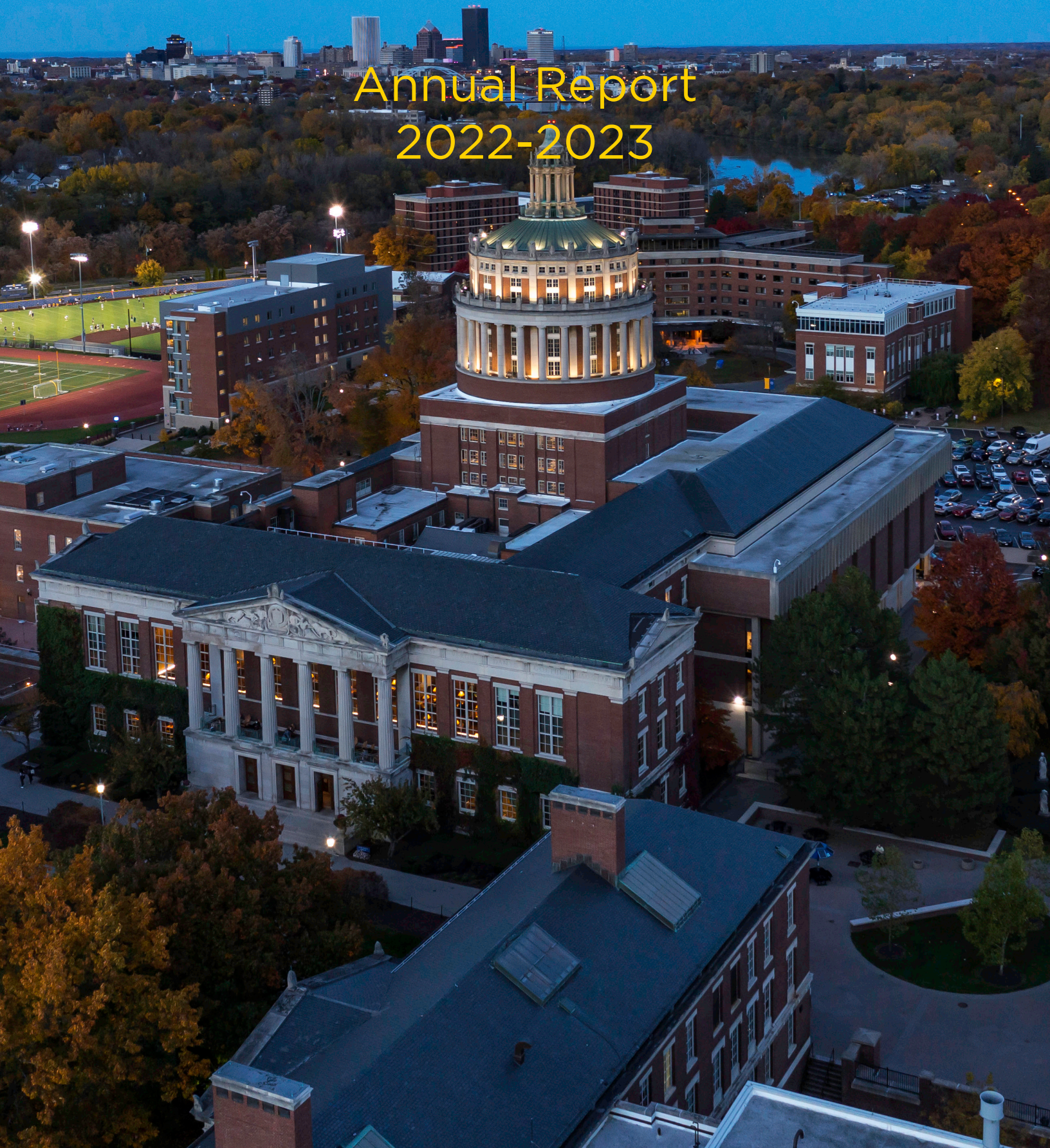


# DEMOCRACY CENTER

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## UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

Annual Report  
2022-2023



A bronze statue of a man with a full beard and long hair, wearing a long, dark coat. He is standing outdoors, looking to the right. The background is a dense thicket of green and yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. The statue is positioned on the left side of the frame, with its hands slightly out to the side.

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

## 2022-2023 Inaugural Year Highlights

- The Democracy Center Faculty Working Group supports research on the resilience and vulnerability of democratic institutions.
- Three junior scholars visit Rochester as part of our visiting scholars program to share their research on democratic institutions with faculty and students.
- The Democracy Center engages the public with educational events addressing urgent challenges to democracy around the world.
- The Democracy Center develops two new student fellowships, the Democracy Center Graduate Fellowship and the Bright Line Watch Fellowship, each of which provides financial support and mentored research experiences for students.
- In partnership with the bridge-building organization Civic Genius, the Democracy Center pilots a unique internship for undergraduates that provides 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. Works in progress featured during the 22-23 academic year include:

- **The Effect of Local News on Political Knowledge**, Scott Abramson and Sergio Montero
- **When Strong Institutions Undermine Strong Democracies**, Gretchen Helmke and Jack Paine
- **The Public's Response to Democratic Backsliding**, Katherine Clayton
- **Selected Works: Race, Gender and Academic Publishing**, Kevin A. Clarke and Lawrence Rothenberg
- **The Direct Cost to Voters of Polling Site Closure and Consolidation**, Scott Abramson and Sharece Thrower
- **Health and Populism: A Longitudinal Study of Individual Health and Support for Populism over Three Decades**, Nolan M. Kavanaugh and Anil Menon
- **Competition and Free-Riding in Electoral Campaigns with Outside Spending**, Brenton Kenkel and Mellissa Meisels
- **Polarization when Voters Demand Competence**, Zuheir Desai, Anderson Frey, and Scott Tyson



## 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.



**Katherine Clayton**, PhD Candidate at Stanford University, serves 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.

**Anil Menon**, Postdoctoral Fellow at Cornell University, serves 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.



**Mellissa Meisels**, PhD Candidate at Vanderbilt University, serves 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.

## Distinguished Speaker Series



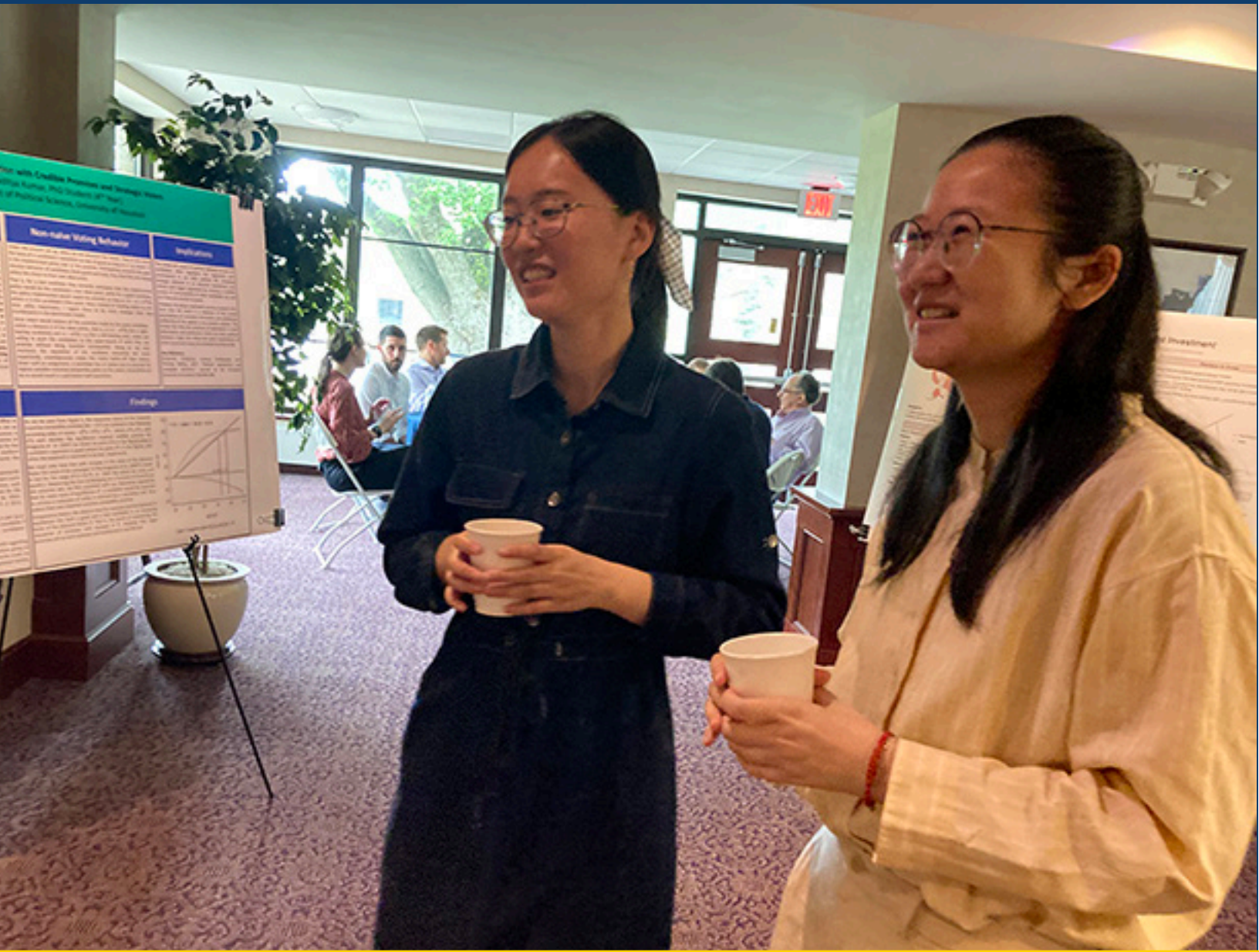
The Democracy Center partners with the Political Science Department and the Riker Seminar Series to host Jamie Druckman, the Payson S. Wild Professor in the Department of Political Science at Northwestern University. Druckman presents “Anti-Democratic Attitudes and Support for Partisan Violence: Are Misperceptions to Blame?”



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# Comparative Politics and Formal Theory Conference

The Democracy Center hosts the 9th Annual Comparative Politics and Formal Theory Conference on June 8 and 9, 2023. The conference brings together a diverse range of scholars working in formal theory and comparative politics to present their research. Hosted previously at leading universities such as Harvard University, Yale University, and the University of Chicago, the conference is designed to facilitate interaction between theoretical and empirically oriented scholars.





## Conference Program



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

# 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.

## **Moving Beyond Polarization: Lessons from South Africa**

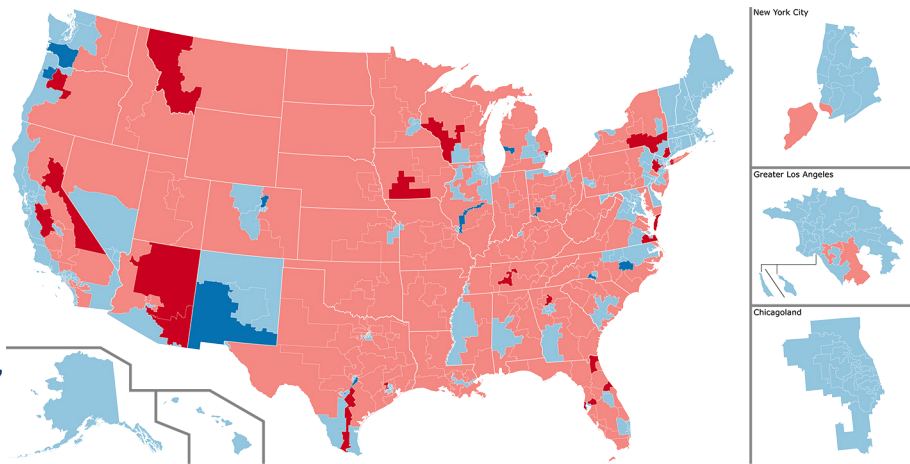


photo by Jacob Schermerhorn / Rochester Beacon

In January of 2023, the Democracy Center partners 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” features 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.

## Bright Line Watch Virtual Roundtable

Fall 2022 was a pivotal moment for American Democracy. Amidst legal investigations focused on former President Trump, threats of violence, and growing concerns about candidates' unwillingness to concede, the Democracy Center, in partnership with Bright Line Watch and the Democratic



Erosion Consortium at Brown University, organizes an expert panel on the implications of the 2022 midterm elections for American democracy.

Image by Ketrit, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

## 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 organizes 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 BY-SA 4.0

## Media Appearances



photo by James Willamor, CC-SA 2.0

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate **Mayya Komisarchik** appears 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 discusses findings from her working paper, “Throwing Away the Umbrella: Minority Voting after the Supreme Court’s Shelby Decision”.

An *Associated Press* story about threats of violence against federal judges by supporters of former President Trump quotes Democracy Center Faculty Director **Gretchen Helmke**. Helmke explains that “[a] popularly elected leader targeting a judiciary is often one early indicator of democratic erosion.” She also warns that public trust in the judiciary is a pre-condition for judicial independence, and points to examples of weak democracies where a lack of public confidence in courts has enabled politicians to manipulate the judicial process and undermine the rule of law.

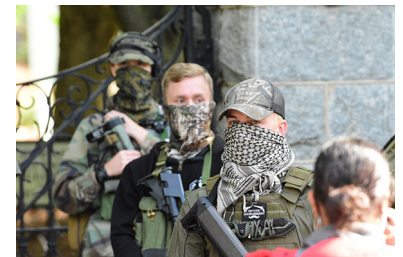


photo by Anthony Crider, CC by 2.0



photo by Governor Tom Wolfe, CC By 2.0

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliates **Gerald Gamm** and **Gretchen Helmke** discuss the 2022 U.S. Midterm Elections and the state of U.S. democracy. Gamm and Helmke clarify the stakes of the 2022 elections and explain the elections’ historical and global context.



photo by Brandonrush, CC0 1.0

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate **Gerald Gamm**'s research (with co-author Thad Kousser) is featured in a *New York Times* story about conflict in state legislatures between representatives of rural and urban areas. Gamm 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.

Democracy Center Faculty Director **Gretchen Helmke**'s research is profiled in a full-length feature article in the Argentine newspaper *La Nacion*. The article examines Helmke's pioneering contributions to the study of the interaction between judicial institutions, political prosecutions, and democratic politics.



photo by Dennis Jarvis, CC-SA 2.0



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 discuss the war in Ukraine in a widely shared *Rochester News Center* story. They offer insights about the significance of military developments, the effects of economic sanctions, and ways the war could come to an end.

Democracy Center Faculty Affiliate **Randall Stone** is quoted in a *Newsweek* story about how the 2024 presidential elections could affect U.S. policy towards Ukraine and Russia. In response to a turnover in the U.S. Presidency, Stone explains, "uncertainty would increase, making miscalculations more likely on all sides."



photo by Balon Greyjoy, CC0 1.0



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

## Bright Line Watch Fellowship

Funded by the Hewlitt Foundation and the Democracy Fund, the Bright Line Watch Fellowship offers undergraduates the opportunity to contribute to efforts to monitor threats to democracy in the United States. Fellows work under the guidance of Democracy Center Associate Director Stu Jordan, receiving hands-on experience in survey design, survey data collection, data analysis, and public communication of research.

## Democracy Center Graduate Fellowship

The Democracy Center Graduate Fellowship provides intensive mentoring and research support to select political science PhD students each year. Students participate in the life of the Center, including the Faculty Working Group, mentoring undergraduate interns and fellows, and the Center's public programming.

During the 22-23 academic year, two students serve as Democracy Center Graduate Fellows:

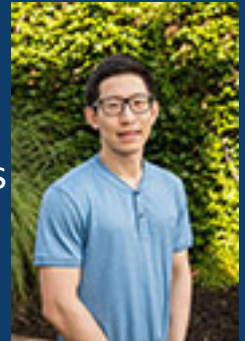
### **Alessio Albarello**

studies comparative politics with a focus on electoral behavior, democratic representation, policymaking processes and applied methodology. As part of his fellowship, he studies bias in public media outlets in a number of countries, including the UK, Italy and Canada.



**Oliver Sun** studies political socialization and the social and economic determinants of political behavior.

As a Democracy Center Graduate Fellow, he pursues a project investigating whether and how intergroup contact affects individuals' political attitudes.



## Democracy Center Undergraduate Internships

Our internships deepen undergraduates' grasp of the dynamics of democratic resilience and vulnerability by embedding them in civic engagement work that aims to reduce threats to U.S. democracy.

We run our internship program in partnership with the Rochester-based organization Civic Genius. Interns assist Civic Genius staff with the development of multi-media educational materials that Civic Genius uses to increase their program participants' civic capacity. They also assist with the planning and execution of Civic Genius' in-person events, which build connection and facilitate democratic engagement across contested social identities.

Interns work under the supervision of Democracy Center Associate Director Stu Jordan to develop and author research-based "explainer" articles for the Democracy Center website that translate findings of political science research for philanthropic funders and non-profit professionals who work to strengthen democracy.



## 2022-2023 Undergraduate Interns



**Sam Eichel**



**Audrey Hinman**



**Matt Kiel**



**Payge Vukelic**

## Partner Organizations

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

## 2022-2023 Faculty Affiliates

- Scott Abramson, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Dan Alexander, Assistant Professor of Political Science
- Kevin Clarke, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Anderson Frey, Assistant Professor of Political Science
- Gerald Gamm, Professor of Political Science and History
- Gretchen Helmke, Thomas H. Jackson Distinguished University Professor
- Stu Jordan, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Tasos Kalandrakis, Professor of Political Science
- Mayya Komisarchik, Assistant Professor of Political Science
- Bethany Lacina, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Alexander Lee, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Bonnie M. Meguid, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Sergio Montero, Assistant Professor of Political Science
- Milena Novy-Marx, Adjunct Professor of Political Science
- G. Bingham Powell, Jr., Marie C. Wilson and Joseph C. Wilson Professor Emeritus of Political Science
- Lynda W. Powell, Professor Emeritus of Political Science
- Randall Stone, Professor of Political Science

## Leadership



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



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

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