

**The Stavros Niarchos Foundation
SNF Agora Institute
AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY**



**FISCAL YEAR 2025
ANNUAL REPORT**



Top left: The SNF Agora Institute has joined efforts with Chatham House, a world-leading policy institute, to support pluralistic coalitions.

Top right: SNF Agora's new building will be a community center, a hub of research and activity, and a homebase for faculty and scholars.

Bottom left: As part of the Introduction to Civic Life course, students participated in a walking tour through blocks of a West Baltimore neighborhood enhanced by local organizing and active civic engagement.

Bottom right: The Civic Thought Project's May 2025 conference brought together policymakers, philanthropists, and scholars from over 50 universities to discuss the current revival of university-level civic education. The project's board includes Christopher S. Celenza, James B. Knapp Dean of the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, as well as several Krieger School and SNF Agora faculty members.

Front cover: The 2024 Democracy Day, which encourages first-year students to embrace civic participation, included new faculty-led workshops and enjoyed its biggest participation numbers yet.

DEAR SNF AGORA INSTITUTE COMMUNITY,

Over the past year, our community expanded the reach and impact of the SNF Agora Institute. We built on our long tradition of creating *agoras* where people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives come together to learn from one another and take part in the work of pluralistic democracy. Through partnerships, research, teaching, and public engagement, we advanced our mission and found new ways to connect democratic ideals with everyday action.

These collaborations included the launch of a flagship debate series with *Open to Debate*, a nationally recognized platform for public discourse; ongoing efforts with Chatham House to support pluralistic coalitions; and a dynamic virtual event produced through the SNF Agora Dialogues series. At the heart of our success is the close partnership we maintain with our academic home, the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences. This positions us to foster meaningful connections and strengthen joint initiatives, including longstanding work with the American Enterprise Institute.

We continued to engage with the undergraduate community and to invest in the next generation of civic leaders. This year's Democracy Day brought our largest turnout yet, offering first-year students the chance to explore civic participation through faculty-led conversations and workshops. Across the academic year, we offered 29 unique courses that guided students through personal and intellectual explorations of democracy in its many forms. We also welcomed postdoctoral and predoctoral scholars through the SNF Agora Academy, supporting them at critical stages in their academic development.

Our research underpins every aspect of this work. This year, SNF Agora faculty received national recognition for their contributions, earning prestigious awards and accolades for newly published books. The number of high-level consultations and public presentations they delivered, including engagements with institutions at the highest levels of government around the world, reflects the trust placed in our expertise and the relevance of our scholarship in the broader world.

We remain committed to discovery, design, and dialogue in service of productive participation and leadership in democracy. I am grateful to each member of our SNF Agora community for the energy and thoughtfulness everyone brings to this work. I especially want to thank Amy Binder, who led the institute as interim director with wisdom and care during the fall 2024 semester.

As we look ahead, we will continue to face new challenges, but I remain confident that our shared values and dedication will enable us to meet what comes next with creativity, empathy, and resolve.



Hahrie Han

Inaugural Director of the SNF Agora Institute

DISCOVERY

Discovery spans a wide range of scholarly activities at the SNF Agora Institute, including research, teaching, and outreach. Individuals associated with the SNF Agora Institute pursued lines of inquiry on some of the most pressing questions facing our global community. They shared their learning with others, creating a flow of knowledge that advanced the work of SNF Agora and the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences.

SNF Agora faculty remained at the top of their field throughout the past year. With the addition of Ruth Braunstein, the institute now has 15 core faculty members. This year alone, our faculty members won Carnegie and Guggenheim fellowships, traveled the globe to inform efforts to strengthen democracy, and spoke and wrote publicly in mass media outlets, academic journals, and elsewhere to shape the public conversation.

Through the SNF Agora Academy, we trained the next generation of scholars, researchers, and practitioners. Last year, 49 graduate and undergraduate students served as student fellows, along with eight postdoctoral fellows. Our visiting fellows program was an integral part of our programming, bringing 11 practitioners from a wide variety of fields who worked on projects and informed the work and educational efforts of SNF Agora.

The SNF Agora community extends throughout Johns Hopkins University, the Krieger School, and beyond. Twenty-one faculty affiliates from institutions such as Georgetown University, University College London, and the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México bring a wide range of specialties and experiences that inform SNF Agora's work. Eight faculty grants were awarded across three schools, enabling Hopkins faculty to pursue research and other activities that addressed key issues for democracy.

In the section that follows, we share just a few highlights from the Discovery pillar of SNF Agora during the last year.

DISCOVERY 2024-25

CORE FACULTY SCHOLARLY IMPACT*



15 total tenure-line faculty



3
books



33
academic articles
& book chapters



16
awards &
fellowships

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION



289
accepted speaking engagements



42
podcasts/media appearances



55
expert engagements
(strategy consults,
advisor invitations, etc.)

PUBLIC PARTNERS

A wide range of civil society and governmental organizations and leaders in the U.S., Asia, Australia, Europe, and Latin America sought expert advice and partnership with SNF Agora Institute faculty, including:



10 DOWNING STREET

*Totals based on the work of core faculty active in AY 2024-45.

A growing academic community

MEET THE NEWEST CORE FACULTY MEMBER

Sociologist **Ruth Braunstein** is the newest core faculty member of the SNF Agora Institute. Her work focuses on taxation, moral resistance, and religious communities, adding valuable dimensions to the institute's commitment to promoting informed, inclusive dialogue across political and ideological divides.

Braunstein's current work spans several projects, including her podcast series *When the Wolves Came: Evangelicals Resisting Extremism*, her newest book, *My Tax Dollars: The Morality of Taxpaying in America*, and her ongoing research initiative, the Meanings of Democracy Lab. Through each of these projects, Braunstein explores ways ordinary citizens interact with democracy.



“The people fighting for pluralistic democracy are incredibly diverse, including liberals and conservatives. It’s not a left-right divide anymore; it’s ‘do you support democracy or not?’”

Ruth Braunstein, Professor of Sociology, SNF Agora Institute

Faculty grants at work

A DASHBOARD FOR DEMOCRACY

SNF Agora faculty grant recipients work to create new knowledge and new real-world tools. In 2024, **Adam Sheingate**, a Krieger School political science professor, received an SNF Agora faculty grant to launch the Election Spending Dashboard. Sheingate developed the dashboard with an undergraduate research team at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Data Intensive Science and Engineering, the SNF Agora Institute, and the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences.

The dashboard provides easy-to-navigate public access to federal records that track campaign and committee expenditures supporting the U.S.'s two main political parties. To do so, the tool deploys machine learning across six million expenditure records reported to the Federal Election Commission. The tool makes public spending more transparent and offers new insight into how and why different parties choose to allocate funds.



“By following the money, we gain key insights into the structure and strategies of modern political campaigns.”

Adam Sheingate, Professor of Political Science, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, as quoted in the November 4, 2024 HUB.

SNF Agora faculty achievements

CRITICAL ACCLAIM AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Throughout the last year, SNF Agora faculty earned honors and awards for their work.

- **Anne Applebaum**, senior fellow at the SNF Agora Institute and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, was awarded the 2024 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade for her writings.
- **Hahrie Han**, Inaugural Director of the SNF Agora Institute and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Professor of Political Science, had her book *Undivided* named a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2024 and included in *The New Yorker's* Recommended Books of 2024. She was also named one of D.C.'s 500 most influential people by *Washingtonian* magazine in the category of Voting Rights and Election Law.

- **Martha Jones**, Society of Black Alumni Presidential Professor, Professor of History, and Professor at the SNF Agora Institute, received a 2025 Guggenheim Fellowship for her achievements in history.

- **Dawn Teele**, SNF Agora Institute Associate Professor of Political Science, was awarded a 2025 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship for her work on gender-based political preferences.

SNF Agora senior fellows reach a broad audience

In partnership with *The Atlantic*, SNF Agora produced the *Autocracy in America* podcast, designed to excavate a central premise: "Authoritarian tactics are already at work in the U.S. To root them out, you have to know where to look." This five-part series features SNF Agora senior fellows Anne Applebaum and Peter Pomerantsev as co-hosts. Applebaum, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and historian, and Pomerantsev, an expert on information warfare and propaganda, bring deep experience to the conversation and guide listeners through the complexities of democratic decline.

Across the series, the co-hosts identified vulnerabilities in U.S. democracy and showed clear signs of its erosion. They interviewed election officials, former members of Congress, disinformation scholars, and a former national security advisor. Through these conversations, they explained what has happened, why it matters, and how to protect democracy moving forward.



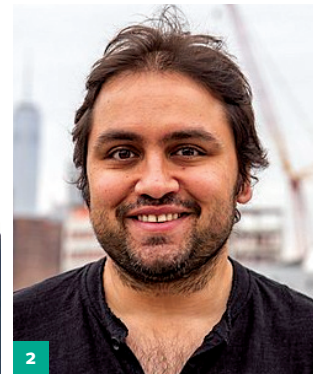
Visiting fellows expand the SNF Agora community

Eleven visiting fellows were part of the SNF Agora community during the last year. Ranging from artists and activists to playwrights, tech designers, and naval officers, they brought diverse perspectives and experiences to the institute. As members of the SNF Agora, Krieger School, and Johns Hopkins communities, they created webinars, facilitated workshops, and taught courses to undergraduate and graduate students, enriching the Hopkins environment throughout the year while completing work on their projects.

THE 2024-2025 SNF AGORA VISITING FELLOWS

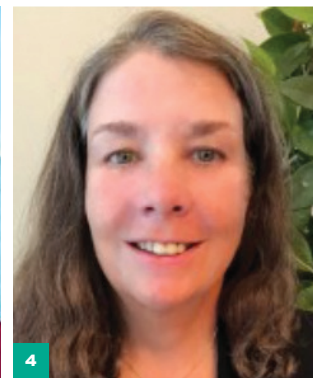
1. ADAM AMBROGI, chief of external affairs at the League of Women Voters

Advanced strategies to strengthen trust in U.S. elections by drawing on his legal expertise and national leadership in voter engagement.



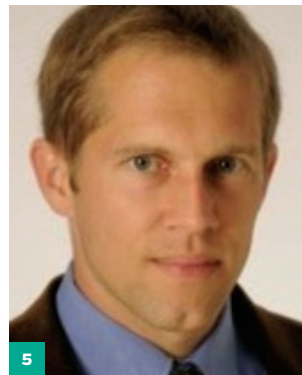
2. AMAR BAKSHI, founder of Whose Metaverse and Shared Studios

Explored how immersive digital spaces and artistic practice can promote civic dialogue across divides, connecting communities through technology and storytelling.



3. JEAN PARVIN BORDEWICH, playwright and former senior congressional staff member

Developed *Electionland*, a historical play about the 1876 U.S. election, as a civic education tool to help high school students understand the Electoral College and contested elections.



4. LEILA BRAMMER, director of outreach and instructional development at the University of Chicago's Parrhesia Public Thought and Discourse program

Designed civic discourse frameworks for higher education, creating curricula that promote inclusive, evidence-based dialogue on campus and in public life.

5. THEO DOLAN, democracy and governance senior advisor at BBC Media Action and board member at Media Literacy Now

Led efforts to counter digital threats to democracy by designing media literacy initiatives that address hate speech and disinformation through global partnerships.

6. ERHARDT GRAEFF, associate professor at Olin College of Engineering and faculty associate at Harvard University's Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Ethics

Researched how engineers can support democratic values by integrating public interest technology and civic responsibility into undergraduate education.

7. JOSEPH M. HATFIELD, retired naval intelligence officer and assistant professor at the U.S. Naval Academy

Examined the ethical and operational dimensions of cybersecurity and national security education, informed by his military service and academic teaching.

8. SEEMA D. IYER, senior director of The Hive Innovation Lab at USA for United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

Applied data science to global displacement and urban migration by developing tools that raise awareness about refugee communities and promote inclusive innovation.

9. MAYA ROCKEYMOORE CUMMINGS, founder, president, and CEO of Global Policy Solutions and a former nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution

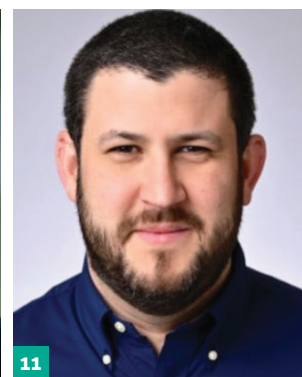
Developed strategies to advance equity and civic empowerment, building on her policy leadership in economic justice and social change.

10. STEFANIE SANFORD, president of civic ventures at Alithi Consulting and Humanitae Philanthropy Advisors and board chair of the Institute for Citizens & Scholars

Began writing *The Right Flank*, a book exploring the role and value of conservatives in left-leaning institutions, drawing on her decades of experience in public service and philanthropy.

11. DAVID SMOLANSKY, deputy director of foreign affairs for Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado and president of the Miranda Center for Democracy

Led research and advocacy on the role of diaspora communities in defending democracy, informed by his experience as an exiled mayor and international envoy.



Dissident in Residence

VENEZUELAN MAYOR BECOMES A HUMAN RIGHTS LEADER



David Smolansky was serving as mayor of El Hatillo, a municipality in Caracas, Venezuela, when his commitment to addressing human rights violations and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country led him to play a key role in nonviolent protests against the country's dictatorship. As a result, he was removed from office, banned from voting, and forced into exile.

Exile did not stop Smolansky from continuing to fight for democratic values or from serving his country. He led a diaspora movement across 77 cities around the world to vote in the opposition's 2023 primary election. He founded and serves as president of the Miranda Center for Democracy. He also serves as the deputy director of foreign affairs for the Venezuelan opposition leader.

Top: SNF Agora – RDI Dissident in Residence
David Smolansky played a key role in nonviolent protests in his home country of Venezuela.

As the 2024–2025 SNF Agora - RDI Dissident in Residence, a role created in partnership with the Renew Democracy Initiative, Smolansky provided the community with a one-of-a-kind opportunity to learn from individuals engaged in real-time fights for democracy. During his time at SNF Agora, Smolansky enriched our work and continued to build his efforts to fight for his own human, political, and civic rights and those of all people.

“We are facing a dictatorship that has stayed in power through force, repression, and corruption. But this isn’t just about one country. What happens in Venezuela sets a precedent for democracy worldwide.”

David Smolansky, 2024–2025 SNF Agora - RDI Dissident in Residence, as quoted in the February 25, 2025 HUB.

SNF Agora Academy

CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCHOLARS



The SNF Agora Academy cultivates the next generation of scholars who carry forward the values, approaches, and intellectual rigor of the SNF Agora Institute. It consists of two programs: one focused on postdoctoral fellows and one on predoctoral scholars who have yet to pursue their PhDs. As the program continues to grow, these fellows will build a cohort of SNF Agora Academy graduates who will carry the imprint of the SNF Agora Institute into their work for years to come.

The SNF Agora Academy 2024-2025 predoctoral fellows.

FEATURED SNF AGORA ACADEMY FELLOW: MAYA JENKINS

Maya Jenkins joined the SNF Agora Academy as a predoctoral fellow for the 2024-25 academic year with a clear purpose. She brought a deep commitment to serving marginalized communities through not only scholarship but direct engagement. SNF Agora offered the environment she was looking for to expand her capacities for conducting research that met the twin goals of relevance and rigor.

During her fellowship, Maya worked with the P3 Lab under the direction of Hahrie Han, collaborating with researchers and community organizers in California. She saw firsthand how rigorous scholarship can support communities rather than extract from them. That approach aligned with her values. “That’s what community-engaged research should do. It should serve,” she said.

Maya also formed close connections with the other predoctoral fellows in her cohort. They supported one another, shared skills, and helped each other grow. Together, they learned how to work with faculty, refine research practices, and navigate complex academic environments. The SNF Agora Academy gave Maya space to reflect on her goals and strengthen her commitment to the communities she intends to serve. It helped her stay grounded in her values while preparing for what comes next.

Maya began her PhD at Brown University in the fall of 2025, ready to carry forward her experience and her conviction for social change.

Adapted from Voices from the Agora: Predoctoral Fellow Maya Jenkins Creates Pathways Between Academia and Community



“We often think change only comes from big, dramatic moments. But it also shows up in the small stuff. Union meetings, neighborhood organizing, conversations in barbershops, and online discussions. That’s where democracy lives too.”

Maya Jenkins, SNF Agora Academy predoctoral fellow

A focus on undergraduates

As the academic home for the SNF Agora Institute, the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences partners with the institute in many ways to support the undergraduate student experience. Through this investment, innovative programming, important resources, and research-based insights are available for the undergraduate community to engage in meaningful ways with the work of the institute. These include a minor in civic life, a BA in Moral and Political Economy, opportunities to take a range of courses taught by SNF Agora faculty, unique workshops and events hosted by visiting fellows, and more.

HIGHLIGHTS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SNF AGORA WORK FROM THE PAST YEAR INCLUDE:

The **2024 Democracy Day** marked the largest and most expansive version of the annual program to date. Designed to give incoming first-year students a strong foundation in civic engagement, the day featured eight hours of programming, including pop-up seminars, a new Democracy 101 session, and an interactive workshop on civic dialogue skills led by SNF Agora Inaugural Director Hahrie Han.



Above: The 2024 Democracy Day featured 22 faculty-led workshops.

Opposite top: Ray Jayawardhana, provost of the university, presented remarks to the incoming class during the 2024 Democracy Day programming, which engaged 1,400 first-year students.

The SNF Agora Institute played a central role in the fall **2024 Hopkins Semester D.C.**, which brought a cohort of students, the Bernstein Family Fellows, to the nation's capital for a one-of-a-kind learning experience. Centered around the theme "The American Presidential Election in Historical Context," SNF Agora faculty Leah Wright Rigueur and Louis Hyman facilitated the Bernstein Family Fellows in meeting with a diverse range of political leaders and commentators to learn about the U.S. democratic process in real time.



Above: Visiting Fellow Leila Brammer led a spring 2024 workshop on political discourse.

Opposite bottom: One of the highlights of the fall 2024 Hopkins Semester D.C. was a behind-the-scenes take on diplomacy and democracy with Vassilis Coutifaris, senior officer at the EU Delegation to the U.S. and Hopkins alumnus.



Cultivating connection 101

One unique opportunity available to undergraduates at Hopkins is the chance to take one-time intersession courses with SNF Agora visiting fellows. Last winter, a group of students had the opportunity to learn and work with **Leila Brammer**, a visiting fellow with more than 20 years of experience in fostering community engagement and dialogue.

The course, titled Cultivate a Culture of Connection: Transforming Communities and Civic Participation, invited students to explore ways to strengthen community ties and enhance civic life in meaningful, everyday ways. To investigate the topic, students examined case studies and theoretical models that highlighted thriving community problem-solving efforts.

By the end of the course, students had a toolkit for practical activism and the ability and support to effect change in their workplaces, communities, and personal or professional relationships.

“Put down your phone and look up. Talk to your bus driver, your barista, or the person in the hallway. These small engagements have a significant impact on our well-being and help us feel seen as part of a community.”

Leila Brammer, 2024-2025 SNF Agora Visiting Fellow, offering advice on cultivating connections, as quoted in the December 6, 2024 HUB.

A new major for a new generation of problem solvers

Today’s complex world involves approaching problems from not just one angle, but many. The newly formed **BA in Moral and Political Economy (MPE)**, an interdisciplinary major offered through SNF Agora’s Center for Economy and Society, inspires students to address challenges broadly, considering comprehensive solutions.

The major is unique. While it has a structured pathway of required coursework to ensure a cohesive experience, it also provides flexibility for students to pursue their interests and to work on solving a problem that is meaningful to them. After completing the foundational courses, students meet with faculty to identify a focus area and take nine electives to support this work. Topics can include borders and migration, land and environment, finance and trade, or other areas proposed by the student.

A dozen students have enrolled in the program, and others have expressed interest. Faculty teaching courses include historians, sociologists, political economists, and postdoctoral fellows.



Students take notes in Social Theories of Economy, a required course for the major that provides an intensive introduction to writings that situate economic life in its historical, political, ethical, and philosophical contexts.

SNF Agora student voices

Adapted from the “Voices from the Agora” series at snf.agora.edu



Arnav Koppala is a junior who participated in the fall 2024 Hopkins Semester in D.C. and the Introduction to Civic Life course. He plans to pursue a career in public service and leadership, and he credits the classes he took through SNF Agora with helping to lay a strong foundation for his future.

“Agora has taught me that politics isn’t black and white. It’s all shades of gray. And it is through exploring those nuances that we truly make progress. Every class I’ve taken through SNF Agora feels like it is preparing me to connect with my community, understand their needs, and translate those into actionable policy.”

Arnav Koppala, Class of 2027

Natalie Bernstein is a double major in political science and psychology who has declared a minor in civic life. She is also the Secretary of State for a Hopkins student group called IDEAL, which hosts speaker events and roundtable discussions on timely issues. She has become involved with SNF Agora and took the course Democratic Erosion as a first-year student.

“Sometimes people think that those who think differently than them either don’t care, want people to suffer, or are just oppositional or contrarian. It’s important to show people what they have in common.”

Natalie Bernstein, Class of 2027



Rachel Fink began engaging with SNF Agora as a sophomore and ultimately served as a student worker for the institute, crafting newsletters, managing events, and designing the website. As part of the five-year BA/MA program between Johns Hopkins and SAIS, she is now in the final year of her master’s studies in international relations. She credits her experiences with SNF Agora for deepening her university experience and guiding her future goals.

“In a lot of my coursework, I saw growing international polarization without a strong discourse surrounding effective strategies for reconciliation and unity. SNF Agora offered something notably different: a focus on dialogue, understanding diverse perspectives, and finding practical paths forward.”

Rachel Fink, A&S '25

Aron Einbinder is pursuing a dual degree program: a Bachelor of Music in Trumpet from the Peabody Institute and a Bachelor of Arts in Moral and Political Economy. He is active with SNF Agora, which helped guide and inform his work as a paid intern for a city council campaign.

“If you are not willing to have your mind changed to some extent, it’s hard to have a productive conversation.”

Aron Einbinder, Class of 2027

DESIGN

Through Design, SNF Agora translated academic research into usable knowledge for the world. Through faculty research labs, communities of practice, case studies, and more, SNF Agora partnered with practitioners to identify, examine, and co-create actionable solutions to pressing public problems.

This year, SNF Agora hosted seven active labs. SNF Agora faculty administered these projects, working with a range of collaborators, including students, Johns Hopkins and external faculty, community members, and practitioners. Each lab addressed a specific challenge, from connecting citizens with modern *agoras*, to grappling with complex histories to inform the present, to studying the interplay of economics, politics, and culture, to creating best practices for overcoming disinformation.

SNF Agora's four communities of practice offered another way to engage a wide range of stakeholders in creating and applying knowledge. These communities brought together teams to carry out defined projects, such as developing a conservative pro-democracy agenda or creating coursework focused on the relationship between democracy and health.

Through case studies, reports, and other publications, SNF Agora also disseminated its work widely to a range of public audiences.

DESIGN 2024-25

7 FACULTY LABS



The Arena Project



**Business Innovation and
Governance in Asia (BIGA)**



**Center for
Economy & Society**



Hard Histories



**Mapping the
Modern Agora**



P3 Lab



**Political
Violence Lab**

4 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE



**CLIMB/Global Commonwealth
Leadership Institute (in partnership with
the Wales and UK District Health Board)**



**Creating a Conservative
Pro-Democracy Agenda
(in partnership with R Street)**



**Health and Democracy (in partnership
with the Johns Hopkins Schools of Nursing,
Medicine, and Public Health)**



**New Pluralists Collaborative
(in partnership with a number
of other organizations)**

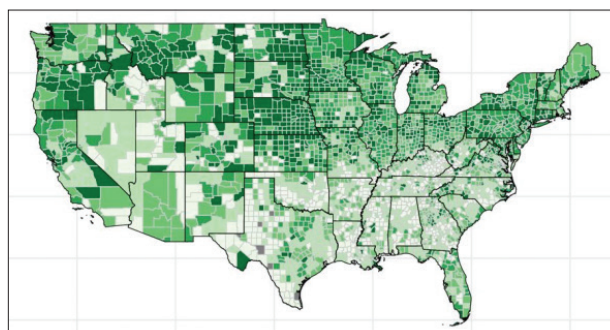
An atlas for engagement: MAPPING THE MODERN AGORA

In many parts of the U.S., people have limited access to the civic spaces that make democracy possible. A project from the P3 Lab at the SNF Agora Institute mapped those spaces. Published in *Nature Human Behaviour*, the work identified more than 560,000 organizations that provided opportunities for civic engagement, offering a clearer view of how Americans come together in community life.

The team began with IRS data on 1.8 million nonprofit organizations, then layered in information from more than 1 million websites and the U.S. Census to identify where civic opportunities are created. They found that local religious and social-fraternal groups remained the most common sources of civic connection, especially in places where other political outlets are limited.

The map revealed clear patterns of inequality. Communities that are wealthier, whiter, and more educated tended to have more civic infrastructure

than those with higher poverty or greater racial diversity. “You can’t fix what you can’t see,” Hahrie Han, inaugural director of the SNF Agora Institute states. This new tool helps make civic life visible so that people, researchers, and policymakers can begin to strengthen it.



The Civic Opportunity Index, pictured, ranks counties on the basis of their cumulative civic opportunity scores per capita. Low civic opportunities are shaded in white and higher civic opportunities are shaded in green.

Civic engagement with a focus on economics: CENTER FOR ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

The Center for Economy and Society (CES) Lab is focused on reinvigorating core debates about the political economy with a strong focus on generative disagreement and productive discourse. The center is one of a number of interrelated initiatives being funded by the Hewlett Foundation and Omidyar Network, aiming to establish academic centers dedicated to reimagining the relationships among markets, governments, and citizens.

The CES is able to accomplish this work through a variety of modes. Main areas of exploration are led by several core faculty members of SNF Agora, and include topics such as AI and the Economy, wherein faculty delve into how artificial intelligence is redefining economic landscapes; U.S.-China and the World, with scholars navigating the complexities of global economic

leadership; and Poverty and Development, which tackles the root causes of poverty with fresh insights. Through exploring these and other topics with new lenses and reframed conversations, the CES is accomplishing novel work and leading fresh lines of scholarly insight.

Education and connection are also core parts of CES work. The center hosts monthly district dinners, bringing journalists, researchers, think-tankers, and policymakers together for salon-style dinner conversations—during the last fiscal year, they hosted 19 in total. CES also prioritizes education efforts, playing a major role in the new bachelor’s degree in moral and political economy, hosting two undergraduate internships, and offering nine courses to benefit the student body at Hopkins during the last year.

What happens next?

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE LEAD TO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Communities of practice represented a diverse group of projects. The CLIMB partnership works with the National Health Service in the United Kingdom to improve civic leadership for health. The New Pluralists Collaborative puts pluralism into action. The Creating a Conservative Pro-Democracy Agenda group travels the nation to collect input and create solutions. And the Health and Democracy community is firmly set in the city of Baltimore, working to harness the expertise and leadership of faculty at Johns Hopkins Medicine to examine the interrelationships of health and democracy.

Across these different goals, the communities have one thing in common: actionable recommendations. After

gathering data, collecting insights from participants, and workshopping ideas and plans, the communities of practice seek to co-create solutions that bring the expertise of scholars and practitioners together.

Our case studies are another important output, and many are fueled by the work of the communities of practice. Eleven case studies have been created thus far, covering a wide range of topics that allow readers to learn in-depth from the work of SNF Agora scholars. These pieces have been downloaded across the globe, at an array of universities, and are publicly accessible to all.

What is a Practitioner in Residence?

This year, SNF Agora welcomed its first Distinguished Practitioner in Residence: former Maryland Representative John Sarbanes. Sarbanes has an extensive background in public service and democratic engagement. He served in the U.S. Congress for 18 years and has championed causes including increasing access to voting, reducing gerrymandering, and making running for political office more feasible for more candidates.

As the Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, Representative Sarbanes brought his experience to the work of the SNF Agora faculty and students, finding new ways to embody the verb practice in his work with the institute. Who better to guide students and academics in their hands-on efforts than someone who has spent his entire career working directly to strengthen democracy? For a student wondering how to turn an idea into real policy, or a faculty member with strong data pointing to necessary action, the Practitioner in Residence bridges the gap between words on paper and action in the halls of government.



“If we don’t figure out how to talk to each other with respect and humility, there’s no way to fix our democracy.”

John Sarbanes, Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, SNF Agora Institute, as quoted in the January 13, 2025 HUB.

Putting debate and dialogue center stage

Many people hear the word *debate* and immediately think of conflict and contentiousness. The SNF Agora Institute seeks to reframe that perception by showing how debate and dialogue can serve as interactive learning experiences that bring people together rather than drive them apart.

The Krieger School has a deep commitment to this model and provides a strong foundation for SNF Agora to build upon. Over the past year, the institute has leveraged existing partnerships and strengths both within the Krieger School and beyond to create a growing series of inclusive and diverse debates and related events.

These programs welcomed a broad range of perspectives and encouraged participants to listen, reflect, and learn in shared spaces of inquiry and exchange.

A centerpiece of this effort is the Hopkins Forum, a new debate series launched in partnership with *Open to Debate*, a leading nonpartisan media platform. The series will host eight debates over two years, alternating between the Hopkins Bloomberg Center in Washington, D.C., and locations in Baltimore.

The Hopkins Forum opened in January 2025 with a debate on the future of the Supreme Court, featuring a bipartisan panel that included Jeff Flake, former U.S. ambassador to Turkey and a former member of the Senate Judiciary Committee; Jamal Greene, Columbia Law School professor and prominent Supreme Court commentator; Cristina Rodríguez, co-chair of President Joe Biden's Supreme Court Commission; and Jeff Sessions, former U.S. attorney general and U.S. senator.

A spring debate in Baltimore focused on U.S.–China relations and asked whether the U.S. can outpace China in AI through chip controls, with panelists Will Hurd, former U.S. representative from Texas and CIA officer; Lindsay Gorman, managing director and senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund's Technology Program; Paul Triolo, senior vice president and partner at DGA–Albright Stonebridge Group; and Susan Thornton, senior fellow at Yale's Paul Tsai China Center and former diplomat.



Additional events this year have continued to model pluralistic dialogue. Highlights include:

- **“Without Bold Government Action, We Cannot Tackle the Climate Crisis”**

Featuring Van Jones, CNN commentator and founder of Green for All, and Benji Backer, founder of the American Conservation Coalition and author of *The Conservative Environmentalist: Common Sense Solutions for a Sustainable Future*.

- **“Bridging the Political Divide: Two Dads Defending Democracy”**

Featuring Joe Walsh, former Republican Congressman, and Fred Guttenberg, prominent gun safety activist whose daughter was killed in the 2018 Parkland school shooting.

- **“The Future of the Two-Party System” presented through the Hopkins Lecture Series**

Featuring Andrew Yang, co-founder of the Forward Party and former presidential candidate, and Adam Kinzinger, former Republican Representative and one of only two Republicans to serve on the January 6th Committee.

Together, these events reflected SNF Agora's core mission: to strengthen democracy by creating spaces for open, informed, and meaningful exchange.

Student debates

LEARNING IN ACTION

Last year, Johns Hopkins students launched a new debate series in collaboration with Hopkins Votes, the Heterodox Academy, and the SNF Agora Institute. The two debates focused on key issues, including immigration policy during the Trump administration, the creation of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), health care, and abortion. Members of the Johns Hopkins College Republicans and the Hopkins Democrats shared their views and responded directly to one another.

Before the first debate, SNF Agora Professor of Sociology Andrew Perrin led a coaching session for all participants, offering guidance on how to engage actively and constructively in the discussion.

“Being able to listen to others and truly understand why people who disagree with you hold their views is an essential citizenship skill. That’s what we hope to teach students.”

Andrew Perrin, SNF Agora Professor of Sociology, speaking to The Johns Hopkins News-Letter on the value of dialogue and debate



Andrew Perrin, SNF Agora Professor of Sociology, provided coaching and guidance as students delved into the art and science of debate.

Building the team

WELCOMING A NEW ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

This year, the SNF Agora Institute welcomed several new team members, including **Mary Bruce**, who serves as the assistant director of public programs. In this role, she collaborates with faculty, fellows, students, and external partners to design new initiatives that advance SNF Agora’s mission by offering opportunities for informed, inclusive dialogue and active civic engagement.

Bruce’s experience bridging differences and creating space for open, reasoned dialogue is extensive. Before joining SNF Agora, she helped to grow civic engagement legacy initiatives of the 41st, 42nd, 43rd, and 44th presidents of the U.S. She also served as an appointee of the 46th president, Joe Biden, holding senior leadership roles at the U.S. Peace Corps and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.



“Democracy works better for everyone when we combine thoughtful scholarship with practical action, which is why I’m honored to join this exceptional team. I look forward to developing programming that sparks meaningful dialogue across difference and enables individuals to participate more fully in civic life.”

Mary Bruce, Assistant Director of Public Programs, SNF Agora Institute

DIALOGUE

Through Dialogue, the SNF Agora Institute shared its work with a wide range of audiences by publishing research, hosting public events, and leading academic workshops.

SNF Agora offered a full schedule of distinctive courses, from first-year seminars on democratic erosion to advanced graduate-level studies examining the relationship between democracy and economics, artificial intelligence, and politics. Drawing on expertise from faculty across many disciplines, SNF Agora helped students study democracy through varied lenses, including social science, history, economics, politics, and science. As of July 2025, three students had officially declared the Minor in Civic Life, all rising juniors or seniors. An additional 16 students, primarily first- and second-year undergraduates, had expressed interest in the program through advising or personal conversations. In total, 19 students across STEM and non-STEM fields showed interest in the minor during the 2024-25 academic year. This early engagement highlights the program's broad appeal and the growing appetite among students to explore civic life in depth.

By hosting 54 public events, co-hosting an additional 19 offerings, and organizing 46 special gatherings through labs and communities of practice, SNF Agora remained at the center of dynamic public programming. These events brought the institute's work to broader audiences and informed the efforts of community members, practitioners, and collaborators. Events ranged from small, invitation-only convenings in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., to larger, public programs in London. Highlights included campus-wide events such as Democracy Day, collaborative efforts such as the Hopkins Forum debates, and regular webinars and workshops led by visiting fellows and faculty members. Following the 2024 U.S. elections, SNF Agora offered a series of timely webinars and panel discussions, reinforcing its reputation as a trusted resource for understanding and responding to current events.

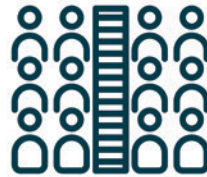
The section that follows highlights just a few of the outreach, education, and programming efforts led by the SNF Agora team.

DIALOGUE 2024-25

EVENTS



54
public events
were hosted
&
46
specialized events
were organized



2,522
in-person
attendees



698
virtual
attendees



95%
recommend events
to colleagues & friends

Focus On: THE HOPKINS FORUM



8
debates in D.C.
& Baltimore



82.6%
learned something that
challenged their thinking



17K
viewers online
& in-person

WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA



229K
page views



40K
unique users



40K
new users



6,334
social media
audience

SNF Agora engaged with the community throughout the year through virtual webinars, classroom discussions, large-scale events, and public programming.



Top left: SNF Agora co-hosted a series of webinars, in partnership with Hopkins at Home, titled “First 100 Days, From Home to Abroad,” examining the effects of U.S. presidential leadership across the U.S. and beyond. The final event featured Jasmine Blanks Jones, the executive director for the Center for Social Concern (bottom left) and John Sarbanes, SNF Agora Practitioner in Residence and former Maryland Representative (bottom right).

Bottom left: In February 2025, SNF Agora co-sponsored a discussion and book signing with Musa al-Gharbi, author of *We Have Never Been Woke*.



Top right: In spring 2025, a special staged reading performance of SNF Agora Visiting Fellow Jean Parvin Bordewich’s play, *Electionland*, was held in the Russel Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.



Bottom right: Dissident in Residence David Smolansky shared his experiences fighting an authoritarian government through a series of conversations and presentations during his time at SNF Agora.

Making the study of civics personal

Students entering the Introduction to Civic Life course explore what it means to participate in democracy, taught by Consuelo Amat, the SNF Agora Institute Assistant Professor of Political Science.

Through Amat’s guidance, they leave the class with a foundation in the theory and practice of the topic and are practiced in exploring it through conversation, reflection, and personal experience.

The course brings in SNF Agora faculty and visiting fellows to present their work and experiences, as well as weekly journaling prompts to highlight the course themes in the daily lives of the students. A highlight in its last session was a field trip to West Baltimore where the class met with

community organizers, participated in a workshop, and took a walking tour through neighborhood blocks enhanced by local organizing, witnessing the impact of civic engagement on the community around them.

No matter the guest or assignment in the class, the main goal remains the same: help students see civic life as something personal and empower them to steer their own civic engagement in a meaningful way during their time at Hopkins and beyond.

“Democracy thrives when people trust their neighbors and feel empowered to take action. Every person has a role to play in building that kind of civic life.”

Consuelo Amat, SNF Agora Institute Assistant Professor of Political Science

A new partnership, a new opportunity to connect

A new partnership with Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is enabling the SNF Agora Institute to engage with scholars, civil society leaders, and young people from more than 90 countries to focus on democratic renewal across borders and generations. The two institutions worked together to create spaces for informed civic dialogue and help a rising generation shape the future of democracy.

SNF Agora and Chatham House led a series of summer 2025 events focused on the question: “How can democratic resilience and renewal be supported across borders and movements?” The events included an online challenge inviting participants to share ideas and personal experiences of democratic backsliding in their lives, a webinar with the Common Futures community, and a session at the 2025 London Conference (the flagship annual event hosted by Chatham House). A follow-up webinar is scheduled to reconnect participants and share takeaways from the London sessions.

At the flagship conference in June 2025, an intergenerational group of leaders from Africa, Europe, and Asia who have experienced democracy under

strain participated in a dynamic session. SNF Agora co-hosted the discussion, “Democratic Resilience in the Face of Global Disruption,” featuring SNF Agora faculty Hahrie Han and Anne Applebaum.

“This partnership brings together two institutions deeply invested in reimagining democracy for the twenty-first century. By joining Chatham House at their global convening, we hope to amplify the voices of scholars, civic leaders, and young changemakers who strengthen democracy where they live.”

**Hahrie Han, Inaugural Director,
SNF Agora Institute**

The June 2025 conference in London, England brought a dynamic audience together to explore the topic of democratic resilience.



Thinking about civic education

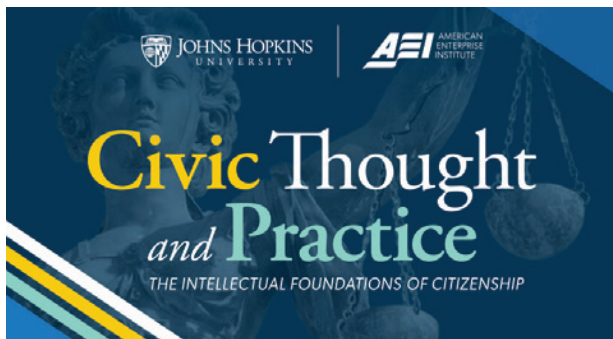
What are the intellectual and practical capabilities necessary to be an effective citizen?

The Civic Thought Project gathers many voices in one room to listen, learn, and deliberate about this question. The organizers do not aim to land on a single definition; instead, they strive to find a common path forward so that universities and other institutions of higher learning have the resources and capacity to guide students in finding individual answers.

The Civic Thought Project launched at the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year, convening a group of Johns Hopkins faculty and scholars from the American Enterprise Institute to start exploring how to revive civic education at the university level. What could broad-

minded, deeply grounded civic education look like? How could it impact future learners as well as the institutions that will house them? Diverse viewpoints were essential to the project, which recognized that different perspectives and approaches would strengthen the work and its relevance to all.

The project culminated in a May 2025 conference where participants from more than 50 institutions came together to explore the how, the why, and the what of this topic. The conference featured sessions on what such a curriculum might contain, how past efforts and movements could inform it, and how to help civic education thrive at colleges and universities.



“Our community—our faculty and students—benefit greatly, as does the search for truth, when different perspectives meet in ways that universities are suited for, centering on evidence and argument.”

Christopher S. Celenza, James B. Knapp Dean, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, as quoted in the April 21, 2025 HUB. Dean Celenza plays a central role in the partnership between AEI and SNF Agora and was a panelist at the Civic Thought Project conference.



The May 2025 Civic Thought Project conference included a panel featuring (left to right) American Enterprise Institute senior fellow Yuval Levin; Johns Hopkins University President Ron Daniels; and AEI senior fellow Jenna Silber Storey.

Growing community, building momentum

The past year at the SNF Agora Institute was marked by new partnerships, innovative programming, and an expanded array of educational and public outreach initiatives.

Rooted in the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences and with an ever-broader reach, SNF Agora continues to engage large audiences, share its work, and advance its mission.

Looking ahead, we have much to anticipate. The opening of our new building will provide a dynamic space for our community and the public—enhancing our capacity to collaborate, educate, and engage. Our faculty, fellows, and students will continue their vital work, and the SNF Agora community will keep growing.





JOHNS HOPKINS
STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION
SNF AGORA INSTITUTE

Realizing the promise
of the ancient agora
in modern times.

SNFAGORA.JHU.EDU