

Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions

CSDI | 2025

CSDI was established in 2009 to support and disseminate systematic theoretical and empirical research on questions central to the health and survival of democratic institutions in the United States and abroad.

The center's current research activities focus on legislative politics and policymaking, executive politics and regulatory policymaking, elections and electoral rules, and media and democratic systems of governance.

For more information:
vanderbilt.edu/csd



VANDERBILT
Center for the Study of
Democratic Institutions

Accomplishments

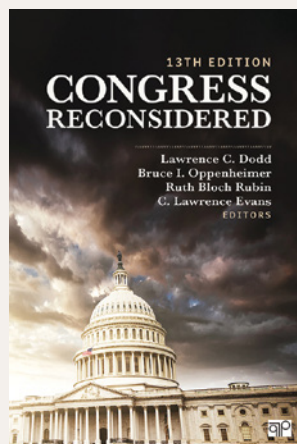
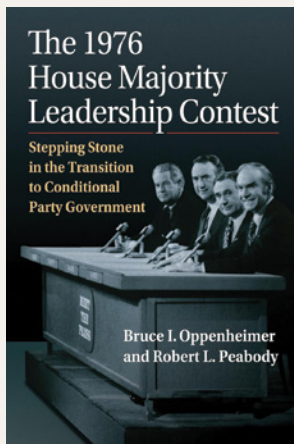
"If you done it, it ain't bragging." —Walt Whitman



CSDI co-director **Larry Bartels** was awarded a **National Medal of Science** by President Joe Biden on January 3, 2025. The National Medal of Science is the highest recognition the nation can bestow on scientists and engineers. The award recognizes Bartels' work in democratic politics, public opinion, and election science.



CSDI affiliate **Bruce Oppenheimer** is making the most out of his emeritus status. He completed two books this year *The 1976 House Leadership Contest: Stepping Stone in the Transition to Conditional Party Government*, co-authored by Robert Peabody and the 13th edition of *Congress Reconsidered*.



Former graduate alliate **Michael Shepherd** who studies U.S. Health Politics and Policy work was mentioned in "[How 'Rural Studies' Is Thinking About the Heartland.](#)"



In 2024 CSDI instituted a **new graduate student research program**. Proposals were called for and five Political Science students received training grants to help with their graduate research. The students who submitted proposals and received the inaugural grants were Lucas Borba, Hangsung Lim, Preeti Nambiar, Kaleigh Ruiz and Alec Tripp.

Community

Josh Clinton has been named a 2024 [Andrew Carnegie Foundation Fellow](#). Clinton's research will explore how political polarization in the United States has harmed public confidence in election processes and outcomes. In particular, the fellowship will support Clinton's research on the connections between public confidence in elections and election procedures, and how that relates to increasing geographic and political polarization.

Dave Lewis was awarded the APSA Presidency Section's Legacy Award for "for a living author for a book, essay, or article, published at least 10 years prior to the award, that has made a continuing contribution to the intellectual development of the fields of presidency and executive politics." He also (with Neal Devins) recently won the American Bar Association's Administrative Law and Regulatory Practice Section's 2024 Annual Scholarship Award for their article in the Cornell Law Review entitled "[The Independent Agency Myth](#)."



Jessica Trounstine's article "[What Underlies Urban Politics?](#)" (co-authored with Zoltan Hajnal), was designated as the "Featured Article of the Decade of the 2010s" by Urban Affairs Review.

Whether it's the weekly CSDI luncheon seminars, happy hours, or frequent impromptu political discussions, CSDI always offers plenty of opportunities for students, faculty and visitors to share ideas. Our weekly seminars provide a vibrant forum for presentations of new research by center affiliates and visiting scholars from across the country. Happy hours provide opportunities for more informal interactions. Our senior professors are not hidden away behind closed office doors but are part of the center's daily life, accessible and willing to listen to an idea or share a laugh.



CSDI seminar speaker
Devin Caughey, MIT



After hours fun

Last year, CSDI co-director **Sharece Thrower** and affiliates **Liz Zechmeister** and **Emily Ritter** ran a summer research opportunity program (sponsored by the National Science Foundation) for undergraduate students. CSDI co-funded the summer program in accountability, behavior, and conflict in democratic politics. The program was an 8-week immersive experience, providing students training in research methods, scientific inference, and academic writing, as well as opportunities for networking, career development, and independent and collaborative research.



In January of this year Larry Bartels hosted a **book workshop** on *Parties on the Ground* a forthcoming book by 2013-14 CSDI visitor **John Zaller** and co-authors. Participants included CSDI faculty and students as well as guest commentators Hans Hassell and Gary Jacobson.

In February 2025 CSDI faculty affiliate and Center for Effective Lawmaking Co-Director **Alan Wiseman** hosted a conference focused on legislative effectiveness in American state legislatures. Scholars from across the country were in attendance to present their work and give feedback on this timely topic.

One of the most notable ways that CSDI has helped to inform the debate over contemporary political issues is through its support of the **Vanderbilt Poll**. The goal of the project is to provide a nonpartisan and scientifically based reading of public opinion within the state of Tennessee. The primary aim is to measure accurately what Tennesseans think about important state issues, and then make that information available to citizens, policymakers, and scholars. All the current and past Vanderbilt polls can be viewed at vanderbilt.edu/csdi/vupoll-home.php.



SVS Scott Abramson and Seth Masket

CSDI hosted four **Senior visiting scholars** for the 2024 -2025 academic year. Scott Abramson (University of Rochester) and Seth Masket (University of Denver) pictured here were in house for the entire year. While Miguel Rueda (Emory) was here for the fall and Alexandra Filindra (University of Illinois, Chicago) visited for the spring semester.

This year CSDI had 5 graduate affiliates and hosted two early career scholars. Postdoc Rachel Lienesch is finishing up her second year in residence and will be leaving us in the fall for a tenure-track position at Indiana University. Ryan Baxter-King is completing his PhD at the University of California Los Angeles and has accepted a tenure-track position at the University of Nevada, Reno.



Front row – graduate affiliates Patrick Buhr, Kaleigh Ruiz and post-doc Rachel Lienesch. Back row – graduate affiliates Aaron Clark, Collette Marcellin, Shelby Shumard and Ryan Baxter-King

Graduate affiliates range in tenure from first year Ph.D, students through advanced degree candidates. The topics of their research and other projects are closely related to research foci of CSDI. They work closely with at least one CSDI co-director, are invited to all CSDI sponsored events, and have numerous opportunities for research promotion and support. Currently we have 5 graduate affiliates. Only one affiliate is leaving us this year. Shelby Shumard is headed to Charleston South Carolina to work with the Riley Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston.

In the last several years CSDI has made a commitment to increasing undergraduate research opportunities.

This year CSDI sent three undergraduate researchers, **Kai Keltner, Andrew Kyung** and **Lily York**, to the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association in San Juan, Puerto Rico. They presented their independent research on presidential transitions, presidential appointments and the role of the attorney general on three excellent panels. All three presentations were well received. Next step publication!

For the second consecutive year, a CSDI independent study was offered for undergraduates to work on projects using the data collected from the annual Vanderbilt Polls. The inaugural session was taught by past graduate affiliate Sara Kirshbaum and this year's was led by graduate affiliate Colette Marcellin. Students learned how to analyze survey data in R, conduct public opinion research, and write their own research briefs and reports. Students' final projects included reports on topics such as the relationship between gender, parenthood, and gun policy opinions, and the policy differences between MAGA and non-MAGA Republicans.

The Center is rolling out a formal undergraduate research program where a graduate student research coordinator will work with interested undergrads and pair them with faculty, post docs and graduate affiliates who have projects that relate to their individual interests and strengths.

Graduate affiliate Patrick Buhr is hosting an undergraduate research fair in March to introduce upcoming research opportunities.



Election 2024

"The County has to awaken every now and then to the fact that the people are responsible for the government they get, Truman wrote."

— Jon Meacham, *The Soul of America: The Battle for our Better Angels.*

On October 8th CSDI brought political analyst Nate Silver to campus. He had a busy day, meeting with the Dialogue Vanderbilt student advisory board and faculty from political science, economics, and public policy. That afternoon there was a public event, "Forecasting the 2024 Presidential Election," which attracted over 500 attendees.

On December 1st CSDI hosted "**Election 2024: How Trump won**". The panel was emceed by department chair and CSDI co-director John Sides and included Molly Ball, Senior Political Correspondent at the Wall Street Journal, Seth Masket, CSDI SVS and Professor of Political Science at the University of Denver, Tasha Philpot, Professor of Government at UT Austin and Amy Walter, publisher and editor of the Cook Political Report.

FORECASTING THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



NATE SILVER
Author of
"On the Edge"
American statistician

Tuesday, October 8
5:00 P.M.
Student Life Center

Silver's latest book,
On the Edge,
will be available for
purchase and signing
following the event.



CSDI co-directors Josh Clinton and John Geer along with Jon Meacham and Nicole Hemmer co-taught the largest class ever offered at Vanderbilt. With just under 1,100 students this U.S. Elections course had some amazing guest speakers visit the class including Walter Isaacson, Mitch McConnell, David Axelrod, and Nancy Pelosi.

CSDI co-director Josh Clinton once again spent election night working on NBC's decision desk. He currently serves as a Senior Election Analyst and helped lead the team responsible for calling state and federal elections in 2024. He has been with NBC News since 2010.

Due to their electoral expertise CSDI co-directors, affiliates and visitors received extensive local and national media coverage during the election. Pictured below is CSDI SVS Seth Masket appearing on CNN shortly after the election.



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