

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-20

THE CHICAGO CENTER ON DEMOCRACY



CHICAGO CENTER ON
DEMOCRACY
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

During the fiscal year from July 2019 - June 2020, the Chicago Center on Democracy expanded its research projects, organized a diverse set of events, and continued to build a community of individuals working to strengthen democracy. A few highlights:

- **Events.** The Chicago Center on Democracy organized a wide set of events to share ideas about democracy with our community members, from informal student meetups to guest lectures to webinars.
- **Curriculum.** We embarked on a new effort, called the “Democracy Curriculum” program, in collaboration with the UChicago Social Sciences Collegiate Division, to formalize and expand curricular and extracurricular activities related to democracy.
- **Democracy tools.** In January 2020, we won a \$220,000 grant from the United Nations Democracy Fund to develop a set of tools that will shed light on key areas of democratic functioning.
- **Bright Line Watch,** a multi-university initiative housed at CCD, continued to administer surveys to the American public and political scientists to track the state of U.S. democracy.
- **Internship.** We organized our second multi-university internship in the summer of 2020, expanding to include students from UChicago, Brown, Dartmouth, and Texas A&M. The interns worked on a global dataset of incidents of democratic erosion, among other activities.



Participants in the two-day “Constitutional Hardball Roundtables” event are amused by an anecdote from U.S. Congressman Jamie Raskin. The event, held in December 2019 in Cambridge, MA, was co-organized by the Bright Line Watch initiative (which is housed at CCD) and the Harvard Weatherhead Research Cluster on Challenges to Democracy. From left, Ben Wittes (Brookings Institution; Harvard Law School), Sarah Longwell (Republican Voters Against Trump), Keith Whittington (Princeton), Jamie Raskin (U.S. Congress), and Gretchen Helmke (University of Rochester).



The Chicago Center on Democracy hosted Adam Przeworski, Professor of Politics at NYU and one of the world's leading thinkers on democracy, in November 2019, to discuss democratic backsliding.

OUR MISSION

Our mission at the Chicago Center on Democracy is to use the power of research and discussion to support democracy worldwide.

We provide a space for researchers, students, practitioners, and others to discuss and refine their work on democracy, worldwide. Through events, publications, and public engagement, we share this work with a broader community of citizens, civil society organizations, and policymakers.

OUR VISION

Our vision is for all people to understand how democracy works and how to strengthen democratic institutions.

OUR TEAM

The center's operations are run through a collaborative effort of:

- The **Faculty Chair**, who provides the overall direction for the center
- The **Senior Research Associate**, who coordinates the operations of the center, including research, communications, fundraising, and other areas
- **Program Assistants**, who support events and other activities
- **Research Project Leads**, who coordinate research in specific areas
- **Research Assistants**, who support data gathering and analysis in our research

FACULTY AFFILIATES NETWORK

Our Faculty Affiliates Network is a group of faculty members who share research interests in topics related to democracy. This group includes faculty in Classics, Law, Political Science, Public Policy, and Sociology. They meet regularly to discuss and refine their research.

GRADUATE STUDENTS AFFILIATES NETWORK

Our Graduate Student Affiliates Network is a group of masters and doctoral students at the University of Chicago who share research interests in topics related to democracy.

RESEARCH

A new project funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund

In January 2020, the Chicago Center on Democracy won a \$220,000 grant from the United Nations Democracy Fund to embark upon a two-year project to develop a set of publicly available tools that will shed light on key areas of democratic functioning.

This project, entitled “Developing a Global Early-Warning System for Democratic Erosion,” will create three publicly accessible tools to allow all interested parties to study, track, and predict democratic erosion in countries around the world: 1) tracking global democratic performance, 2) analyzing the rhetorical strategies of politicians, and 3) understanding the role of referendums in healthy democracies.

Bright Line Watch monitors the state of U.S. democracy

Is democracy eroding in the United States? If so, how exactly would we know?

To answer these questions, a multi-university initiative called Bright Line Watch was established in late 2016 to monitor democratic practices, their resilience, and potential threats. It is housed at the Chicago Center on Democracy, and is collaboratively run by political scientists at the University of Chicago, Dartmouth College, and the University of Rochester.

As of November 2020, Bright Line Watch has completed 13 survey waves, which collectively provide a large set of data about how the views of the American public and political scientists on the country's democratic performance have evolved during the Trump administration.

Bright Line Watch's work has been covered in many major media outlets, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New Yorker*, *Bloomberg*, and others.

APSA DEMOCRACY AND AUTOCRACY SECTION

Susan Stokes, the faculty director of the Chicago Center on Democracy, began a two-year term as Chair of the Democracy and Autocracy section of the American Political Science Association in the summer of 2019. She and the CCD team help manage the activities of the section, including awards, conference presentations, and other activities.



DEMOCRACY CURRICULUM

The Chicago Center on Democracy has embarked on a major new effort, called the “Democracy Curriculum” program, in collaboration with the UChicago Social Sciences Collegiate Division. This program focuses on growing the offerings to UChicago undergraduates in the area of democracy. This program will identify and formalize existing curricular and extracurricular activities, and determine areas for additional opportunities.

The major workstreams of the Democracy Curriculum are:

- **Teaching:** Organization and formalization of UChicago course offerings connected to democracy
- **Research:** Providing research opportunities for undergraduates, through research assistantships and internships
- **Events:** Organization of events that address the interests of undergraduates

This effort will be guided by a Steering Committee and an Advisory Group, which consist of faculty members at the University of Chicago. These cross-disciplinary groups will provide input and guide decision-making related to the future of democracy education at the university.

EVENTS

Events are a critical component of the Chicago Center on Democracy's efforts to create and incubate a community of individuals committed to strengthening democracy. We organize events that appeal to a range of people, including students, faculty, staff, and off-campus individuals. From July 2019 through June 2020, we organized a wide set of events, from informal grad student meetups to discussions with visitors to UChicago to a two-day conference.



Virginia Oliveros, Professor of Political Science at Tulane University, visited UChicago in February 2020 for a discussion of "Clientelism and the Political Behavior of Slum Dwellers," co-organized by the Chicago Center on Democracy and the Center for Latin American Studies.

Selected events:

November 2019: Is Democracy in Crisis? An Interview with Adam Przeworski

Adam Przeworski, Professor of Politics at NYU, one of the world's leading thinkers on democracy, visited University of Chicago to participate in a conversation with Susan Stokes, Faculty Director of the Chicago Center on Democracy, on the topic: "Are we in a crisis of democracy?"

November 2019: A Comparative Perspective on Impeachment

The Chicago Center on Democracy brought a panel of esteemed scholars together to discuss the comparative politics of impeachment. The conversation covered how various aspects of impeachment differ across countries, the politics of impeachment, and the fallout from the impeachment proceedings in the United States.

December 2019: The Partisan Origins of Democracy in Latin America

CCD hosted Raúl Madrid (UT Austin) for a conversation about the emergence of democracy in Latin America during the early 20th century. Madrid posed the questions: Why did democracy arise in the region at this juncture, and why in some countries and not others?

December 2019: Constitutional Hardball Roundtables

The Bright Line Watch initiative (a multi-university effort housed at CCD) partnered with the Harvard Weatherhead Research Cluster on Challenges to Democracy to organize a two-day set of roundtables on the topic of "constitutional hardball." Leading academics, practitioners, and journalists convened to discuss the rise in hardball tactics in politics, such as voting restrictions, legislative/executive relations, impeachment, and court packing.

April 2020: Preserving Democracy during the Pandemic

A discussion between regional experts about the state of democracy around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how it can be strengthened.

DEMOCRATIC EROSION

Democratic Erosion is a course consortium of more than 50 institutions that share a syllabus and resources to help students evaluate threats to democracy. Professor Susan Stokes brought the course to UChicago in Spring 2019 and taught it again in Fall 2021.

In addition, out of this collaborative course was borne a multi-university internship program. In the summer of 2019, the Chicago Center on Democracy, with support from the Social Sciences Collegiate Division, organized a collaborative internship between UChicago and Brown University. Three UChicago undergraduates and two Brown students worked together on a database of global incidents of democratic erosion, among other projects.

During the summer of 2020, we expanded this internship program to include 12 students from four universities: UChicago, Brown, Dartmouth, and Texas A&M. These interns expanded the global dataset of incidents of democratic erosion, helped design a new dataset of incidents of autocratic consolidation, and wrote policy reports, among other activities.

“Working as a research assistant at the Chicago Center on Democracy the Summer after my second year was an incredibly enriching and engaging experience. Coming into the center after taking Democratic Erosion with Professor Stokes, I was able to further follow an incredibly interesting and emerging field in Political Science. Through my work, I was able to gain not only an understanding of the state of democracy around the world, but also encouraged to immerse myself in studying specific obstacles or threats to democracy, like corruption or media restrictions. I was allowed the freedom to hone and improve my research skills, while also given enough guidance and support that the work always felt intentional and beneficial. Overall, my experience with the center was an experience which certainly opened my career plans after college to a focus on pro-democracy and anti-corruption work.”

—Carter Squires, UChicago undergraduate student and 2019 intern

GRANTS

The Bright Line Watch initiative, which is housed at CCD, continued to benefit from support from two foundations: Democracy Fund and the Hewlett Foundation. This support has allowed us to run regular surveys to gauge views on the state of U.S. democracy, understand other aspects of democracy, and organize events.

The Chicago Center on Democracy is also very appreciative of a grant we received in January 2020 from the United Nations Democracy Fund to embark upon a two-year project to develop a set of publicly available tools that will shed light on key areas of democratic functioning.

COLLABORATORS

Our collaborators this year included:

University of Chicago

- Center for Latin American Studies
- Comparative Politics Workshop
- Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse
- Social Sciences Collegiate Division
- University of Chicago Women's Board

Brown University

- Democratic Erosion consortium

Dartmouth College

- Political Economy Project

Harvard University

- Weatherhead Research Cluster on Challenges to Democracy

Texas A&M University

- Bush School of Government and Public Service





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