

## Democracy in Danger

### S4 E1: By Unpopular Demand

**Will Hitchcock** [00:00:03] Hello, I'm Will Hitchcock.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:00:04] And I'm Siva Vaidhyanathan.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:00:06] And from the University of Virginia's Deliberative Media Lab, this is Season Four of Democracy in Danger.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:00:13] As our listeners know, we spent a good deal of time last season looking at a lot of problems and a few bright spots in some key states around the union. We covered voter suppression and the whitewashing of history in Texas. Here in Virginia, we looked at stumbling blocks in the effort to tamp down gerrymandering, and we heard from an activist in Florida who's helping to get more than a million ex-felons back on the voter rolls.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:00:41] Yeah, Siva. And one of the things that series really hammered home to me is that, you know, America's federal system is much more complex than we usually think, and it demands that we focus in not just on how democracy's working at the national level, which is the thing we all get most exercised about and angry about, right? But what's happening in statehouses and in cities and counties across the United States. That is where a lot of policy and strategy is getting forged and implemented. It is also where a lot of the groundwork is being laid for the anti-democratic forces that are of late, frankly threatening democracy and threatening the Republic. And this is precisely the issue that our guest today takes up in his new book.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:01:26] Yeah, we have David Pepper with us from Cincinnati. He's the former chairman of the Ohio Democratic Party. He's an Ohio native, and he served on Cincinnati's City Council, as well as the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners. David is also a novelist. He's written three political thrillers so far, and he's the author most recently of a work of nonfiction with a provocative title: Laboratories of Autocracy, A Wake Up Call from Behind the Lines. David, welcome to Democracy in Danger.

**David Pepper** [00:01:57] Thank you very much. Great to be with you guys.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:01:59] So, David, I'm wondering if you could get us started with a pretty revealing story out of Laboratories of Autocracy. It concerns one of the political aftershocks following the murder of 17 year old Trayvon Martin. Trayvon was the African-American boy gunned down by a white vigilante in Sanford, Florida, simply for walking home at night, and his killer went free, thanks in part to Florida's Stand Your Ground law. Now, that tragedy brought light to a previously rather shady organization called ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council. What is ALEC? What does it do? And how did the Trayvon Martin case bring this organization out of the shadows?

**David Pepper** [00:02:42] You know, I go through that example because, as you said, it was one of the first moments where a broader, you know, there have been activists focusing on ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, for some time. But that was, I wouldn't say, it was fringe, but it was people who were really in the weeds who would try to explain everyone else this is a big deal and it impacts everyday lives. And this is when a lot broader group of people figured that out. So the Achilles heel of American

governance is, in many ways, statehouses because so little people pay attention to them. Their nearly anonymous, but they have a huge amount of power over everyday issues that we all care about that are in the news, but also about democracy itself. But because no one knows it, they can do all sorts of damage without anyone really caring, except for insiders who sort of ask them to do what they want. Well, ALEC figured this out before just about anybody else, and it's weaponized these state houses to accomplish all sorts of aspects of a much broader agenda on economic issues, on social issues, and that ALEC model has been churning away for decades. Well, one of the things they pushed was the stand your ground law and stand your ground is what allowed George Zimmerman to get away with shooting Trayvon Martin. But quickly, people figured out that ALEC had taken that Florida law and before the Trayvon Martin trial ever happened, or the George Zimmerman trial had already, you know, gotten all over the country through the ALEC model. Essentially, they privatized the legislative process, so take what they call model laws, hand them to the legislators at fancy conferences all over the country, those legislators fly back to their home states and pass them. And this stand your ground law was an example of that. And because the Trayvon Martin shooting was so controversial, it's the first time people woke up to the fact that, my gosh, there's this private group full of private corporations disseminating laws, not just an economic issues, but even on something as controversial stand your ground. It was the first time that people started making noise about it. The good news is, as I put it in the book, The heat that came from that actually did lead a lot of sort of consumer facing companies to drop out of ALEC because the controversy was so great. The bad news is ALEC itself just kept plugging away and the legislators that are part of it didn't bat an eye. They keep going. But they did show you that exposure of this stuff did at least scare away some companies from being part of this whole quiet but very, you know, central effort to rigging state houses to accomplish this right wing agenda.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:05:27] So who's behind ALEC and what's their big agenda? Why would you know consumer companies have an investment in something like a stand your ground law?

**David Pepper** [00:05:38] Yeah, I think actually some of those consumer companies, to their credit, asked themselves the same question after this. But ALEC started in the 70s and its initial focus was social issues like, you know, Roe v. Wade. But that didn't - it didn't really grow much with that. Then they decided, understandably, oh no, we can get a lot done on a conservative economic agenda in states, you know, on any number of issues, stopping climate change efforts, pushing energy, helping, you know, telecommunication companies. That's when they took off because companies around the country figured out, my gosh, we can get more done through ALEC that no one even knows we're doing, then we can by lobbying Congress. Clearly, though, they also started doing work for these sort of right wing social outfits again, like people pushing those gun laws. And I think this moment was what people realize this isn't about even just a conservative economic agenda - as damaging is that is - this has gotten far afield of that. And so some of the consumer companies dropped out. But for the most part, ALEC is still plugging away. And here's a danger of ALEC as I write in the book. The model is actually more important than the organization. Of using state houses to get the worse things done. So now you have lobbyists of private companies in almost every state house in the country. You have other organizations doing what ALEC did. The Heritage Foundation around voting rights. The NRA's is in every state at this point. So ALEC showed the way. And even though a few companies dropped out of ALEC after Trayvon Martin, a whole lot of other people said, Gosh, this thing really works.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:07:21] David, I'm fascinated by this model, and I think it's really something our listeners need to hear about the sort of how local a lot of these efforts have become and how successful they become. But you refer to a theory the 80/20 rule or 80/20 theory. And I just that's a very helpful thumbnail to think about how this strategy actually works and why it's so successful. Just remind us what that is.

**David Pepper** [00:07:46] Yeah. So basically, the whole approach is almost a spaghetti on the wall. Full speed ahead on every single issue. And one of the keys to all this is there's very little attention on these state houses and very little press coverage. Most states are down to just a handful of reporters covering these statehouses. Most states are down to a handful of any long term columnists. Ed boards are cratered down to almost nothing. So the media falling apart in a lot of these states is a key part of this. 80/20 is my term. They will throw a hundred percent of everything they care about at a state house. Many of those items will generate a story and potentially controversy. And so not everything on their agenda happens every year. But as 80 percent of the issues get attention and ultimately don't happen because they generate a firestorm, they generate the story - 20 percent of the issues will pass while no one's paying attention because they're looking at the churn on all the other issues. And played out around 50 states that means 20 here, 20 here, 20 here, 20 here. And one of the parts of my book is that these states are always modeling after every other state that passes something. So if you were on a multistate sort of playing field in every legislative term, you create such a mess of issues and so much controversy and you quietly get through even 20 percent, in a few years you've got your whole agenda done in state after state after state. And as I put in the book, every time something passes and becomes the law of Ohio or the Law of Tennessee and it survives court scrutiny, every other state starts to pass it to and then they can say, Well, so-and-so did it. We're doing it here. So even when they don't win on something, they win.

**Siva Vaidhyathan** [00:09:36] So David gerrymandering, which of course, is a serious threat to democracy, we've talked about it a lot in this podcast. Your book does a really good job of outlining the links between the redistricting process and some of these extreme laws that are being adopted in statehouses across the country. Can you give us a thumbnail sketch of the relationship between gerrymandering and these clandestine legislative efforts?

**David Pepper** [00:10:00] Sure. Basically, you could not get away with the extreme agenda on these issues, whether it be Roe v. Wade or extreme sort of gun legislation that they're putting in, corruption that we see wide out in the open, and the egregiously horrific public outcomes. In a world of fair districts, if you did all that stuff, you would lose your office. So central to the right wing agenda and the ALEC agenda and the Koch brothers agenda is they need a place to go where they can push a deeply unpopular agenda. But the people who push it are guaranteed to stay in office. And that's what gerrymandering does. It's made these statehouses the perfect launch point of things that in any other level of government would get people de-elected from office. And so again, if you look at the Texas law and what they did with with Roe v. Wade there, that's unpopular even in Texas. Most of the gun laws we're talking about, they're siding with the 15 percent over the 85 percent. In a world of fair districts they would never win. These things all ratchet up together. The more extreme you go, the more corrupt you go, the more the public outcomes crater because the legislature is pushing more for those private companies and not public goods like rural broadband. The more they do that, the more they have to then rig districts to stay in power, and then the more they rig districts, the more extreme they can get. So the reason we have this downward spiral, not just with extremism and anti-democracy and gerrymandering is because they go together and they sort of ratchet each

other up. I could point to almost every single issue that is really sort of roiling American politics. Most of it's happening through statehouses, and most of it is a direct result of the rigging of these districts. It's not just that Ohio, a 50/50 state, is electing 12 Republicans to Congress, and 4 Democrats, when it should be, you know, eight and eight or seven and nine or something like that. It's that in Ohio and many states like ours, out of a 62 person majority Republican statehouse out of 99, 60 of those seats average double digit wins for the last decade. It's an entire generation of politicians who themselves have never faced accountability. They never worry about their elections. It's that freedom to operate with no accountability that lets them be so extreme and get away with it.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:12:31] Yeah. David, I really like hearing you talk about Ohio. I went to college in Ohio back in the 80s, and back then it had a very vibrant, strong Democratic Party. There were two Democratic senators, John Glenn and Howard Metzenbaum. And of course, it is still a swing state today. You have both a Republican and a Democratic senator, the remarkable Sherrod Brown. I want to hear a little bit about how he manages to win statewide elections, but it went for Trump, not just once but twice. And the last time 2020, it went for Trump by eight points. So it's a gigantic number in a swing state, begging the question of whether it really is a 50/50 state or a swing state. So what explains the troubles of the Democratic Party in Ohio? You know, it can't just be gerrymandering, right? I mean, these are statewide elections in which the the state is clearly drawn to, at least in certain elections to the conservative side.

**David Pepper** [00:13:25] Yeah, I mean, we've always been, I would say, a slightly lean red swing state, you know, a little a little the conservative side, but only a couple of points. Trump was obviously beyond those couple of points, but we - Ohio has always been sort of a moderate state. Even the Republicans who won - it was like Kasich beating Trump in the '16 primary, a little more moderate. And Trump clearly appealed, like he did in other big states with a lot of red areas. He clearly got the red part of our state fired up. And if you're going to do that in a state like Ohio, you're going to win. But what I tried to explain in the book is it's there's politics and there's candidates and good candidates like Sherrod Brown win. Tim Ryan is a good candidate, he could win. We won a Supreme Court seat in 2020 by 10 points - a Democratic endorsed candidate, even when Trump won by eight, so you could see that split. But the story of Ohio is also a real wakeup call, as my book tells you that if one side uses government to attack the other side's voting base, it does have an impact. And I go through this, you know, Barack Obama won Ohio decisively, and he did it on the back of a broad and diverse coalition of young voters, diverse voters, centered in urban counties. And the case study of Ohio that should scare everybody is when they began purging relentlessly beginning 11 and they attacked early vote. Forget gerrymandering, you said for a second. They were able to take the margins of victory of Democrats in Cuyahoga County in other counties and diminish them greatly. You know, Hillary Clinton got a higher percentage of the registered vote of our largest Democratic county, Cuyahoga County, than Obama did. But her raw vote margin was a lot less. Why? There were so many fewer voters because they were purging infrequent voters. They took up, you know, a battle ax to the heart of the Obama coalition, which didn't make Ohio impossible in '16 but made it a whole lot harder. You know, urban turnouts have been a lot lower. So it's not, you know, it's also about candidates. But it showed Republicans, and I worry that Ohio is the model that others have been following since - that if you attack the means of voting of the opposition relentlessly for years, you can change outcomes or make them much more difficult. And we saw that in Ohio play out in '16 and '20. The margins of victory in our large democratic counties are not what they were in '08 and '12.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:15:58] Right.

**David Pepper** [00:15:58] And it's not, by the way, because all sorts of people moved away. The purging of voters is a far higher degree than any census diminishment. So there's a lot of politics. Trump has appeal clearly, but it's also there's been a deep damage down the Ohio electorate through raw voter suppression.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:16:16] Well, David, from your book and from your conversation with us today, it's pretty clear that Ohio is really a laboratory for all of these nested issues that deeply threaten democratic accountability. And you could look at Ohio as a bellwether for the entire nation, right? It's everything that's happening around the country is happening sometimes more intensely in Ohio. So as we look forward to the midterm elections in 2022, the national elections in 2024, we see the rise of yet another one of these groups. And I'm wondering if you could tell us about it. It's called the Honest Elections Project. Now what's the deal with the Honest Elections project? What is it up to in Ohio? What do we have to look forward to?

**David Pepper** [00:17:02] So first of all, I appreciate what you said on Ohio and it is the case. I mean, we should be a bellwether of how wrong things can go. We voted for Obama twice. We had a 10/8 congressional Democratic delegation, 10 Democrats, 8 Republicans as recently as 2010. We had a Democratic statehouse in '08 to '10. And so the idea that now we are legislating like Alabama only a few years after that because of rampant suppression, egregious gerrymandering, et cetera, should scare people. If it can happen to us quintessential swing state, it can happen anywhere. Missouri is a few years ahead of us. But who's next? It should scare people. So honest elections. It's again. I mentioned earlier how ALEC became the model.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:17:48] Right.

**David Pepper** [00:17:48] And the Honest Elections project, I'd say, is almost like the legal equivalent of ALEC. It's a bunch of lawyers trying to figure out how can we advise all these states on gerrymandering and aspects of voter suppression that are more, you know, legally intense. So there's a whole wing of the right wing now that is essentially doing what ALEC did on economic and social issues, on elections issues, on voting and districting issues. So the Heritage Project, Honest Elections Project. People coming out of the Federal Society. And the worry is that they are giving the guidance on how to keep rigging elections on how to pass voting laws to suppress the vote, just as we've seen here in Ohio. How to do it in a way that gets upheld by the courts and scarily enough I have no doubt that they're plugging away right now on how to deal with the Electoral College math and counting process that tries to do what they tried, so in an ugly way to do on Jan. 6. But tries to do it long before Jan. 6, 2025. So issues that involve, you know, the legality or the tactics to deal with voting. I would say, are all wrapped up in this far right group and others related to it. That's what's happening right now around Jan. 6. How do we how do we play with these rules of how we deal with the Electoral College counting process so that next time we're not relying on Mike Pence on the final day, but we work through legislatures to take care of this issue long before we get to that day. And that's another thing I have no doubt that that group is working on. That's how they operate.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:19:35] Well, David, you're you're giving us a short and very bracing lesson in the multi-faceted, anti-democratic right wing machinery. But talk about what's happening on the other side, if there is anything happening on the other side, is there a corresponding system on the left that is engaged in the battle? Is there a well-funded, progressive coalition that's trying to pass its own laws and if, if not, why not?

**David Pepper** [00:20:03] So I would say that the problem is that that ALEC and the right wing got a multi-decade head start and they now have their levers on the hands of so much of the power of democracy in states. And so Democrats are playing catch up. Now there are some, you know, Eric Holder is out. Really, you know, raising the alarm about state houses and the need to end gerrymandering. And he worked very hard. He helped us pass some changes to our constitution that we hope will stop gerrymandering here. Stacey Abrams, as I put my book, is a role model of how to view this as a long fight for democracy and not only something you fight every cycle and then move on. And she began an operation called Fair Fight, which is lifting up voter protection in state after state. She's a friend of mine from law school. So I've watched her for a long time. She's a model. There are other groups fighting for voting rights, but is there something as big? There was an attempt to create the equivalent of ALEC on more of the left. It wasn't nearly as robust. So bottom line, we are not where we need to be. There is not a broad 50 state 'we're going to fight for democracy every day, every year, everywhere' equivalent of what we're seeing on the other side. And the one reason I wrote that book is there has to be. We have to rethink politics right now. It needs to start at the top, but it needs to involve everybody. This is no longer about one party against another and federal elections, which is how we too often thought about it. It's a battle for democracy itself. They know it. That's why they wage it every year in all 50 states. We're still playing an old game of swing states and federal years. We have to reorient our politics like Stacey did. It's a long game. It's a 50 state game. It's a game over every single election. And when I say game, I shouldn't, because the consequences are far more serious than a game. Once you frame it that way, by the way, it also means you should be unified with much more than just members of the Democratic Party. Anybody. Anybody. Former Republican, current Republican, independent who cares for democracy - you need to welcome aboard. It should broaden the coalition if you're doing it right.

**Siva Vaidhyathan** [00:22:11] Right, right. Now, I'm really glad that you brought up Stacey Abrams. We paid a lot of attention to Georgia in our first season. And of course, Stacey Abrams' work has influenced people around the country. She's been quite an inspiration, quite a model. She's also like you, a novelist. So I was hoping we could take just a few minutes now and talk a bit about your fiction work now. You know, you've written political thrillers, three of them so far. You follow a fictional Midwestern reporter, a guy named Jack Sharp, and he uncovers various plots and threats against American democracy. Right. So the names of your books, if I can roll them out, The People's House, The Wingman, The Voter File, they have it all. They have a Russian plot to rig U.S. congressional races. They have a corrupt politician seeking the presidency at any cost. You have the hacking of voter databases. Really? You know, are you giving the right wing some sort of game plan to use through your fiction? What's going on in your fiction? What's the connection? What's the inspiration? And are you having fun with this?

**David Pepper** [00:23:16] Yeah. And by the way, just to be clear, I wrote these plots before they came true.

**Siva Vaidhyathan** [00:23:21] See, that's what I'm worried about. I'm worried that you're giving them ideas.

**David Pepper** [00:23:26] So here's the funny thing. Believe it or not, I wrote the first book I began writing 2012. Why? Because I wanted to talk about gerrymandering in a way that maybe would break through with people. And so my first book is actually about the rigging of elections in congressional gerrymandered districts. And here's the problem as you may

know, a novel about gerrymandering is the worst novel. Nobody's going to read that. So I thought, OK, I'm going to come up with a bad guy. Let's make him a Russian. Then he is going to figure out how bad gerrymandering is, and he's going to focus on certain swing districts. And I don't want to give the plot away I'll just give a hint at it. And by focusing on the swing districts, he'd swing the Congress to his benefit. I worked in Russia years ago, believe it or not, in the 90s, that's why I picked a Russian. I wasn't trying to predict anything. I was simply trying to spice up a novel about gerrymandering. By the way, my second book is all about dark money groups putting up fake third party candidates. Well, that's just what happened in Florida years later. And so I think the reason the reason I worry that my books are routinely coming true is because what I as a novelist, you're trying to come up with plots that sound true and are based on reality. And as a novelist, you're forcing yourself to think through what I what that Russian was. If I wanted to take advantage of a weakness in America, what would I do? And by forcing - by putting myself in the mindset of that, I am literally coming up with plots that people really thinking these things are coming up with. So I would not say I'm the reason they did it, but by being a novelist thinking through what they would do I'm on a parallel track. And again, again and again, I do stumble into plots that ultimately - I had no idea when I was writing that book that Putin was doing the same thing as I was writing it. And the Florida one, I again, if you read *The Wingman*, which hasn't got as much attention, if you read the plot, it literally is what they were doing in Florida around those ghost third party candidates. The wingman in that book is literally the name of the candidate that they used to take votes away from the person they are worried about. And again. But the point of my books is they're similar in a way to my nonfiction book. My goal is to tell a good story, not be preachy because that doesn't work, but to take everyday readers and expose them to problems that are real in politics are one of the things like it's it sounds like a weird compliment. But a lot of people have said to me after reading, especially the *People's House*, but all of them, wow, that book really scared me. Could that happen? And the answer, sadly, is not exactly how I write it, but pretty much! I wish my fiction would stop coming true. And I wish my nonfiction was fiction, right? But it's all a little too close to reality a lot. All of them together basically cry out for reform. That's sort of the point.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:26:27] Well, David Pepper, sometimes truth is stranger than fiction, and sometimes fiction becomes truth. So thank you very much for your insights and thanks for joining us today on *Democracy in Danger*.

**David Pepper** [00:26:38] Really enjoyed it. Thank you, guys. Appreciate all you're doing.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:26:51] David Pepper is an author, politician, lawyer and fifth generation Cincinnati. He was chairman of the Ohio Democratic Party for five years. His latest book, published in October 2021, is called *Laboratories of Autocracy*.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:27:06] *Democracy in Danger* is part of the Democracy Group Podcast Network. Visit [DemocracyGroup.org](https://DemocracyGroup.org) to find all our sister shows. We'll be right back after this message from our friends.

**Jane Frankel** [00:27:22] Hi, I'm Jane Frankel, an intern on the show. We wanted to let you know about a cool new project from the Democracy Group. It's a set of podcast channels with shows from across the whole network organized by topic. You can look up episodes from *Daddy* and all of our sister shows. They're organized around themes like voting rights, racial justice, misinformation, climate change and much, much more. Just go to [Democracy Group dot org](https://DemocracyGroup.org) and scroll down. You'll find links to each topic with audio from acclaimed guests like Ezra Klein, Madeleine Albright, Andrew Yang, Sergio Popovic and

Elizabeth Warren. While you're at it, let us know about any other topics that you'd like the network to carry for its audience. Thanks for listening, and let's get back to the show.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:28:12] So Will, I was really struck by where David Pepper went near the end of our interview? He made it clear that while he's a partisan, right, he's been active in the Ohio Democratic Party, he's been chair of you. Higher Democratic Party. He boasts of Barack Obama's success in Ohio, and yet he understands deep in his heart that this is not about how well Democrats do against Republicans. It's about whether we can sustain any sense of democratic accountability, not just through our elections, but through our legislative process. And one thing we've been, you know, really focused on in this show, as since the beginning, is that the title of the show is Democracy in Danger, not Democrats in danger. But the Republicans are making real hard on us to maintain that distinction right? The Republican Party has consistently, explicitly and aggressively come out against democracy at every level. Am I? Am I overreacting to this? You know? Am I panicking too much?

**Will Hitchcock** [00:29:17] I don't think so. I mean, one of the things that really made the hair on the back of my neck stand up was when he said, Ohio is like the next Alabama. In a sense, the gerrymandering, combined with voter suppression, has enabled so many just extreme legal tweaks and bills have been written in at the Heritage Foundation to be passed at the state level that really we are losing those swing states that once produced moderates from both parties. But then at the same time, in a gerrymandered state like Ohio, you get people like Jim Jordan, right, who are truly the Tin Hat Group and you know, just have drunk the Trump Kool-Aid and were more Trump than Trump. Right? So we're losing that sense that democracy is still a jump ball, that it's a fair fight. And if Ohio goes, boy, you know, it's it's really it's curtains for democracy.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:30:10] Now here's the thing that I keep focusing on as I look around the country, I look at Columbus, Ohio, I look at Austin, Texas. I look at Richmond, Virginia, Atlanta, Georgia, and I see time and time again state legislatures passing laws that conflict rather directly with public opinion. Right. And that should not happen in a functional democracy. Our legislators, our elected leaders, should not always cohere with public opinion. But at least be guided by it or limited by it. But as David explained to us, right, because of gerrymandering, because of voter suppression, there are way too many legislators around the country who do not face the wrath of the great swath of the middle of voters. That's just no longer the case. It's really no longer the case, at least for Republicans. Democrats still have to run to the middle because Democrats represent an extremely diverse party that does include conservatives and moderates and liberals and even Democratic socialists.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:31:15] Yeah, although running to the middle, it didn't help Joe Biden in Ohio. He got trounced there by Trump. Look, I think the thing that we should all be on guard for right now is whether or not essentially the direct election by the public of the president will continue. Now we know that we don't really have direct election of the president. We have 50 presidential elections that occur in each of the states. But what's happening now is an attempt to redraw the rules so that the state legislatures can name the victor, even if the public in a given state comes up with a candidate that the state legislature doesn't like. So if Joe Biden wins reelection in Ohio in 2024 and the state legislature says, sorry, we want to throw our our electoral votes to Donald Trump, this is what they're going to try to do, and they're going to try to lay the legal groundwork in the next year or more to do that. And that really will be perhaps the final nail in the coffin of

what we think of as a democratic system in the United States. Cheerful thought to end our first show of the fourth season on, but it turns out that democracy is still in danger.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:32:20] Yeah, yeah. Our job is never done here, Will, on Democracy in Danger. That's all we have for you this time next week, we'll pick up the conversation on broadband with a leading advocate for government funded internet access. Media scholar Christopher Ali

**Christopher Ali** [00:32:43] Broadband is expensive. Broadband requires public funding. We've ceded broadband to the private market. And you know what, if the private market was going to solve this problem, it would have already done it.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:32:54] In the meantime, don't be a stranger. Shoot us a tweet @dindpodcast that's D-I-N-D podcast. And be sure to share this episode on social media.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:33:02] There's a lot more to read and see on our web page. DinDanger.org If you're a student, please tell your teachers about Democracy in Danger. The show is a growing part of curricula across Virginia, and we're looking to expand to other states.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:33:18] This episode was produced by Robert Armengol and Jennifer Ludovici. Our editor is Sidney Halleman, and we have three intrepid interns Denzel Mitchell, Jane Frankel and Elie Bashkow.

**Siva Vaidhyanathan** [00:33:28] Support comes from the University of Virginia's Democracy Initiative and from the College of Arts and Sciences. The show is a project of UVA's Deliberative Media Lab. We're distributed by the Virginia Audio Collective of WTJU Radio in Charlottesville. I'm Siva Vaidhyanathan.

**Will Hitchcock** [00:33:44] And I'm Will Hitchcock. We'll see you next time.