



Elections Research Center

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Letter from the Director



Barry Burden

Director, Elections Research Center

Lyons Family Professor of Political Science

Reflecting on 2023

I am pleased to share the 2023 Annual Report for the Elections Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The ERC continues to be a trusted and influential source for expertise on elections in the U.S. and other parts of the world. My colleagues and I deeply appreciate your support for our ongoing work.

Elections are receiving more scrutiny and facing more challenges than in the past. The ERC is making valuable contributions by conducting serious research, sharing insights with the public, and training the next generation of practitioners and experts.

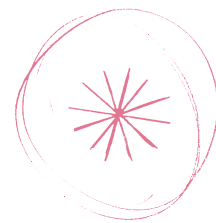
Looking Ahead to 2024

As we prepare for the year ahead - and the 2024 election season in particular - the ERC is well-prepared to continue serving in this role, with a substantial and multi-disciplinary slate of academic researchers working to further our understanding of elections, and a number of events on the schedule that will address the year's most important election issues.

The Elections Research Center will remain a trusted resource, offering timely programming to engage and inform the public during the busy campaign season. The year will conclude with the highly anticipated symposium on November 22 that will provide a full review of what happened and why.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry Burden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



A Year in Review

The Elections Research Center continued to provide cutting-edge election analysis and timely commentary in 2023 toward our mission to further scholarly understanding of voter decision-making and election outcomes. The ERC also continued to support an array of research initiatives and produce impactful scholarship. Faculty and graduate student affiliates and others who received funding worked on a wide range of research projects and presented their findings at talks and conferences around the country.

ERC affiliates produced important research on the ways social media can affect voter attitudes and behavior, how some voter mobilization efforts had the opposite of their intended effect, and how polarization and partisanship interact with voters' news consumption, among other crucial topics.

Additionally, the ERC engaged the public in a number of panel discussions on important election-related topics, including the high-profile state supreme court election and the Republican party's trajectory into the upcoming presidential election. ERC affiliates also spoke with the media often and contributed public commentary related to their work.

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





RESEARCH

Our affiliates produced important scholarship on a wide variety of topics relevant to understanding voter behavior and election results, ranging from the impact of social media on the 2020 election to the interaction between polarization and voter attitudes to measures of candidate debate performance. Many were published in leading academic journals. A sampling of ERC affiliates' research includes the following:

"Like-minded sources on Facebook are prevalent but not polarizing"

by Young Mie Kim and coauthors (in *Nature*)

"Voter mobilization efforts can depress turnout"

by Levi Bankston and Barry Burden
(in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*)

"Polarized platforms? How partisanship shapes perceptions of 'algorithmic news bias'"

by Michael Xenos and coauthors (in *New Media & Society*)



"Building an ICCN Multimodal Classifier of Aggressive Political Debate Style: Towards a Computational Understanding of Candidate Performance Over Time"

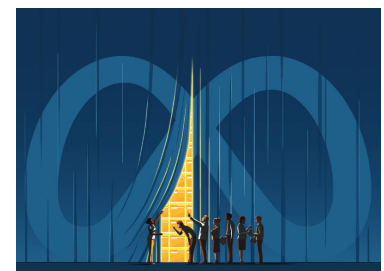
by Dhavan Shah and coauthors
(in *Communication Methods and Measures*)

"Civic Fracture & Renewal in Wisconsin: A Report on the Public's Civic Attitudes and Behaviors"

by Nathan Kalmoe, Michael Wagner, and Dhavan Shah
(for the Center for Communication and Civic Renewal at UW-Madison)

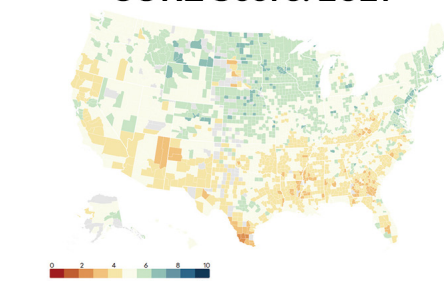
"Threats as Political Communication"

by Nathan Kalmoe with Lilliana Mason
(in *Political Communication*)



Independence by permission
Industry-academy collaboration explores the 2020 US election

CORE Score: 2021



Index of American well-being calculated from measures of economic security, economic opportunity, health, and political voice.
From "Advancing a People-First Economy" (2023), available at www.corescore.us.

"Independence by permission"

by Michael Wagner (in *Science*)

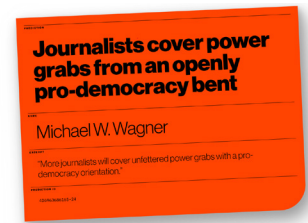
"Advancing a People-First Economy"

by Katherine Cramer and coauthors
(for the American Academy of Arts & Sciences' Commission on Reimagining Our Economy)

ERC affiliates' published research complements their ongoing scholarly work and the many conference and workshop presentations supported by the ERC.

In addition to this academic work, affiliates regularly engaged the public with analysis and commentary related to their research findings to inform and call attention to underappreciated issues.

Below are a few examples of their contributions:



"Journalists [will] cover power grabs from an openly pro-democracy bent"
by Michael Wagner (in Nieman Lab's *Predictions for Journalism, 2024*)



"Paper ballots are good, but accurately hand-counting them all is next to impossible"
by Barry Burden (in *The Conversation*)

"Political indoctrination? Here is what goes on in my UW classroom"
by Katherine Cramer (in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

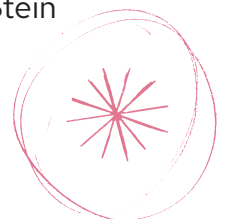
"Wisconsin GOP's impeachment threat against state Supreme Court justice is unsupported by law and would undermine judicial independence"
by Robert Yablon with Derek Clinger (in *The Conversation*)



"US Public Opposition for Armed Political Demonstrations"
by Nathan Kalmoe with Lilliana Mason (in *Political Violence at a Glance*)



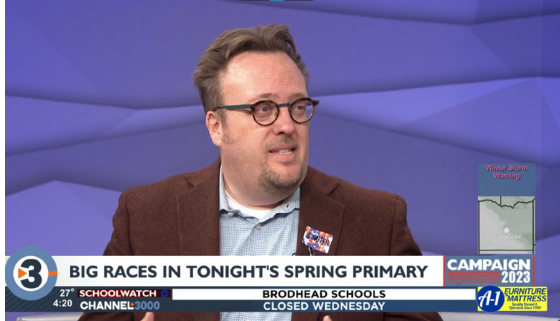
"Opting Out? Recent Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Poll Workers"
by Barry Burden with Robert M. Stein (for the MIT Election Data and Science Lab)





MEDIA

The Elections Research Center and its affiliates provided election analysis and sharp expertise on salient current events to journalists and the broader public through engagement with numerous media outlets. Affiliates gave hundreds of interviews via TV, print, radio, and digital media (including podcasts and social media) as they explained insights gleaned from their research on current politics.



A large number of ERC affiliates' interviews with the media addressed the high-profile state supreme court race, its results, and its impact and subsequent political developments, including a legislative effort to impeach the newly seated justice. Michael Wagner (left) appeared on local news station Channel 3000 ahead of the spring primary election.

The 2023 Wisconsin Supreme Court race was significant in many ways, as ERC affiliates explained in many interviews with national and local reporters. A few of their media appearances on the topic are listed below:



"How State and Local Judicial Elections Became So Politicized"

featuring Michael Wagner (in *NPR's Morning Edition*)

"What the Wisconsin Supreme Court race could mean for the state's Republican-drawn redistricting maps"

featuring Robert Yablon (on *Wisconsin Public Radio*)

"Republicans have ruled Wisconsin for a decade – but a court decision could change that"

featuring Kenneth Mayer (in *The Guardian*)

"Wisconsin Republicans vote to fire elections director, who sues to keep her job"

featuring Barry Burden (in *The Washington Post*)



Concerns over campus culture, broader civic attitudes, and democratic norms were another strong theme throughout the year. Katherine Cramer (left) spoke with PBS Wisconsin's *Here and Now* program on fostering open discussion amidst polarized politics. Michael Wagner also appeared on the program to discuss findings on civic fracture and renewal in Wisconsin.

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



A sampling of news stories featuring ERC affiliates include:

"One year after Roe v. Wade overturned, Wisconsin Democrats keep abortion rights at forefront"

featuring Barry Burden (in the *Wisconsin State Journal*)

"The Resentment Fueling the Republican Party Is Not Coming From the Suburbs"

featuring Katherine Cramer (in *The New York Times*)

"A Major Polling Company Is Throwing Its Weight Behind Huge Conspiracy Theories"

featuring Barry Burden (in *HuffPost*)

"With Climate Panel as a Beacon, Global Group Takes On Misinformation"

featuring Young Mie Kim (in *The New York Times*)

"5 Lessons for Democrats From Victories in Wisconsin and Chicago"

featuring Katherine Cramer and Barry Burden (in *The New York Times*)

"Wisconsin GOP weighs moves to sideline elections chief and liberal Supreme Court majority"

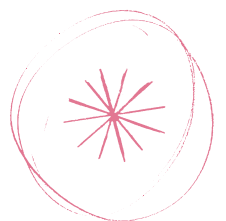
featuring David Canon (in *CNN Politics*)

"As Wisconsin Supreme Court Takes Up Maps Case, Impeachment Threat Looms"

featuring Barry Burden (in *The New York Times*)

"Mathematician Answers Geometry Questions From Twitter"

featuring Jordan Ellenberg (on *Wired's* Tech Support YouTube series)





EVENTS

The Elections Research Center hosted and sponsored many hybrid in-person and virtual events throughout the year. Panel discussion events on important election-related topics featuring academic and legal scholars as well as journalists and practitioners remain a core component of the ERC's outreach strategy to engage with the public and share expertise. Additional event descriptions and recordings of ERC events can be viewed on our website (elections.wisc.edu) as well as the ERC's YouTube channel.

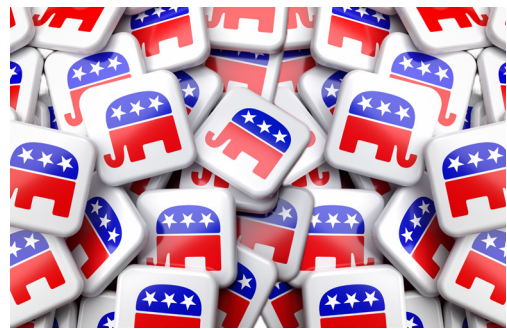
Understanding Wisconsin's Supreme Court Election

Co-hosted with the State Democracy Research Initiative, this panel discussion examined the process and remarkably high stakes of Wisconsin's spring judicial primary and general elections. The event featured panelists Miriam Seifter (UW Law), Barry Burden (ERC), Jane Schacter (Stanford Law), and was moderated by Robert Yablon (UW Law, ERC).



Road to 2024: The GOP Presidential Nomination

Following the first GOP debate held in Milwaukee, this panel discussion analyzed developments in the ongoing Republican nomination contest in the wake of their 2020 loss and the fight to decide the future of the party. Moderated by Barry Burden (ERC), the panel featured Julia Azari (Marquette), Reid Epstein (New York Times), Liz Mair (Mair Strategies), and Josh Putnam (FrontloadingHQ).



ELECTION MATTERS 2023

The ERC partnered with the State Democracy Research Initiative to host the “Election Matters 2023” event series, sponsored by the well-known Wisconsin law firm Stafford Rosenbaum LLP. The series brought together various experts to dissect developments in election law and related issues.



Year in Review: Democracy Litigation in the U.S. Supreme Court & the States



This event featured attorneys who litigated some of the year’s most important cases, including *Moore v. Harper* and *Allen v. Milligan* in the U.S. Supreme Court as well as state court rulings on voting rights and gerrymandering. Moderated by Miriam Seifter (SDRI), panelists included Alicia Bannon (Brennan Center for Justice), Ryan Park (North Carolina Solicitor General), Abha Khanna (Elias Law Group), and Steve Vladeck (UT-Austin Law).

Voting Rights & the Criminal Justice System



Featuring Naila Awan (NYCLU), Michael Massoglia (UW Sociology), Michael Morse (Penn Law), and Michael Leo Owens (Emory Political Science), this panel discussion moderated by Barry Burden (ERC) addressed the current legal and policy approaches and challenges of re-enfranchisement for the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.



CAMPUS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to promoting elections research and hosting many elections-related events open to the public, the Elections Research Center and its affiliates engaged with the campus and broader community in other ways as well. Affiliates spoke to civic organizations, faith communities, student groups, and more.



Serving Students

The ERC and its faculty affiliates supported students in numerous ways, teaching popular courses, advising both graduate and undergraduate student research, and providing funding for elections-related research and related conference travel.

Financial Support for Student Research

Many students received financial support to conduct and promote elections research. Undergraduate students especially benefitted from the Rose Family Undergraduate Research Project, which allowed students to receive up to \$3,000 for a research project conducted on their own or in collaboration with a faculty member.

Five graduate student affiliates took advantage of the Collaborative Summer Research Initiative, which supported projects with faculty. As participation at in-person academic conferences continued to grow, multiple graduate students received funding to defray the costs of travel to present their research at national and international conferences.



Elections-Related Course Offerings

Faculty and advanced graduate affiliates taught a range of high-demand courses for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students in 2023, including:

- Introduction to American Politics
- Introduction to Mass Communication
- Introduction to Survey Research
- Law of Democracy
- American Political Parties
- The American Presidency
- Public Opinion
- United States Congress



AWARDS & PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

ERC affiliates also received prestigious awards and engaged in a variety of additional professional activities. A few highlights include the following:



Young Mie Kim was awarded a year-long fellowship at Stanford to continue her study of digital politics and disinformation, joining 37 scholars as part of the 2023-24 fellows class at the Center for Advanced Study of Behavioral Sciences. As a CASBS Fellow, Dr. Kim is researching the impact of data algorithms on political inequality.



Katherine Cramer continued serving as co-chair of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on Reimagining Our Economy (CORE), rethinking the principles, metrics, narratives, and policies that shape the nation's political economy. Their final report, "Advancing a People-First Economy," was released in November 2023 and argues for a shift in national priorities from a focus on how the economy is doing to how Americans are doing within it.



Dhavan Shah was awarded a Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) Named Professorship, which recognizes distinguished research contributions and comes with \$100,000 in research funding over five years. The Jack M. McLeod Professor of Communication Research professorship recognizes Dr. Shah's leading scholarship in the study of political communication, mass media effects, public opinion, and the role of media in broadening democratic participation.



Several ERC affiliates served as expert witnesses in important election-related litigation. **Kenneth Mayer** offered his expertise in a lawsuit challenging a new voter ID requirement in Missouri. **Barry Burden** provided analysis in a Georgia lawsuit over a 2021 law that enacted numerous changes to the state's election rules.



Many ERC affiliates appeared on the Political Science Department's podcast, called *1050 Bascom*, to offer key insights on current events and all things politics. **Michael Wagner, Barry Burden, Katherine Cramer, David Canon, Rochelle Snyder**, and **Jessie Munson** all made appearances on the student-run podcast.



Kennia Coronado received the MPSA Latina/o Caucus Best Graduate Student Paper award for her paper, entitled "The Construction of Latino Identity in Presidential Elections."





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