

THE CHICAGO CENTER ON DEMOCRACY 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



CHICAGO CENTER ON
DEMOCRACY
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE CHICAGO CENTER ON DEMOCRACY

The Chicago Center on Democracy, based at the University of Chicago, uses the power of academic research and discussion to support democracy worldwide. We do this by organizing events, publishing research, engaging with the public, and conducting other activities.

Our community is broad; it includes faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, researchers, partners, and interested individuals from around the world.



2021-22 IN REVIEW

Research. We continued to develop and expand our various research workstreams.

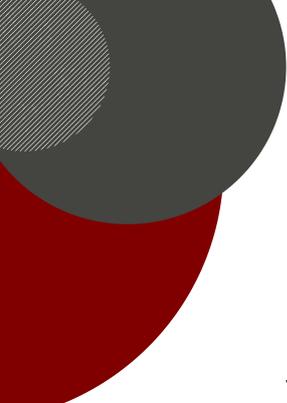
Curriculum. The “Democracy Curriculum” program launched the University's first curricular structure dedicated to the study of democracy—a three-course Social Sciences Core Sequence—and laid the groundwork for the launch of a new Minor in Democracy Studies.

Student opportunities. We expanded our set of research positions and internships for students.

Events. We organized events on a diverse set of topics, including, among other topics, the history of democracy, social movements, international law, armed threats to democracy, and democracy and the environment.

Media. We received media coverage in outlets from the *Chicago Tribune* to *USA Today* to the *Washington Post*.





RESEARCH

The Chicago Center on Democracy is conducting research in a number of areas. Our team—which includes faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduate research assistants, and collaborators—run these projects collaboratively.

Analyzing political rhetoric for authoritarian warning signs

A number of politicians in recent times have been democratically elected, but then go on to undermine their country's democratic institutions. Many such politicians win elections by tapping into people's fears and prejudices. But what exactly separates these politicians' rhetoric from that of other politicians? What are the early warning signs that a politician might try to undermine democracy once elected? We are tackling such questions through a multi-country project that uses techniques of text analysis to analyze campaign speeches to better understand how campaign rhetoric might provide "early-warning signs" of future attacks on democratic institutions.

Another question associated with the rhetoric of these "aspiring autocrats" is how they are able to attack democratic institutions without driving away public support. One potential answer is that they build support for democratic erosion by "trash-talking" democracy to reduce faith in the benefits of democracy generally. These leaders are also known for using emotionally charged language, often outrage-inducing, perhaps with the goal of widening polarization to allow cover for democracy-eroding actions. We are conducting surveys to understand the effects of these aspects of authoritarian-leaning rhetoric.

Tracking global democratic performance

Anecdotal evidence of the erosion of democracy in particular countries is strong, and has been described by leading scholars. But existing systematic measures to track this decline globally suffer from several shortcomings. The Chicago Center on Democracy has developed and will soon publish a Democratic Erosion Index, which tracks the erosion of democracy across the world and over time.

Exploring mechanisms of direct democracy

Mechanisms of direct democracy, such as referendums and citizen initiatives, are often embraced, as they give “the people” the final say on questions of collective importance. But it is an open question whether such mechanisms enhance the legitimacy and performance of representative systems. Exploring this leads to many other questions, including: How do voters view these mechanisms? Why is turnout often lower than in general elections? Why do governments call referendums? What is the role of political parties?

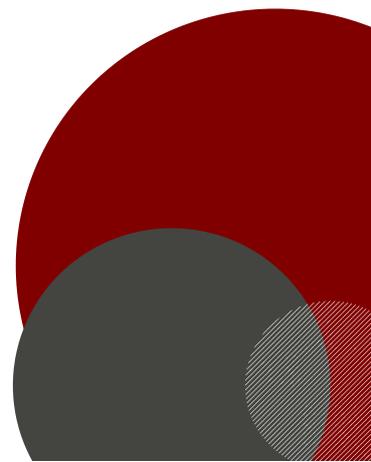
Our team is conducting a set of projects to explore mechanisms of direct democracy, including:

- Constructing a dataset of national-level referendums in democracies over recent decades.
- Conducting interviews in countries in which notable referendums have taken place, such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and Colombia.
- Gathering data from public opinion polls and Google trends to understand voting behavior.

Monitoring U.S. democratic performance with Bright Line Watch

Bright Line Watch is a cross-university collaboration to monitor democratic practices, their resilience, and potential threats in the United States. Bright Line Watch’s flagstone activity is a set of regular surveys of political science experts and the general American public that provide a fine-grained picture of the performance of U.S. democracy over time. Since early 2017, prior to establishing its home at the center, Bright Line Watch’s surveys have become an indispensable tool for monitoring the state of U.S. democratic performance, and have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, among other news outlets. We continue to run the core Bright Line Watch surveys, and to add new innovative survey techniques with each survey wave.

Bright Line Watch’s multi-university team of faculty and student researchers are also working on two parallel research tracks: 1) They are scraping the Twitter and Facebook posts of state legislators and cataloguing their views on the “Big Lie” (i.e. that there was election fraud in 2020), and 2) They are investigating the timing and narrative of concession statements by 2018 and 2020 U.S. Senate and House candidates.



DEMOCRACY CURRICULUM

The Democracy Curriculum program promotes teaching, research, and extracurricular activities related to democracy at the University of Chicago. Through our activities, we seek to bring democratic questions back to the center of the curriculum.

The program is jointly operated by the Chicago Center on Democracy and the Social Sciences Collegiate Division, and is guided by a Steering Committee and Advisory Board consisting of University of Chicago faculty from across the University.



October 2021: We welcomed David Stasavage, Dean of NYU Social Sciences, to campus for an event that served as a launch for both the new phase of the Democracy Curriculum, as well as "The Democracy Series," a collaborative initiative to feature dialogue between book authors and experts on issues of democracy.

DEMOCRACY CORE SEQUENCE

For decades prior to the 2021-22 academic year, there were no curricular structures at the University to pursue sustained, systematic inquiry into democracy as a distinctive modality of social life, political power, and governance.

In fall 2021, we took the first step in creating a democracy-centered curriculum by offering a new three-course Social Sciences sequence within UChicago's Core Curriculum, entitled "Democracy: Equality, Liberty, and the Dilemmas of Self-Government."

In the fall 2021-22 academic year, there were two sections of this Core sequence, each with 15-20 students. For the 2022-23 academic year, it will expand to four sections.

Students also have access to a writing program that offers customized training integrated into their democracy Core classes.

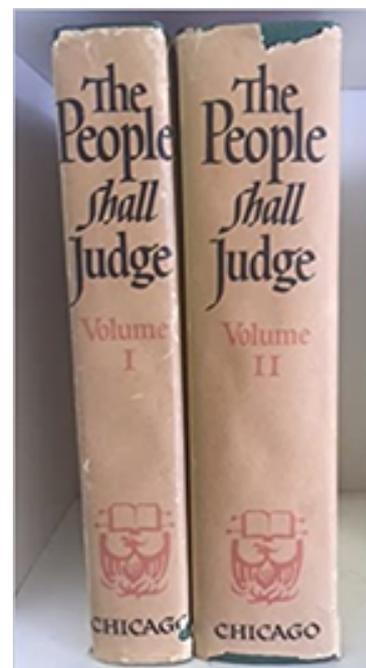
A Brief History of Democracy in the University of Chicago Core Curriculum

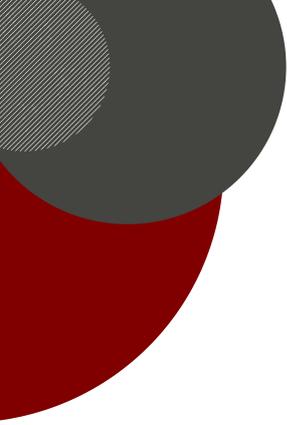
The Democracy Core aims to return democratic questions to the center of the Social Sciences Core Curriculum, where they once enjoyed pride of place. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, when the University of Chicago's Core Curriculum was in its formative stages, the early leaders of the Social Sciences Core sought to recover and renew the wellsprings of the democratic imagination.

True to this mission, the opening sentence of the 1949 book, *The People Shall Judge*, the textbook for Social Sciences 1 at the University of Chicago for much of the postwar period, announced: "This book expresses the faith of one American college in the usefulness of liberal education to American democracy... **Democracy declares that 'the people shall judge.'** Liberal education must help the people to judge well." This clarion call for an education in democracy rings true today.

THE DEMOCRACY CORE

- Autumn Quarter: The Life and Death of Popular Government
- Winter Quarter: Democracy, Revolution, and History
- Spring Quarter: The Challenge of Modern Democracies





DEMOCRACY MINOR

During the 2021-22 academic year, we laid the groundwork for a new democracy-focused minor: taking stock of the existing courses and faculty interest, deliberating about the shape this minor should take, and planning to make it a reality.

We are excited to launch the new Minor in Democracy Studies at the University of Chicago in the Fall Quarter 2022.

This program will be one of only a handful of democracy-focused minor programs that we are aware of at U.S. universities. The minor will provide students essential knowledge, insights, methods, and critical perspectives necessary to understand the world around us and the historical developments that have placed it in such a precarious state.

The minor offers a broad range of courses that allows students to select cross-disciplinary electives suitable to forming a broadly conceived program of study. Students in the minor will learn, among other topics, how democracy extends well beyond the political arena, to encompass a broad set of structures, including civic organizations, laws, deliberative practices, rhetorical strategies, cultural forms, collective imaginaries, and moral, ethical, and spiritual codes.

DEMOCRACY AND ITS CRITICS

As part of the minor, our faculty will introduce a new required course, “Democracy and Its Critics,” in which students will investigate the strengths and weaknesses of democracy as a political regime and a form of social organization.

They will explore the relationship between democracy and values such as equality and freedom; democratic threats to minorities; the risks of elite capture and manipulation; and democratic erosion and collapse.

EXTRACURRICULARS FOR UNDERGRADUATES



Student Research

One of the key goals of the Democracy Curriculum is to expand democracy-focused research opportunities at UChicago. To reach this goal, we have funded undergraduate research assistants to work with faculty on research projects that relate to some aspect of democracy. We have created more than twenty such positions. Students have conducted research on topics as diverse as the power of Congressional leaders, land reform, and classical Greek thought.



Careers and Internships

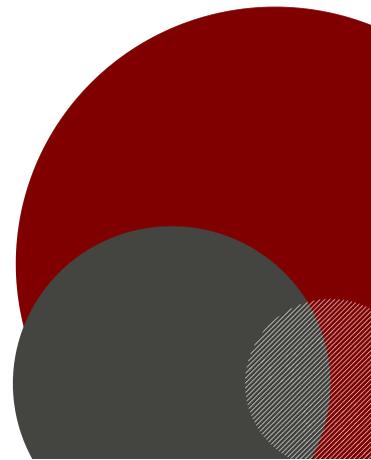
Through a new program called UChicago Democracy Careers, run in collaboration with the Career Advancement office, students have access to engagement with employers, specialized career cohorts, tailored advising, and internship support.

In summer 2022, we are running our third inter-university internship program, which has expanded to include four universities: UChicago, Brown, Dartmouth, and Univ. of Houston. The students are working together on a set of projects revolving around the tracking of global incidents of democratic erosion.



Undergrad-Focused Events

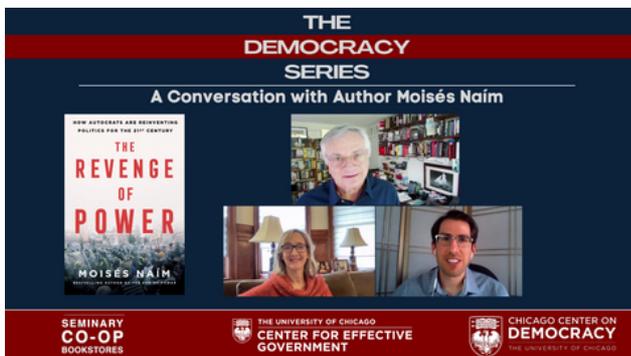
We organize events that apply democratic questions to the lived experience of students.



EVENTS

During the 2021-22 academic year, as in-person life on campus continued its gradual progression, we offered a mix of in-person, virtual, and hybrid events. In-person components of our programming included various precautions (size limits, masking, attention to ventilation, etc.), but our community members who joined such events shared a collective appreciation of the privilege and pleasure of being in the same room to discuss matters of intellectual import.

Our events this year ran the gamut in terms of subject matter, including, among other topics, the history of democracy, social movements, international law, armed threats to democracy, and democracy and the environment.



Scenes from some of the "Democracy Series" conversations we held with authors of democracy-focused books during the 2021-22 academic year. This series was co-organized by the Center for Effective Government, the Chicago Center on Democracy, and the Seminary Co-op Bookstores.

SELECTED EVENTS

- **November 2021: Bureaucratic Resistance to Global Autocratic Ambitions.** A set of virtual panel discussions with scholars and practitioners about the prospects of bureaucratic resistance to populism across the globe.
- **November 2021: Film Screening: What is Democracy?** An in-person screening of the film "What is Democracy?" followed by a student discussion.
- **December 2021: Democracies and International Law.** How can international law strengthen democracy in a time of rising authoritarianism? Tom Ginsburg, professor at the University of Chicago Law School, discussed this question with a set of esteemed panelists.
- **May 2022: The Democracy Series: A Conversation with Author Yascha Mounk.** As part of our jointly organized Democracy Series event, we virtually welcomed Yascha Mounk, professor at Johns Hopkins University, to discuss his book *The Great Experiment: Why Diverse Democracies Fall Apart And How They Can Endure*.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2021

BUREAUCRATIC RESISTANCE TO GLOBAL AUTOCRATIC AMBITIONS

9AM: Focus on Eastern Europe:

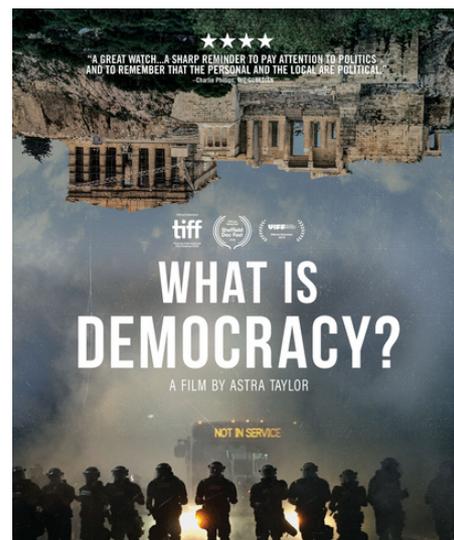
- Monika Nalepa, University of Chicago
- Barbara Maria Piotrowska, King's College London
- R. Daniel Kelemen, Rutgers University
- Tim Frye, Columbia University
- Susan Stokes, UIC

10AM: Focus on Latin America:

- Gabriela Lotta, Georgetown University
- Eduardo Dargent, University of Chicago
- Javier Corrales, University of Chicago
- Julio Rios-Figueroa, University of Chicago
- Susan Stokes, UIC

11AM: Global lessons:

- William Howell, University of Chicago
- Susan Stokes, UIC
- Walter Shaub, Princeton University



DEMOCRACIES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

DECEMBER 9, 2021

How can international law strengthen democracy in a time of rising authoritarianism? Discuss this question with Tom Ginsburg, author of the new book *Democracies and International Law*, and panelists.

- Tom Ginsburg, University of Chicago
- Karen Alter, Northwestern University
- Rob Blair, Brown University
- Hélène Landemore, Yale University
- Brad Roth, Wayne State University

DECEMBER 9, 2021
11:00AM - 12:30PM CST
(12:00PM - 1:30PM EST)
VIRTUAL EVENT

REGISTER:
DIRECT LINK HERE, OR AT
DEMOCRACY.UCHICAGO.EDU/EVENTS

DEMOCRATIC EROSION
WATSON INSTITUTE
BROWN UNIVERSITY

CHICAGO CENTER ON DEMOCRACY
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE DEMOCRACY SERIES

A Conversation with Author Yascha Mounk

Monday, May 16 | 7:00 PM CT
Virtually via Zoom

*The Great Experiment
Why Diverse Democracies
Fall Apart
and How They
Can Endure
Yascha Mounk*

Yascha Mounk
Associate Professor,
Johns Hopkins University

Moderated by
Susan Stokes
Director, Chicago Center on
Democracy

NOW UNTIL JUNE 16
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MEDIA COVERAGE

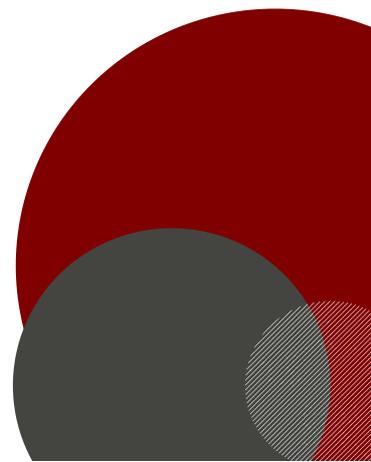
Receiving coverage in the mainstream media is one way for our center and associated individuals to expand our reach and impact. Over the past year, our team has contributed to public dialogue about democracy in many outlets.

Our Faculty Director, Susan Stokes, was interviewed and published opinions about a number of topics. These include news pieces about the war in Ukraine, reflecting on Biden's presidency, and the one-year anniversary of the January 6th Capitol insurrection:

- "The global struggle for democracy is in Ukraine" (*Project Syndicate*, March 4, 2022)
- "American democracy needs a grassroots coalition at home" (*Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 2021)
- "What anti-protest bills reveal about the state of U.S. democracy" (*WBUR's "On Point"* program, April 27, 2021)
- "January 6 laid bare our national fissures. One year later, the day's memories still divide us" (*USA Today*, January 5, 2022)
- "It's time for Democrats to break the glass" (*The Atlantic*, 1-6-22)

The findings of Bright Line Watch, the multi-university initiative to monitor U.S. democracy, based at CCD, were also referenced in many articles, such as:

- "Why many Americans might be increasingly accepting of political violence" (*FiveThirtyEight*, 1-6-22)
- "Don't despair about U.S. democracy — fix it" (*Bloomberg*, 12-23-21)
- "Republicans' belief in Trump's 'Big Lie' holds steady as confidence in U.S. elections dips" (*Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 2021)
- "A new survey provides little comfort about democracy's future" (*Washington Post*, December 16, 2021)
- "Americans and experts agree that democracy is struggling" (*FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast*, July 15, 2021)
- "47% of west coast Dems, 66% of southern Republicans want to secede from U.S." (*Newsweek*, July 14, 2021)



FUNDING

Our work is supported by external entities—including Hewlett Foundation, Democracy Fund, the Carnegie Corporation, and the United Nations Democracy Fund—as well as University of Chicago sources, including the Social Sciences Division, the Social Sciences Collegiate Division, the Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse, the University of Chicago’s Center in Paris, the Center for International Social Science Research, the College Curricular Innovation Fund, the Jeff Metcalf Fellowship Grant for Internships, UChicago Summer Match Program, and the Laboratory Schools Summer Link Internship Program.

COLLABORATORS

We collaborate with entities at the University of Chicago, other universities, and in civil society. Collaborators this year include:

University of Chicago:

- Center for Effective Government
- Center for Latin American Studies
- Institute on the Formation of Knowledge
- Laboratory Schools
- Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse
- Social Sciences Collegiate Division
- Statistics Consulting Program

Outside the University:

- American Bar Foundation
- Brown University: Democratic Erosion consortium
- Dartmouth College: Political Economy Project
- Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Seminary Co-op Bookstores
- United Nations Democracy Fund
- University of Houston: Hobby School of Public Affairs



Flyers from our series of three referendums focused on the role of referendums in Latin America, April-June, 2022



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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The vision of the Chicago Center on Democracy
is for all people to understand how democracy works
and how to strengthen democratic institutions.

We invite you to join us in working toward this vision.



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