



Elections Research Center

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2022 Annual Report

The Elections Research Center continued to provide cutting-edge election analysis and timely commentary in 2022. Especially in a midterm election year, the ERC remained an essential resource for relevant, non-partisan electoral analysis. Among other contributions, our experts used social science to provide analysis of polls and election results, confront misinformation about elections, made recommendations on how to protect election officials, and provided expert commentary on a variety of news stories on topics ranging from campaign finance to the partisan media ecosystem.

The ERC continued to support an array of research initiatives and produced impactful scholarship. Faculty as well as graduate students worked on a wide range of research projects and presented their findings at talks and conferences around the country.

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 and 13 other faculty and over 25 students from the Department of Political Science, Law School, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and other units on campus.

Publications and Research

Our affiliates produced important research in 2022 on a wide variety of topics. These books and articles complement the many conference presentations and scholarship supported by the ERC. A sampling of publications includes:

Battleground: Asymmetric Communication Ecologies and the Erosion of Civil Society in Wisconsin

by Lewis Friedland, Dhavan Shah, Michael Wagner, Katherine Cramer, Chris Wells, and Jon Pevehouse

“The Effects of Malapportionment on Economic Development”

by Rikhil Bhavnani (*PLOS One*)

“Incidental News Exposure Via Social Media and Political Participation: Evidence of Reciprocal Effects”

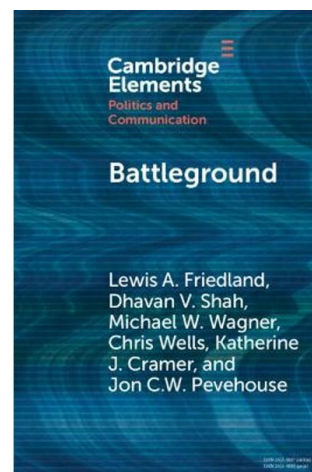
by Michael Xenos with Sangwon Lee (*New Media and Society*)

“Comparative Election Administration: A Legal Perspective on Electoral Institutions”

by Daniel Tokaji (*Comparative Election Law*)

“Algorithmic Agents in the Hybrid Media System: Social Bots, Selective Amplification, and Partisan News about COVID-19”

by Dhavan Shah and coauthors (*Human Communication Research*)



Media

The Elections Research Center and its affiliates engaged with the public through many news media outlets in 2022. Our experts provided extensive midterm election analysis and timely input on the most salient current events. Affiliates gave hundreds of interviews via TV, print, radio, and podcasts and even wrote columns explaining how their research relates to current politics.

Featured in the News

Affiliates were quoted and featured in a variety of prominent stories published by high-profile news media outlets. Among others, these media organizations included the following:



A sampling of these appearances includes:

“On Conservative Radio, Misleading Message Is Clear: ‘Democrats Cheat’”
featuring Lewis Friedland (*The New York Times*)

“Despite Rebukes, Trump’s Legal Brigade is Thriving”
featuring Barry Burden (*Politico*)

“Report: Need Tighter Security for Wisconsin Election Workers”
featuring Kenneth Mayer (*Associated Press*)

“9 Tips to Debunk False Claims Made by Friends and Family”
featuring Michael Wagner (*Washington Post*)

“Fueled by Billionaires, Political Spending Shatters Records Again”
featuring Kenneth Mayer and Eleanor Powell (*The New York Times*)

“Wisconsin’s Close Senate Race Could Determine Control of Congress”
featuring Barry Burden (*PBS News Hour*)



“Is this consistent with democratic — ‘little d’ — principles when you have billionaires dropping millions of dollars and they are having such an effect? We’re breaking records every cycle.”

- Kenneth Mayer

The New York Times

Authored Columns

Our affiliates also authored op-ed columns in local and national media outlets. Here are a few examples of their contributions:

“Presidents Can’t Declassify Documents with Green Lantern Superpowers”

by Kenneth Mayer with Andrew Rudalevige (*The Washington Post*)

“States Regulating Ballot Drop Boxes Should Check the Science First”

by Laura Albert (*The Hill*)

“Michael Gableman's Vendetta over Wisconsin's 2020 Election Must End – Before He Wreaks Havoc on the Next One”

by Barry Burden with Trey Grayson (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

“New Survey Data on Who Americans Look to For Election Information”

by Michael Wagner with Katie Harbath, Collier Fernekes, Rachel Orey, and Mara Suttman (Bipartisan Policy Center)

“The Backlash Against Pro-Democracy Reporting is Coming”

by Michael Wagner (Nieman Lab)



Events

The ERC hosted and sponsored many in-person and virtual events related to the midterm elections throughout the year. Hundreds of people attended the events. All of the events can be viewed on our website (elections.wisc.edu) as well as on the ERC's YouTube channel.



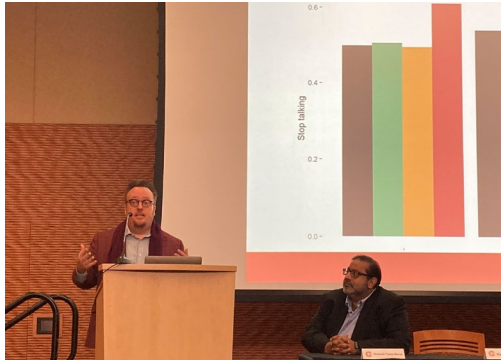
Throughout the year, the Elections Research Center partnered with the State Democracy Research Initiative to host the "Election Matters 2022" series. The four panel discussions were sponsored by the law firm Stafford Rosenbaum LLP. This event series brought together diverse experts to tackle evolving election-related issues. Events included discussions of election administration, the Voting Rights Act and redistricting, campaign finance and election misinformation, and direct democracy in states.



In December, the ERC hosted its 2022 Election Symposium. The all-day, public event featured experts analyzing the results of the 2022 midterms and exploring key races, abortion, election protection, advertising, and the races in Wisconsin. The event was covered by Wisconsin Eye and received other local news coverage.



Campus and Community Engagement



The ERC and our affiliates also engaged with the broader community. Faculty gave a variety of community-facing talks. For instance, Lewis Friedland, Dhavan Shah, and Mike Wagner participated in the Renewing Civic Life in Wisconsin campus event. And Barry Burden and Eleanor Powell teamed up to talk at an event focused on the pipeline of candidates for public offices. ERC affiliates also provided commentary at various election-related events such as debates and watch parties.

Serving Students

The ERC and its faculty supported students in many ways throughout 2022: teaching popular courses, advising graduate and undergraduate student research, and providing funding for elections research.

Financial Support for Student Research

Many students received financial support to conduct and promote election research. Undergraduate students especially benefitted from our Rose Family Undergraduate Research Project which allowed students to get up to \$3,000 for their own research or to work with a faculty member. In the summer, five graduate student affiliates took advantage of a new collaborative summer research initiative to work on projects with faculty. And with in-person conferences returning in full during 2023, ten graduate students received funding to help them defray the costs of travel to present their research around the country.



Course Offerings

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

- Introduction to American Politics
- Introduction to Mass Communication
- Intro to Survey Research
- Elections and Voting Behavior
- Campaign Finance
- United States Congress

Awards and Professional Activities

Our affiliates also received prestigious awards and engaged in a variety of professional activities.

- Rikhil Bhavnani served as the Associate Chair and Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of Political Science.
- Multiple faculty members met with diplomats and international observers from around the world monitoring elections in Wisconsin in 2022.
- David Canon continued to serve as the editor-in-chief of the *Election Law Journal*.
- Graduate student affiliate Chagai Weiss received his Ph.D. and defended his dissertation “Prejudice Reduction at Scale: How Institutional Inclusion Reduces Social Exclusion.”
- Ken Mayer testified as an expert witness in lawsuits over election practices in Arizona and Montana.
- Dhavan Shah received the B. Aubrey Fisher Mentorship Award from the International Communication Association.

