



# Elections Research Center

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## 2021 Annual Report

The Elections Research Center maintained a vital public presence in 2021. Even in an election off year, the ERC remained an essential resource for relevant, non-partisan electoral analysis. Among other contributions, our experts used social science to confront misinformation surrounding the presidential election results and provided critical commentary on issues such as redistricting and campaign finance in the U.S. as well as insights into elections in other countries.

The ERC continued to support an array of research initiatives and produced impactful scholarship. Faculty affiliates were featured frequently in local and national media outlets. And the ERC hosted virtual programs to offer deeper understanding of pressing current events.

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 30 students from the Department of Political Science, Law School, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and other units on campus.

## Publications and Research

Affiliates of the Elections Research Center produced important research in 2021 on a wide variety of topics. These books and articles complement the many conference presentations and talks where affiliates presented scholarship supported by the ERC. Here is a sampling of recent research:

### **“Free and Fair? The Differential Experiences of Voting Barriers and Voting Policies in American Midterm Elections”**

by Jordan Foley, Michael Wagner, Ceri Hughes, Jiyoung Suk, Katherine Cramer, Lewis Friedland, and Dhavan Shah (*International Journal of Public Opinion Research*)

### **“Gerrylaundering”**

by Robert Yablon (*New York University Law Review*)

### ***Shape: The Hidden Geometry of Information, Biology, Strategy, Democracy, and Everything Else***

by Jordan Ellenberg (*Penguin Press*)

### **“Debunking the “Big Lie”: Election Administration in the 2020 Presidential Election”**

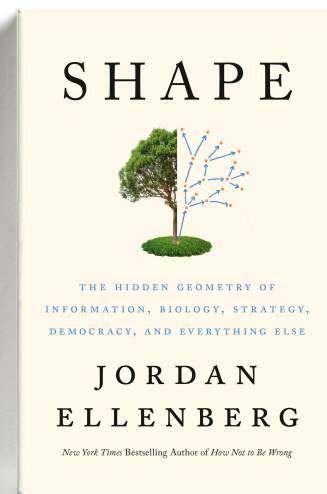
by David Canon with Owen Sherman (*Presidential Studies Quarterly*)

### **“Explaining Uncontested Seats in Congress and State Legislatures”**

by Barry Burden and Rochelle Snyder (*American Politics Research*)

### **“Party Competition and Cooperation Shape Affective Polarization: Evidence from Natural and Survey Experiments in Israel”**

by Lotem Bassan-Nygate and Chagai Weiss (*Comparative Political Studies*)



## Media

The Elections Research Center and its affiliates engaged with the public through many news media outlets in 2021. Our experts provided extensive election analysis and timely input on the most salient current events. Affiliates gave hundreds of interviews via TV, print, radio, and podcasts. And many 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:

**“House Exiles Marjorie Taylor Greene From Panels, as Republicans Rally Around Her”**  
featuring Eleanor Powell (*The New York Times*)

**“‘I’ve Never Seen Anything Like This,’ Experts Say as States Introduce Hundreds of Election Bills”**  
featuring Barry Burden (*Newsweek*)

**“In Statehouses, Stolen-Election Myth Fuels a G.O.P. Drive to Rewrite Rules”**  
featuring Kenneth Mayer (*The New York Times*)

**“Why Some House Districts Won’t Have A Representative for Almost a Year”**  
featuring David Canon (*FiveThirtyEight*)

**“Wisconsin: The Incubator for America’s Tribal Politics”**  
featuring Kenneth Mayer (*Washington Post*)

**“Welcome to A True American Bloodsport: Redistricting”**  
featuring Barry Burden (*Politico*)



*“The typical response by a losing party in a functioning democracy is that they alter their platform to make it more appealing. Here the response is to try to keep people from voting. It’s dangerously antidemocratic.”*

- 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:

### **“We Just Witnessed a Coup Attempt in Washington, D.C. Now We Must Choose: Democracy or Trump**

by Kenneth Mayer (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

### **“Is It Possible to Have Safe and Equitable Elections?”**

by Barry Burden with Laura Albert (*The Hill*)

### **“National News Will Be Overmatched, Local News Will Be Undersupported”**

by Michael Wagner (*NiemanLab*)

### **“Wisconsin Supreme Court is Wrong to Preserve Gerrymandered Electoral Maps”**

by Robert Yablon (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)



## Virtual Events

The ERC hosted and sponsored several virtual events in 2021 for policymakers and the public. Hundreds of people attended each event. Expert panel discussions tackled voter confidence, ranked-choice voting, and developments in redistricting. All these events can be viewed on our website ([elections.wisc.edu](https://elections.wisc.edu)) as well as on the ERC's new YouTube channel.

### *Restoring Confidence in the U.S. Election System*



The 2020 presidential election shook public confidence in the U.S. election system, leading to dozens of lawsuits and an insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. In March, the ERC hosted a virtual panel of experts to offer recommendations about how to go about the vital task of rebuilding public trust in the administration of elections. The featured speakers included New Mexico

Secretary of State and President of the National Association of Secretaries of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver along with other academic voices from inside and outside UW-Madison.

### *Can Ranked-Choice Voting Work in Wisconsin?*



Ranked-choice voting continued to gain traction in 2021 and permeated election reform debates around the country. In October, The ERC along with several other units on campus sponsored a panel discussion to help inform the debate among Wisconsin policymakers and the broader public. An expert panel took lessons learned from elsewhere to forecast how

ranked-choice voting might work if implemented in Wisconsin.

### *Redistricting and Gerrymandering in 2021*

With redistricting well underway, the ERC partnered with the State Democracy Research Initiative to provide legal and political science perspectives on the decennial political mapmaking process. Experts provided insight into the impacts of redistricting commissions, racial gerrymandering, judicial review, and the process in Wisconsin.

## Campus and Community Engagement

The ERC and our affiliates also engaged with the broader community. Many faculty affiliates were guests on the Political Science Department's podcast "1050 Bascom." Faculty also gave a variety of other community-facing talks. For instance, Lewis Friedland, Ken Mayer, Eleanor



Powell, and Michael Wagner teamed up to speak at the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation's Crossroads of Ideas Conference to provide a "checkup" on democracy. Michael Wagner spoke with the *Capital Times* about how Act 10 affected Wisconsin politics a decade after the legislation fundamentally changed how public sector unions operate. And Young Mie Kim gave a UW-Madison "RED Talk" on the impact of political disinformation and the role of digital platforms in spreading furtive messages.

### *ERC Newsletter*

ERC inaugurated its twice-annual email newsletter in 2021 to keep the community and broader public up to date on our cutting-edge research, commentary from our affiliates, and information on our many activities. The newsletter reaches over 700 subscribers with more signing up every month.

## Serving Students

The ERC and its faculty supported students in many ways throughout 2021: teaching popular courses, advising graduate and undergraduate student research, and providing funding for elections research.

### *Financial Support for Student Research*

Several graduate students received support to participate in online and in-person conferences. Five other graduate students received financial support to help jump-start their research in 2021 following interruptions caused by the pandemic. Additionally, the Rose Family Undergraduate Research Project award made funds available for undergraduate research on elections.



## Course Offerings

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

- Introduction to American Politics
- Introduction to Mass Communications
- The Legislative Process
- The American Presidency
- Mass Political Behavior
- Political Behavior and Economic Inequality

## Awards and Professional Activities

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

- Daniel Tokaji testified in front of the U.S House of Representatives Committee on House Administration about the elections clause of the U.S. Constitution.
- Young Mie Kim was featured in *On Wisconsin* magazine as the “disinformation detective” for her continued work to understand digital disinformation.
- Michael Wagner became an Associate Editor of *Public Opinion Quarterly* and received a grant for \$750,000 to study methods for combatting misinformation online.
- Lewis Friedland retired and became an emeritus professor after 20 years at UW-Madison.
- Barry Burden published a report on the experiences of the public and municipal clerks in Wisconsin during the 2020 general election.
- Graduate student affiliate Jiyoung Suk received her Ph.D. after completing her dissertation, “Lived Experiences, Networked Media, and Polarized Group Attitudes”

