms. Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups face barriers to realizing their rights across a broad spectrum. They are subjected to racial profiling, unlawful arrests, mass incarceration, and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment as well as police violence that can result in death. Structural racism also creates barriers that can impede communities' and individuals' access to education, quality healthcare, and other human rights. *Candidates should commit to a comprehensive plan to advance racial justice in line with human rights. Such plans should include, but not be limited to addressing the debt for chattel slavery, colonialism, and their ongoing harmful legacies both in domestic and foreign policy, including through the establishment of a federal reparations commission, concrete action to end police abuses, and economic policies that reduce racial wealth inequalities and disparities in health, education, and other rights.*

2) End the Epidemic of Gun Violence: Gun violence continues to plague the U.S. and is a serious human rights crisis. With over 100 people dying every day from firearms, it is also the leading cause of death for Black men aged 15-34. There are clear policy solutions to this crisis that have been shown to work and could be implemented at the local, state, and federal levels, but politicians continue to prioritize gun money over human lives. Meanwhile, globally, the unregulated proliferation of small arms and light weapons contribute to numerous forms of violence, ranging from armed conflict to repressive actions by the state to domestic abuse. *Candidates should support legislation and efforts that will uphold the U.S.'s human rights obligation to protect all people in the U.S. from gun violence; this includes but is not limited to banning assault weapons, ensuring universal background checks, funding gun violence prevention and intervention programs, and banning guns at polling places. Candidates should commit to condemning and countering armed white nationalist groups, including in the run up to the election. Candidates should also commit to take action to prioritize human rights and civilian protection and reaffirm U.S. government signature of the Arms Trade Treaty, an international treaty that prohibits transfers of weapons, munitions, and related items when they would be used to commit or facilitate genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and serious human rights violations, and that bars weapons shipments to countries under UN arms embargoes.*

3) Guarantee Access to Abortion: The U.S. is regressing on the right to abortion, with abortion now totally or near-totally banned in at least 26 states. Abortion is a human right, and criminalizing abortion violates the rights of women, girls, and people who can become pregnant. Rollbacks in abortion rights in the U.S. represent a significant setback in the context of otherwise steady global progress for abortion rights, joining a very small group of countries that have restricted abortion rights in recent years. Banning, restricting, or making abortion inaccessible puts women, girls, and people who can get pregnant people at risk. Everyone should be free to exercise their bodily autonomy and make their own decisions about their reproductive lives, including when and if they have children. Additionally, U.S. foreign policy impacts the ability of people globally to access safe and legal abortion services. Funding restrictions prevent the U.S. from supporting abortion services abroad, and former policies, like the so-called “global gag rule,” have meant that foreign organizations receiving U.S. health assistance are prohibited from using even their own money to provide services or information about safe abortion. Such harmful U.S. policies put the lives of millions at risk globally. *Candidates should commit to supporting laws and policies at the local, state, and federal levels that ensure access to abortion and full bodily autonomy and that do not force people to seek out unsafe abortions. Candidates should also ensure that the U.S. does not enact laws or policies that enable the violation of the rights of millions of people globally to health, information, free speech, and even life, including policies related to U.S. health assistance, and should repeal those that do.*

4) Respect the Rights of Refugees, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers: There are many reasons people leave their country and cross borders, from fleeing violence, war, extreme poverty, climate catastrophes, or religious persecution, to wanting to find better opportunities for their families. It is imperative that the U.S. adopt policies and practices that protect human rights and human dignity. Amid a global refugee crisis, the U.S. must do more to protect people and serve as a global model of humanitarian protection. The U.S. is currently the largest funder of UNHCR, and in recent years has been working to rebuild its refugee resettlement system and introduce and expand complimentary pathways. Yet, at the same time, the U.S. has piloted new policies that undermine peoples’ right to seek asylum at the border, with Black people and Indigenous Peoples disproportionately impacted. The U.S. use of detention for migration processing and new technologies to limit access to borders is also deeply problematic. The U.S. has also seen a normalization of harmful white nationalist rhetoric that incites discrimination and violence, and must end. *Candidates should promote policies that restore access to asylum and respect the rights of refugees and migrants while also strongly denouncing language around migration grounded in racism and white nationalism. Addressing the global displacement crisis must include deep investment in refugee resettlement and complimentary humanitarian pathways, while upholding and expanding the right to seek asylum.*

5) Fight Inequality and Advance Economic Rights for All: Everyone has the human right to a standard of living adequate for their well-being, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control. Yet over 37 million people in the U.S. are living in poverty while tens of millions more live in a state of uncertainty and insecurity, and workers’ rights and labor movements are under attack. At the same time, extreme wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, and corporate profit margins are soaring. Globally, 60% of low-income countries are in debt distress or at risk of high debt distress while they spend four times more on debt repayments than on health, and twelve times more on debt than on social protection. The U.S. has a powerful role to play and a responsibility to help advance economic rights both in the U.S. and internationally. *Candidates should commit to policies that require the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share of taxes; ensure that resources are allocated equitably to remedy systemic discrimination; ensure workers’ rights are respected, including the right to a living wage; and guarantee access to comprehensive, quality care for all people as a right and a public good. Candidates should support international policies related to debt cancellation, international tax reform, and development finance that would boost available resources for governments to pay for social protection and respect, protect, and fulfill economic rights for their people.*

6) Overhaul the U.S. Criminal Legal System & End Abuses in the Name of National Security: The U.S. is the world's largest jailer, and mass incarceration disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and other racialized groups, as do police use of lethal force and the death penalty. The U.S. is the only executioner in the Americas, where the death penalty remains legal in 27 states and at the federal level. As of the end of 2022, 2276 people were on death row. Furthermore, 30 Muslim men remain at Guantanamo, the U.S. government continues to kill people globally based on a problematic "forever war" paradigm, and there's been virtually no accountability for torture, including by the CIA. *Candidates should support a complete overhaul of the U.S. criminal legal system in line with human rights and commit to abolishing the death penalty and taking action to uniformly restrict the use of lethal force by police. Candidates should also support the passage of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act or similar reform bills and efforts to demilitarize police forces by ending programs that provide military equipment to law enforcement agencies. Candidates should work to decriminalize drug possession and sex work and should release all people incarcerated for them. Candidates should commit to ending abuses in the name of national security—including closing the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay, ending indefinite detention, halting the unfair military commissions, and ensuring an end to unlawful killings—and support accountability, including for torture by the CIA.*

7) Take Decisive Action on Climate Justice as a Human Rights Imperative: The climate emergency is a human rights crisis of unprecedented proportions. Although the climate crisis is a global problem affecting everybody, it disproportionately impacts people who are already facing discrimination or marginalization due to structural inequalities. The transboundary nature of the climate emergency requires all countries achieve zero carbon emissions as soon as possible and to help people to adapt to the climate crisis, but not all countries are equally responsible. The U.S. is the world's worst historic fossil fuel emitter, second worst current emitter, and worst per capita emitter. The U.S. government and businesses must therefore radically ramp up their efforts to end this crisis and end it the right way—through human rights and climate justice. *Candidates should commit to the U.S. quickly ending its use of fossil fuels and fully transitioning to green energy in a way that respects human rights and leaves no one behind domestically and globally. Candidates should call on U.S. companies including financial institutions to divest from fossil fuels and should support the U.S. paying its fair share to finance climate mitigation and adaptation globally, and to countries that need help financing their own just transition to green energy. Global green energy laws and policies must respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the right to free, prior, and informed consent; workers' rights; and the rights of communities impacted, such as the rights to housing, health, and a healthy environment.*

8) Rein in Harmful Corporate Power: The U.S. needs strong laws, regulations, and policies to ensure that businesses support—and do not undermine—human rights and that private gains are not prioritized above the public good. We have seen repeatedly the devastating implications of unregulated and unchecked corporate power. That includes the technology industry's failure to protect people from harm and exploitation of their data for profit to the catastrophic impact of the fossil fuel industry. *Candidates should support laws and regulations that prevent, address, and remedy human rights harms and center the rights of workers and impacted communities, both in the U.S. and outside the country when U.S. companies operate globally. Candidates should support and strengthen international business and human rights frameworks domestically and globally through a strong U.S. National Action Plan and other relevant regulations and ensure that the power of the government's purse is used to advance responsible business conduct. Candidates should support federal law to protect privacy rights and urge companies to prevent unlawful harassment and discrimination on their platforms, including gender-based violence. Candidates should support effective regulation around Artificial Intelligence, including Generative AI, to help ensure that companies developing these new technologies and tools do not amplify existing inequities and do not further undermine our rights. Candidates should support legislation that strengthens penalties for corporations that violate their operating permits and should support accountability and redress for past human rights abuses.*

9) Promote Freedom of Expression & Protect Protest Rights: Human rights defenders, prisoners of conscience, and protest movements for human rights around the world face repression and backlash from governments and non-state actors alike, including due to the rise of authoritarian leaders. This includes: a growing number of laws and measures worldwide, including the U.S., that restrict the right to protest; the misuse of force; the expansion of unlawful mass and targeted surveillance; internet shutdowns; online censorship and harassment; and abuse and stigmatization. A number of U.S. states have enacted laws that repress the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Law enforcement routinely uses equipment such as tear gas, rubber bullets, batons, and restraints, to intimidate, repress, and punish protesters, human rights defenders, journalists, and others, during the policing of demonstrations and in places of detention, in all regions of the world. *Candidates should commit to enacting policies and laws that robustly protect the right to protest and a healthy civic space at home and abroad. That should include repealing U.S. state laws that infringe on the right to freedom of assembly; freeing prisoners of conscience; supporting human rights defenders; ensuring police respect, protect, and fulfill the right to protest of people taking action for human rights, and working to advance a global treaty to ban the trade of equipment often used for torture or other ill-treatment by law enforcement.*

10) Respect Human Rights for All, Everywhere: The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) opens with “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” While the U.S. played a foundational role in the creation of the UDHR and the international human rights system 75 years ago, it has consistently rejected the application of human rights norms to itself—to the great detriment of people marginalized by systems of oppression in the U.S. and around the world. Multiple forms of discrimination continue and must end, including discrimination based on race, color, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, Indigenous status, religion, culture, age, and other identities, often intersecting. *Candidates should commit to fully implementing all of the U.S. government’s human rights obligations, foreign and domestic. That includes supporting a National Human Rights Institution as well as ratifying and implementing the full spectrum of international human rights treaties. Candidates should commit to advancing human rights in U.S. foreign policy, including by centering human rights in diplomacy; raising concerns about the human rights records of other countries’ governments, including ally governments; ensuring that U.S. support, including funding, does not enable abuses of human rights or humanitarian law; and by funding a robust human rights ecosystem that includes sufficient staffing of the State Department and the key roles that monitor and advance human rights around the world, as well as consistent funding for and engagement with multilateral institutions to advance human rights globally.*

For more information, please visit www.amnestyusa.org