



Elections Research Center
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2019 Annual Report

Overview

In 2019, the Elections Research Center continued to support cutting-edge academic research and provide expert analysis about a wide range of topics related to voters, campaigns, and elections. Graduate and faculty affiliates produced impactful scholarly research. Faculty affiliates were featured frequently in national and local news media. And the ERC supported student research, hosted events, and engaged in a variety of community outreach.

These successes have been made possible with the financial support of Jeffrey and Susanne Lyons, the Mai Family Foundation, and other generous donors along with the involvement of a Steering Committee of three faculty members and the affiliations of a dozen other faculty and over 25 students from the Department of Political Science, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and other units on campus.

Publications and Research

Affiliates of the Elections Research Center produced impactful research in 2019. Research covered a wide variety of topics such as the impact of voter ID laws, the effect of candidate sex on voter choice, and how news media respond on Twitter. These articles were in addition to the many conference presentations and talks where affiliates presented scholarship supported by the Elections Research Center. A sample of affiliate publications in 2019 include:

“Trump, Twitter, and News Media Responsiveness: A Media Systems Approach”

by Dhavan Shah and Ayellet Pelled with Chris Wells, Josephine Lukito, Jon Pevehouse, and JungHwan Yang (*New Media and Society*)

The Long War Over Party Structure

by Byron Shafer and Regina Wagner

“Campaigns Inc”

by Robert Yablon (*Minnesota Law Review*)

“The Contingent Effects of Candidate Sex on Voter Choice”

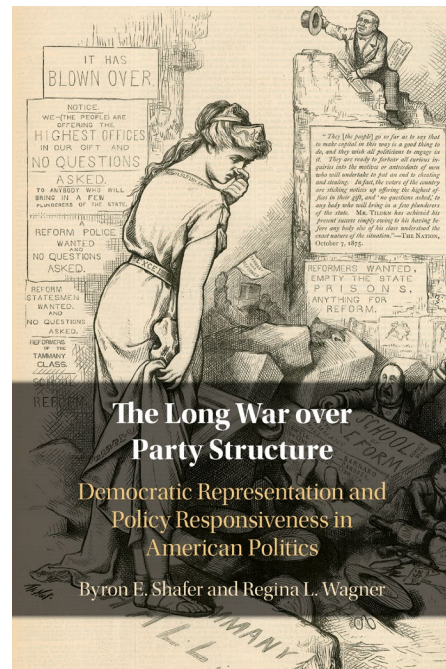
by Barry Burden with Yoshikuni Ono (*Political Behavior*)

“Voting for Development? Ruling Coalitions and Literacy in India”

by Rikhil Bahavnani with Francesca Jensenius (*Electoral Studies*)

“Voter Identification and Nonvoting in Wisconsin—Evidence from the 2016 Election”

by Michael DeCrescenzo and Kenneth Mayer (*Election Law Journal*)



Hosted Events

The Elections Research Center hosted nine events in 2019 to engage with the public, scholars, and election professionals.

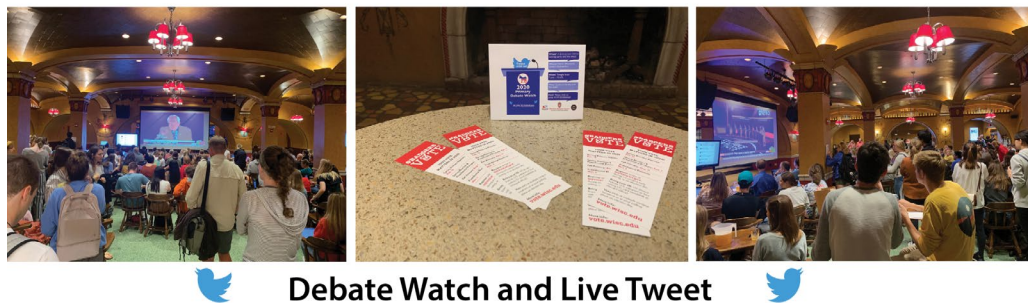


In August, the ERC partnered with the MIT Election Lab to host the Wisconsin Election Landscape workshop. The one-day event brought together political scientists with election administration officials from around Wisconsin. The conference reviewed an audit of voter turnout, absentee ballots, and voter registration procedures as a platform for how to improve elections administration.

In October, we hosted a public event to commemorate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. The event featured two expert presentations about the history and subsequent developments of the 19th Amendment.



Throughout the Democratic presidential debates, we sponsored three viewing parties and live tweet events for students and the public. Attendees got the chance to tweet along with our experts.



The Elections Research Center sponsored other talks and events over the past year. Early in the year, we co-sponsored a mayoral debate moderated by professor Kenneth Mayer. We heard about campaign finance law from Abby Wood, a visiting law professor, and the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination from FiveThirtyEight's senior political writer Claire Malone. The ERC even sponsored a film screening for students where they had the opportunity to register to vote.

Media

The Elections Research Center and its affiliates engaged with the public through various news media outlets in 2019. Our experts provided timely input on some of the most salient current events over the past year. Our affiliates were featured in both TV and print news, and many wrote columns explaining how their research relates to day-to-day politics. On average, an affiliate was featured in either a local or national news story more than once a week.

Featured in the News

Affiliates were quoted and featured in a variety of prominent stories published by high-profile news media outlets.



Our faculty affiliates commented on diverse topics such as the 2020 presidential campaigns, impeachment, digital misinformation, gerrymandering, and money in politics. With too many to list, here are some highlights:

“Time is short’: Why experts warn Russian meddling detailed in Mueller report could happen again”

featuring Young Mie Kim (*USA Today*)

“Everyone Knows Money Influences Politics ... Except Scientists”

featuring Eleanor Powell (*FiveThirtyEight*)

“In the War Against Gerrymandering, an Army of Voters Meets a Dug-in Foe”

featuring Kenneth Mayer (*New York Times*)



“Nonbinding referendums and resolutions — even those with overwhelming public support — are the equivalent of Nerf guns in a political battle that demands heavy artillery.”

- Kenneth Mayer

The New York Times

Featured in the News Continued...

“Trump Playing Defense in Rust Belt as He Opens Re-Election Bid”

featuring David Canon (*Bloomberg News*)

“Trump, No Fan of Big Cities and Their Democratic Leaders, Unleashes His Derision on L.A.”

featuring Katherine Cramer (*Los Angeles Times*)

“Voting Rights Were Already a Big 2020 Issue. Then Came the Gerrymandering Ruling.”

featuring Barry Burden (*New York Times*)

Public Outreach through Op-Eds

Our affiliates also authored their own op-ed columns in well-known media outlets such as *Vox* and the *Washington Post*. Here are just a couple examples of what our affiliates wrote:

“What makes Wisconsin swing?”

by Michael Wagner, Jiyoun Suk, Dhavan Shah, Lewis Friedland, Jordan Foley, Ceri Hughes, Josephine Lukito, Katherine Cramer, and Chris Wells (*Vox*)

“Russians tried to hack our elections. Voters overwhelmingly support stronger security measures.”

by Evan Crawford (*Washington Post*)

Community Engagement

Our affiliates engaged with the broader community, giving many talks to local groups both on and off campus. Faculty participated in a range of events.

Dhavan Shah spoke about his research investigating the outpouring of sympathy in response to mass shootings at the UW-Madison Diversity Forum. David Canon and Rob Yablon teamed up to speak to the Madison Institute about partisan gerrymandering. Michael Wagner moderated a debate between several candidates for the Wisconsin State Supreme Court. Young Mie Kim spoke about Russian interference in U.S. elections at the Crossroads of Ideas lecture sponsored the Morgridge Institute. And Barry Burden, Kenneth Mayer, and Young Mie Kim all came together to speak at the Wisconsin Ideas Conference hosted on campus.



Barry Burden, Kenneth Mayer, and Young Mie Kim at Wisconsin Idea Conference

Awards and Professional Activities

Our affiliates also received prestigious awards and engaged in a variety of professional activities beyond their responsibilities to the University.

Award and Grants



Young Mie Kim won a “brainy award” and became a 2019 Andrew Carnegie fellow. The award is given to extraordinary scholars who propose groundbreaking research to study some of the world’s biggest problems. Her award comes with a grant to support her newest project entitled “Follow the Ad: Understanding Election Interference on Digital Platforms.”

Katherine Cramer was elected to be a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Membership recognizes outstanding achievements both inside and outside of academia.

Eleanor Powell served as program chair of the 2020 Midwest Political Science Association meeting, one of the largest and most prestigious in the field.

Several faculty affiliates partnered on a research project that was awarded a \$1 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to establish the Center for Communication and Civic Renewal and conduct a ten-year study of Wisconsin’s communication system. The new center will be supported by our affiliates Lew Friedland, Dhavan Shah, Michael Wagner, and Katherine Cramer.

Young Mie Kim and other graduate student affiliates who worked with her won the Kaid-Sanders award for their publication “The Stealth Media? Groups and Targets behind Divisive Issue Campaigns on Facebook” at the International Communication Association conference.

Michael Wagner and Rob Yablon were both recognized for their teaching with the 2019 Distinguished Teaching Award, which honors the University’s top ten educators.

Graduate student affiliate Ceri Hughes received his Ph.D. His dissertation is entitled “Democracy’s Minor Problem: Communication and Third-Party Politics.”

Professional and other Notable Activities

Katherine Cramer worked with the Local Voices Network, a nonprofit with the goal to foster conversation in communities and in the media that improves our understanding of one another. LVN pursues its goal through in-person conversations that take place around a “Digital Hearth,” which records community discussions and enables hosts to play conversations from other groups.

Barry Burden, David Canon, and Kenneth Mayer spoke at the Strategic Partnership for Applied Redistricting Knowledge (SPARK) Conference, a Big 10 Academic Alliance event that brought together a multidisciplinary group of experts to launch a new initiative focused on how academia can address challenges associated with redistricting and gerrymandering.

Professional and other Notable Activities Continued...

Two of our faculty served as editors in academic journals last year. Michael Wagner served as Forum Editor for *Political Communication*, and David Canon was Editor-in-Chief of the *Election Law Journal*.

Serving Students

The Elections Research Center and its faculty supported students in many ways throughout 2019. Faculty taught a wide range of popular courses, advised undergraduates writing senior honors theses, mentored students, and spoke to many student organizations.

The Big Ten Voting Challenge, an initiative to encourage student turnout in the 2018 midterm election and supported by the Elections Research Center, won a University-Community Partnership Award for its innovative collaboration of students, faculty, staff, and city officials.

Course Offerings

Faculty taught a range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional courses last year:

- Introduction to American Politics
- Introduction to Mass Communication
- The American Presidency
- Politics Around the World
- Introduction to Survey Research
- Race and Politics in the United States
- Understanding Political Numbers
- The Legislative Process

Financial Support for Student Research

Two grant competitions and one summer fellowship provided funds for graduate students to conduct research projects and participate in scholarly conferences. Multiple students received financial awards to support their work. One of the supported graduate students, Rochelle Snyder, even had her work on uncontested elections featured in the *Washington Post's* Monkey Cage.

Additionally, the Rose Family Undergraduate Research Project award made funds available for undergraduate research on elections. Several students received the awards to collaborate with faculty on projects.

Looking Ahead

The Elections Research Center is looking toward the 2020 elections while continuing to provide research and expert analysis. During the campaign season, we will conduct multiple polls in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin during the primary and general elections to illuminate how these swing-state voters are thinking about the election. Results will be distributed to the public and the news media and used in research by ERC faculty and students.

Over the next year, the Elections Research Center will also be assisting the Badger Vote Coalition, an on-campus group with the goal of increasing student turnout in the upcoming elections that includes representatives from various organizations and departments.