

DEMOCRACY CENTER

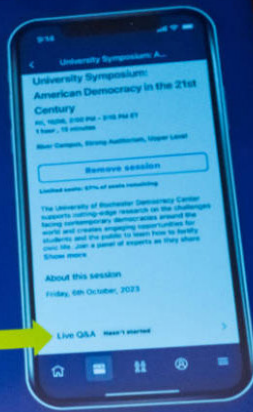
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

2023-2024 Annual Report

**UNIVERSITY SYMPOSIUM:
American Democracy in the 21st Century**

- Open the Meliora Weekend app
- Find today's session: Schedule → All Sessions
 - Filter by date and time
- Scroll to bottom and select "Live Q&A"
 - Submit your question (option to remain anonymous)
- We will answer as many questions as time allows

Find additional event information by downloading "Meliora Weekend" from the app store, then search for "Meliora Weekend 2023" within the app.



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Launched in fall 2022, the Democracy Center supports cutting-edge, social science research on the many challenges facing contemporary democracies around the world.

What We Do

- The Democracy Center **Faculty Working Group** supports non-partisan, scientific research on democracy in the United States and abroad.
- The **Visiting Scholars Program** brings a diverse group of early-career scholars to Rochester to share their research on democratic institutions with faculty and students.
- Our **academic conferences** bring leading scholars of democracy together to share and discuss their research.
- Each year, we organize **public events** that provide the University and wider community a chance to connect with experts addressing today's most pressing challenges related to democracy.
- The Democracy Center **fellowship programs** provide financial support and mentored research experiences for undergraduate and graduate students.
- In partnership with Rochester-based civic organizations, the Democracy Center offers unique **internships for undergraduates** that provide a combination of research and civic action experience.

Faculty Working Group

The Faculty Working Group is a monthly intensive conversation focused on research presented by our faculty affiliates and visiting scholars. Recent works discussed include:

- **Strangers and Settlers: Migration and Conflict in a Nativist World**, Bethany Lacina, University of Rochester
- **Statebuilding in Modern South Asia**, Alexander Lee, University of Rochester
- **Spatial Networks and The Diffusion of Ideas**, Caterina Chiopris, Harvard University
- **Recentralization and Democratic Erosion: Subnational Strategies of Aspiring Autocrats**, Theodoros Ntounias, University of California, San Diego
- **The Development of an Issue Public: Evidence from the Eras Tour**, Erin Rossiter and Jeffrey Harden, University of Notre Dame



Visiting Scholars Program

Our visiting scholars program integrates emerging scholars into the Democracy Center community. Visiting scholars present their work in progress in our Faculty Working Group and discuss their research with faculty and students.



Erin Rossiter, Nancy Drexel Assistant Professor of Political Science at University of Notre Dame, served as a Democracy Center Visiting Scholar in April of 2024. She studies interpersonal communication and its political consequences, with a specific interest in political discussion and polarization.

Theodoros Ntounias, Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of California, San Diego, served as a Democracy Center Visiting Scholar in February of 2024. His research concerns fiscal and political recentralization as a strategy of democratic backsliding, with a focus on Europe.



Caterina Chiopris, Ph.D. candidate in Political Economy at Harvard University, served as a Democracy Center Visiting Scholar in March of 2024. Her research explores the political economy of innovation, regional inequalities, democratic backsliding, and state building.



Mellissa Meisels, Postdoctoral Associate in the Center for the Study of American Politics at Yale University, served as a Democracy Center Visiting Scholar in March of 2023. Her research focuses on the relationships between campaign positioning, electoral competition, and campaign finance in congressional elections, with a particular emphasis on primary races.

Anil Menon, Postdoctoral Fellow at Cornell University, served as a Democracy Center Visiting Scholar in February of 2023. His research is motivated by questions about the effects of traumatic experiences on political attitudes, the historical roots of political and economic development, and the effectiveness of rhetorical appeals to the past.



Katherine Clayton, Senior Research Fellow in Social Psychology at Stanford University, served as a Democracy Center Visiting Scholar in October 2022. She studies American politics and comparative politics, focusing on political behavior and survey methodology, with particular interest in public opinion about democracy, identity, and immigration.

Conferences

The Democracy Center co-sponsors and organizes conferences that bring scholars together from around the world to share and discuss cutting-edge research on democratic practices and institutions.

2023 9th Annual Formal Theory and Comparative Politics Conference

- German Gieczewski and Korhan Kocak “Altruism in Protests.”
- Pablo Beramendi and Daniel Kselman “Centralization, Political Geography, and Extremism: Can Polarization be Self-Correcting?”
- Chris Blattman, Horacio Larreguy, Benjamin Marx, and Otis Reid “Eat Widely, Vote Wisely: Lessons from a Campaign against Vote Buying in Uganda.”
- Scott Gehlbach, Zhaotian Luo, Anton Shirikov, and Dmitriy Vorobyev “Is There Really a Dictator’s Dilemma? Information and Repression in Autocracy.”
- Carlo Horz and Hannah Simpson “Community Interventions in the Administration of Justice.”
- Richard Van Weelden and Peter Buisseret “Pandora’s Ballot Box: Electoral Politics of Referendums.”
- Tinghua Yu and Stephane Wolton “Unmasking the Enemies: A Theory of Denunciations.”

2024 Conference on Applied Methods for Political Science

Co-sponsored with the Department of Political Science

- Chris Blair “Maximum Pressure: How Refugee Repatriation Shapes Conflict.”
- Sumitra Badrinathan “Countering Misinformation Early: A Classroom Media Literacy Intervention for Rural Populations in India.”
- Allison Stashko “Polling Place Location and the Costs of Voting.”
- Shiro Kuriwaki “Policy Responsiveness: A Seats Votes Curve for Issues.”
- Roya Talibova “#Stoprussia: Weaponizing Social Media for Foreign Support.”
- Lucia Motolinia “Candidate Selection and District Competitiveness: Evidence from Horizontal Parity Laws in Mexico.”
- Anna Wilke “The Sisterhood Effect: Evidence on Girl Empowerment from Kenya.”

Public Programming

In collaboration with our partners, the Democracy Center organizes in-person and virtual events for students, alumni, and the public to learn about pressing challenges facing democracies around the world.

Meliora Weekend, 2023: American Democracy in the 21st Century



“American Democracy in the 21 Century” brought together academic, civic, and university leaders to discuss the future of democracy in the United States. Over 200 Meliora Weekend visitors attended the panel, which featured Shaun Nelms, the University’s Vice President for Community Partnerships, Jillian Youngblood, Executive Director of Civic Genius, Payge Vukelic, undergraduate student and Democracy Center intern, Jamie Druckman, Professor of Political Science, and Gretchen Helmke, Professor of Political Science and Faculty Director of the Democracy Center.

The Israeli Judiciary and the Future of Israeli Democracy

During the early months of 2023, Israel endured an unprecedented crisis when the ruling coalition in its parliament proposed an overhaul of the country’s judiciary which triggered the largest street protests ever to occur in that country. Responding to the intense interest of the Rochester community, the Democracy Center organized two events: An informal discussion for students with an expert in Israeli politics, professor Guy Grossman, and an online panel discussion for the general public featuring professor Grossman, along with comparative constitutional law scholar Tom Ginsburg and Democracy Center Faculty Director, and professor Gretchen Helmke, moderated by professor Mical Raz.

photo by Oren Rozen, licensed under CC



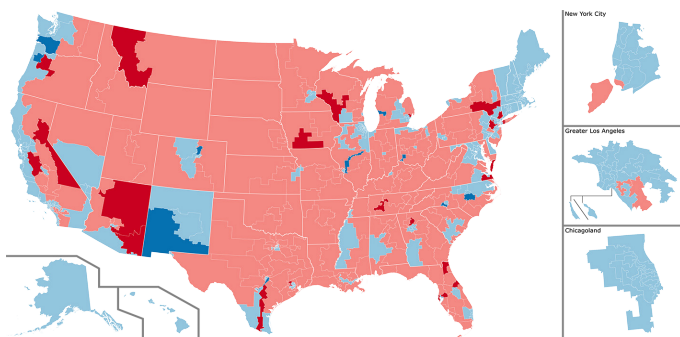
Moving Beyond Polarization: Lessons from South Africa



In January of 2023, the Democracy Center partnered with Civic Genius, Beyond Conflict, and the Rochester synagogue Temple Sinai to create an extraordinary learning opportunity for residents in the Rochester area and the University of Rochester community. “Moving Beyond Polarization: Lessons from South Africa” featured a conversation between two leaders – Mohammed Bhabha and Rolf Meyer – who led the negotiations between South Africa’s apartheid ruling party and the African National Congress that guided South Africa from a racist dictatorship to a representative democracy.

photo by Jacob Schermerhorn / Rochester Beacon

Bright Line Watch Virtual Roundtable



With legal investigations focused on former President Trump, widespread concerns about losing candidates’ willingness to concede, and threats of violence, the fall of 2022 was a pivotal moment for American Democracy. The Democracy Center partnered with Bright Line Watch and the Democratic Erosion Consortium at Brown University to organize an expert panel to discuss the implications of the 2022 midterm elections for American democracy.

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Media Appearances



Photo by Adriana Loureiro Fernandez for the New York Times

Democracy Center Faculty Director Gretchen Helmke was quoted in a New York Times analysis of the 2024 Venezuelan elections. Autocrats hold elections, Helmke explained, when they expect they are going to win, “or at least come very close to winning so that tilting the outcome in their favor is not seen as so egregious.”

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate Jamie Druckman was interviewed by the Rochester Review about the effects of dehumanizing language and other kinds of negative rhetoric in American politics. “The perception of the divide in this country,” Druckman explained, “is greater than the divide itself.”



University of Rochester photo/ J. Adam Fenster



Democracy Center Faculty Director Gretchen Helmke appeared on the 538 Politics Podcast to discuss findings from the most recent wave of Bright Line Watch Surveys. Helmke shared findings bearing on voter confidence in the U.S. election system, expert predictions and voter attitudes towards potential departures from democratic norms during a potential second Trump presidency, and voter reactions to the ongoing legal cases involving Donald Trump.

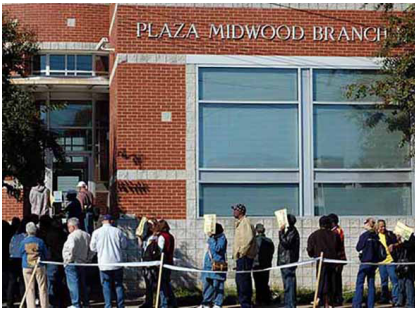


photo by James Willamor, CC-SA 2.0

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate **Mayya Komisarchik** appeared on *Not Another Politics Podcast* to discuss the effects of the recent U.S. Supreme Court *Shelby* decision, which weakened provisions of the Voting Rights Act, on voter turnout in communities of color. Professor Komisarchik discussed findings from her working paper, “Throwing Away the Umbrella: Minority Voting after the Supreme Court’s

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate **Gerald Gamm**’s research (with co-author Thad Kousser) was featured in a *New York Times* story about conflict in state legislatures between representatives of rural and urban areas. Gamm’s and Kousser’s research shows a substantial bias in state legislatures’ allocations of resources to cities with high shares of immigrant and non-white residents.



photo by Brandonrush, CC0 1.0



map by Dmytro Putiata, Andrii Karbivnychyi, Vasyl Rudyka CC-SA 4.0

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate **Randall Stone** and political science faculty member Hein Goemans discussed the war in Ukraine in a widely shared *Rochester News Center* story. They offered insights about the significance of military developments, the effects of economic sanctions, and ways the war could come to an end.



Democracy Center fellowships provide students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels mentored research experiences.

Democracy Center Graduate Fellows



Alice Brocheux studies the politics of fiscal austerity and the relationship between climate change and political preferences. She began her service as a Democracy Center Graduate Fellow in the 2023-2024 academic year.



Oliver Sun studies political socialization and the social and economic determinants of political behavior. He has served as a Democracy Center Graduate Fellow since the 2022-2023 academic year.



Alessio Albarello studies comparative politics with a focus on electoral behavior, democratic representation, policymaking processes and applied methodology. He served as a Democracy Center Graduate Fellow during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Powell Research Grants

The Powell Research Grant program supports empirical research by graduate students, including field experiments, survey research and data collection. Projects funded by Powell Grants include:

- Hongyi She, *Compensating the Losers*.
- Joe Essig, *Framing Effects in Survey Experiments*.
- Dot Sawler, *Policy Issues, Opinion Diversity and Intraparty Coherence*.

Democracy Center Undergraduate Internships

We run our internship programs in partnership with two Rochester-based organizations: Civic Genius and the Rochester Area Community Foundation. Interns working with Civic Genius assist staff with the development of multi-media educational materials that Civic Genius uses to increase their program participants' civic capacity. Interns working with the Rochester Area Community Foundation assist in the development of online educational materials that help community leaders understand and use data to improve the quality of decision making.



Democracy Center Undergraduate Interns:

- Payge Vukelic, class of 2024
- Matt Klein, class of 2023
- Audrey Hinman, class of 2025
- Sam Eichel, class of 2024
- Emanuel Muñoz-Barillas, class of 2025
- Sarah Knight, class of 2024

Bright Line Watch Fellowship

Funded by the Hewlett Foundation and the Democracy Fund, the Bright Line Watch Fellowship offers undergraduates the opportunity to contribute to making social science research accessible to the public. Fellows assist in the development of web-based interactive tools for exploring the Bright Line Watch Data -- consisting of responses to over 30 surveys of experts and the public assessing the state of U.S. democracy since 2017. We also partner with faculty to develop learning activities in which college students use the tools we develop to explore quantitative approaches to the analysis of democratic institutions and processes.

Bright Line Watch

data explorer [make a dataset](#) api doc

categories

- expert assessments >
- democratic performance**
- democratic norms
- election confidence
- survey experiments
- expert covariates
- public covariates

Batteries in this group ask experts and members of the public to rate the quality of democracy at the state and national level on a variety of dimensions.

▼ **assessing US performance on multiple characteristics of democracy**

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Selected Upcoming Activities

- Meliora Weekend 2024 Panel: Elections and Democracy in the U.S. and Abroad
- Interdisciplinary graduate fellowship for the study of democracy
- Conference on Democratic Norms
- Distinguished Speaker -- Susan Stokes, Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor, University of Chicago

Partners

- Bright Line Watch
- Beyond Conflict
- The Chicago Center on Democracy
- Civic Genius
- The Democratic Erosion Consortium
- The University of Rochester Humanities Center
- The Malvi Center for Institutional and Legal Integrity, University of Chicago
- The Penn Development Research Initiative
- The Rochester Area Community Foundation

Leadership



Gretchen Helmke is the Faculty Director of the Democracy Center and Thomas H. Jackson Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Political Science



Stu Jordan is the Associate Director of the Democracy Center and Associate Professor of Political Science

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