

FREE

VOICES INTO VOTES

FALL 2026 PROGRAM SERIES

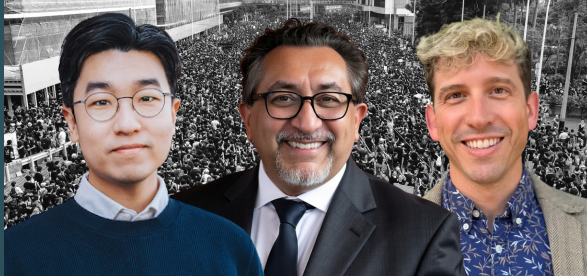
WHY TURNOUT MATTERS HERE, THERE, AND NOW



PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION: SOCIAL MEDIA, PODCASTS, AI, AND CABLE NEWS
WITH DAVID DOWLING AND ALEX SCOTT, UI SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2026 | 6:00-7:30 P.M. | IOWA CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY



As the high-stakes 2026 election cycle unfolds, political persuasion is becoming more sophisticated - and harder to recognize. Alex Scott and David Dowling examine how AI-generated deepfakes, social media algorithms, podcasts, and cable news can blur reality, intensify partisan division, profile voters, and sort audiences into separate information worlds. Drawing on their research in visual media, political communication, and digital culture, they will show how manipulative images, video, audio, and rhetoric are produced and circulated. You will gain practical strategies for evaluating sources, identifying synthetic media and extremist messaging, and making voting decisions based on credible information rather than fabricated narratives.



DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING: WHAT IS IT, HOW DOES IT IMPACT ELECTIONS, HOW CAN IT BE STOPPED?
WITH SEONGJOON AHN (UIOWA), GERARDO BERTHIN (FREEDOM HOUSE), WAYDE MARSH (UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE)
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2026 | 6:00-7:30 P.M. | IOWA CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY



As the 2026 U.S. midterm elections approach, Gerardo Berthin, Seongjoon Ahn, and Wayde Marsh examine democratic backsliding around the world and its direct and indirect effects on electoral integrity, voter participation, political norms, and public trust. They will define democratic backsliding, identify common tactics and warning signs, and compare examples from the U.S. and other democracies. Explore how democratic erosion can alter the conduct and outcomes of elections, as well as strategies for preventing and reversing these trends. You will gain a comparative understanding of what democratic backsliding looks like in practice and what citizens, institutions, and communities can do to defend and restore democratic processes.



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS & THE BALLOT: COVERING ELECTIONS AROUND THE WORLD
FEATURING INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTS FROM THE 2026 WORLD PRESS INSTITUTE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026 | 11:30 A.M.-1:00 P.M. | IOWA CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY



How do reporters hold power to account when elections are surrounded by propaganda, misinformation, and intense political pressure? International journalists participating in the 2026 World Press Institute fellowship will share firsthand experiences covering elections in their home countries. The panel will explore the role of independent media during tense electoral periods, the pressures journalists face, and the challenges of protecting press freedom while providing the public with accurate and useful information. You will gain a global perspective on the relationship between journalism and democracy, and guidance for evaluating election coverage and recognizing unreliable information.



WHO VOTES, WHO DOES NOT, AND WHY?
WITH CAROLINE TOLBERT, UI DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2026 | 6:00 P.M.-7:30 P.M. | IOWA CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY



Drawing on research from the United States and other democracies, Caroline Tolbert shares how electoral rules, voting laws, demographics, and political trust, partisanship, and other factors shape participation and representation. Explore how the U.S. two-party system influences whether voters feel they have meaningful choices, how closed primary elections affect nearly 30 million Americans who identify as independents in states that restrict their participation, and which election laws strengthen voter participation, election administration, confidence in outcomes - and which may create barriers. You will learn about election policies, proposed reforms, and how these factors impact participation, and tradeoffs between election integrity and ballot access.



FUTUREPROOFING DEMOCRACY: TOWARDS HOPEFUL & ACHIEVABLE ELECTIONS IN THE US
BARRY BURDEN (UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON), JULIE PERSONS (JC AUDITOR), AND CAROLINE TOLBERT (UIOWA)
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2026 | 6:00 P.M.-7:30 P.M. | UI OLD CAPITOL SENATE CHAMBERS



In the final program of the fall series, Professor Barry Burden examines the U.S. election system and offers a hopeful, practical vision for protecting election integrity, building trust in the nation's decentralized electoral system, and ensuring access for all eligible voters. He will explore the importance of increasing civic engagement, strengthening representation, and promoting political accountability. Following the presentation, he will join Professor Caroline Tolbert and Johnson County Auditor Julie Persons for a discussion of how clear-eyed, actionable, and optimistic approaches can strengthen democratic norms and increase voter confidence. Together, we consider why this vision requires a broad coalition spanning political and ideological perspectives.

THE IOWA CITY FOREIGN RELATIONS COUNCIL PRESENTS THE FALL '26 SERIES, VOICES INTO VOTES: WHY TURNOUT MATTERS HERE, THERE, AND NOW.

Turnout is more than a number. It shapes whose voices are heard, whose interests are represented, and how public power is exercised. ICFRC invites you to a five-part series exploring the forces that influence whether people vote - and whether elections earn public trust. Conversations about disinformation, democratic backsliding, press freedom, voting access, and election reform, with scholars and international journalists will connect the 2026 U.S. election cycle with lessons from democracies around the world.



SCAN TO REGISTER

