

# Benny Witkovsky

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Department of Sociology | University of Wisconsin-Madison  
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## EDUCATION

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- Exp. 2026     **Ph.D., University of Wisconsin—Madison**, Department of Sociology  
Dissertation: “Fig Leave and Fortresses: Nonpartisan Politics in a Polarized Time”  
Advisor: Mustafa Emirbayer  
Committee: John Major Eason (Brown), Chad Alan Goldberg, Fabien Accominotti  
Prelim Exams: Political Sociology, Community and Urban Sociology
- 2019            **M.S., University of Wisconsin—Madison**, Department of Sociology  
Thesis: “The Local Periphery: Small Cities and the Politics of Exclusion.”  
Committee: Mustafa Emirbayer, Chad Alan Goldberg, Pamela Oliver
- 2012            **B.A., Vassar College**, Independent Program: Peace and Conflict Studies  
Senior Thesis: “The Several Deaths of Anwar al-Awlaki: The Collapsing Distinctions  
of State Violence in Post-9/11 America”  
Advisors: William Hoynes (Sociology); Joseph Nevins (Geography)

## PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

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2025 – Present **Senior Research Specialist/Wisconsin State Lead**, Bridging Divides Initiative,  
Princeton University

## RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

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Political Sociology, Community and Urban Sociology, Comparative-Historical Sociology, Urban Governance, Democracy, Political Culture, Qualitative Methods, Social Movements, Sociology of Race and Ethnicity.

## PUBLICATIONS

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### **Peer Reviewed Publications**

**Witkovsky, Benny**. 2025. “Building a Broken Wall: Small Cities, Nonpartisan Government, and Polarization.” *Theory and Social Inquiry* 1(2): 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.16995/tsi.17592>

Jensen, Katherine, Monika Krause and **Benny Witkovsky**. 2025. “Human Rights as a Lay Category of Thought: Content and Structure in the United States.” *Socius*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231251333455>

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2025. "Cities and Their Neighbors: Examining the Rural-Urban Divide on a Local Scale." *Urban Affairs Review* 61(6): 1884-1908.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874251314851>

Dempsey, Sadie, Jianing Li, **Benny Witkovsky**, Lew Friedland, Dhavan Shah and Michael Wagner. 2024. "Weaponized Patriotism: How Local-National Feedback Loops Strategically Amplify Election Fraud Claims on Republican Party County Facebook Pages." *Politics & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323292241279671>

Stoecker, Randy and **Benny Witkovsky.** 2022. "Elder Civic Engagement and Rural Community Development." *Ageing International*. Vol. 48: 526 – 546. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-022-09488-4>

Stoecker, Randy and **Benny Witkovsky.** 2021. "From Inclusionary to Exclusionary Populism in The Transformation of U.S. Community Development," in *Populism, Democracy and Community Development*, Sue Kenny and Jim Ife, eds. Policy Press: Bristol.

### **In Preparation**

**Witkovsky, Benny** and Carter Burg\*. "Stalwarts, Socialists, and Reformers: The Contested Meaning of Nonpartisanship in Progressive Era Wisconsin" *Full Draft Available*.

**Witkovsky, Benny.** *Rejected with Invitation to Resubmit* "The Local Periphery: Small Cities and the Politics of Exclusion."

Dempsey, Sadie and **Benny Witkovsky.** "Mixing Qualitative Data Sources in the Study of Political Life."

Eason, John M., **Benny Witkovsky**, Angelina Rios-Galindo\*, and Isabel Anadon. "Local Partisanship and the Prison Boom."

### **Public-Facing Scholarship**

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2025. "A Politics of Standing in the Gaps." *States, Power, & Societies: The ASA Political Sociology Section Newsletter*. Spring/Summer 2025. [http://asapoliticalsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/ASA-PolSoc\\_States-Power-Societies\\_Spring-Summer-2025\\_compressed.pdf](http://asapoliticalsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/ASA-PolSoc_States-Power-Societies_Spring-Summer-2025_compressed.pdf)

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2025. "Cities and Their Neighbors." *Urban Affairs Review Blog*. February 13, 2025. <https://www.urbanaffairsreview.com/uar-archive/cities-and-their-neighbors>

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2025. "Election Reflections." *Perspectives: Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section* (45)2, Winter 2024.

Dempsey, Sadie, **Benny Witkovsky**, Jianing Li, and Michael Wagner. "Swing-state GOP leaders amplified election denial in 2020 – and may do so again." *The Conversation*. October 11, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/swing-state-gop-leaders-amplified-election-denial-in-2020-and-may-do-so-again-235823>

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2024. "Stand up to Hate: A Mission for Wisconsin." *Wisconsin Humanities*.  
<https://communitypoweredwi.org/stand-up-to-hate/>

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2024. "Pretending Local Elections Aren't Partisan is Actually Making Voters Angrier." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.  
<https://www.jsonline.com/story/opinion/2024/03/14/wisconsin-local-elections-spring-democrat-republican/72843788007/>

**Witkovsky, Benny.** 2020. "Community and Urban Sociology: Local Politics and Civic Participation During The COVID-19 Crisis." *Footnotes* (48)3: May/June 2020.

Eason, John, **Benny Witkovsky**, Chloe Haimson and Jungmyung Kim. 2020. "Wisconsin's Not So White Anymore—And In Some Rapidly Diversifying Cities Like Kenosha There's Fear and Unrest." *The Conversation*, December 4, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/wisconsin-not-so-white-anymore-and-in-some-rapidly-diversifying-cities-like-kenosha-theres-fear-and-unrest-148044>

Stoecker, Randy, **Benny Witkovsky**, Aaron Hicks, Karime Perez, Xong Vang, Matthew Tye and John Patterson. 2019. "Building Community-Police Relations by Building Community-Community Relations." *Police Chief Magazine*, July 10.  
<https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/building-community-police-relations-by-building-community-community-relations/?ref=96dbe8d6750003ac8454839cbbcc10d6>

### White Papers and Research Reports

Heller, Jonathan, Paula Tran Inzeo, Mary Kate O'Leary and **Benny Witkovsky**. 2021. "Achieving Racial Equity and Health: Strengthening Milwaukee County's Public Health Infrastructure." Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health – University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

**Witkovsky, Benny**, John Eason, Chloe Haimson and Jungmyung Kim. 2020. "There Could Be Many More Kenoshas Across Wisconsin." University of Wisconsin Justice Lab:  
<https://uwjusticelab.wisc.edu/white-papers/kenosha/>

Stoecker, Randy and **Benny Witkovsky**. 2018. Research for City of Madison Police Department, Centro Hispano, Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership Development, and Bayview Foundation: "Evaluation of The Madison Police Department – South District COPS Project".

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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#### Instructor of Record

2022                    **Sociology of Law**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2020                    **Sociology of Race and Ethnicity**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept

2020-2021 **Ethnic Movements in the U.S.**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2019 **The Sociological Imagination**, Ripon College, Sociology Dept

### **Teaching Assistant**

2019-2020 **Sociology of Race and Ethnicity**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2019 **Sociology Marriage and Family**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2017-2018 **Ethnic Movements in the U.S.**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2017 **Survey of Sociology**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2016 **The Sociological Enterprise**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept

### **Grader**

2024 **The Sociological Enterprise**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2020-2024 **Intermediate Classical Theory**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept  
2016-2023 **Classical Sociological Theory**, University of Wisconsin, Sociology Dept

### **GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS**

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2024-2025 **ASA Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant**  
American Sociological Society (\$14,000)

2022-2023 **Mellon Public Humanities Fellowship**  
UW Center for the Humanities

2022 **Graduate Student Fellow**  
The Tobin Project (\$1,000)

2020 **Teaching Fellow**  
University of Wisconsin, College of Letters and Sciences

2018 **Small Grants for Summer Research**  
University of Wisconsin, Department of Sociology

2011 **Tanenbaum Fellowship for Study in Peace and Religion**  
Vassar College

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

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2021 **MAGS/ProQuest Distinguished Master's Thesis Award**  
Midwest Area Graduate Schools

2019 **Award for Excellence in Teaching – Teaching Assistant**  
University of Wisconsin, Department of Sociology

- 2012            **Departmental Honors and College Honors**  
Vassar College
- 2012            **Sarah Catlin Prize for Distinguished Service to the Campus Religious  
Community, Vassar College**

#### OTHER RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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- 2023-2024    **Project Coordinator – United We Stand, Wisconsin Council on Humanities**  
As part of the White House’s United We Stand initiative, oversaw the research, writing, and piloting of a humanities curriculum on hate crimes, hate-motivated violence, and domestic extremism in Wisconsin.
- 2022-2023    **Research Assistant – Professor Katherine Jensen, Department of Sociology**  
Assisted in a variety of research and editing tasks related to preparation of book *The Color of Asylum* and a survey research project on the cognitive mapping of human rights.
- 2021-2022    **Program Evaluator - Legacy Community Alliance for Health**  
Assisted in the evaluation of a multi-year, multi-city project to support Health in All Policies initiatives in small cities across Wisconsin. For this project I conducted interviews with key participants; collected background information on political, demographic, and economic characteristics of each community; wrote analytical case-studies of project sites; and helped develop a strategy for cross-case analysis.
- 2020-2023    **Research Assistant – Center for Communication and Civic Renewal**  
Assisted Professor Lew Friedland and Sadie Dempsey with conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews on politics, community, and media, with people across Wisconsin.
- 2018-2020    **Research Assistant – Wisconsin Seniors Project**  
Assisted Professor Randy Stoecker and Elisa Avila on research regarding the civic engagement of elders in rural Wisconsin. Tasks focused on transcription and analysis of in-depth interviews.
- 2017-2018    **Program Evaluator – Madison Police Department, Madison, WI**  
Through participant observation, in-depth interviews and informal survey research, Professor Randy Stoecker, UW Community and Environmental Sociology and UW-Extension, and I served as evaluators on a project organized by the City of Madison Police Department’s South District and funded by the COPS program of the Department of Justice. The project focused on building new structures of communication between the police department and the precinct’s large African American, Latino and Hmong communities. Our work culminated in writing a report on the project which will be used to implement similar programs in every precinct in Madison.

## INVITED TALKS

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- 2025 "The County Party and Nonpartisan Elections" – Portage County Democratic Party
- 2019 **Wisconsin Idea Lecture Series** – "The Local Periphery: Small Cities and the Politics of Exclusion," University of Wisconsin, Department of Sociology.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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- 2024 "Building a Broken Wall: Small Cities, Nonpartisan Government, and Polarization." American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, QC.
- 2024 "Mixing Qualitative Methods." With Sadie Dempsey. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, QC.
- 2024 "The Cognitive Structure of Human Rights: Implicit Understandings of Rights, Violations, and Geographies." With Katherine Jensen and Monika Krause. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, QC.
- 2023 "The Semi-Partisan Problem: Urban Politics, Municipal Reform, and Polarization" American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.
- 2023 "Weaponized Patriotism: How Local-National Feedback Loops Strategically Amplify Election Fraud Claims on Republican Party County Facebook Pages." With Sadie Dempsey. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.
- 2023 "Camouflage, Coordination, and Conflict: An Ethnographic Examination of Partisanship in Nonpartisan Politics" Midwest Sociological Society, Minneapolis, MN.
- 2022 "Stalwarts, Socialists, and Reformers: The Contested Meaning of Nonpartisanship in Progressive Era Wisconsin." Tobin Project Graduate Student Workshop, remote.
- 2022 "Camouflage, Coordination, and Conflict: An Ethnographic Examination of Partisanship in Nonpartisan Politics." Chicago Ethnography Conference, Remote.
- 2021 "National Politics, Local Fissures: A Closer Look at the Rural-Urban Divide." American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, remote.
- 2019 "Beyond Red vs. Blue America: Small Cities and the Politics of Exclusion" American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, New York, NY.
- 2019 "When Politics is Still Local: Looking Closer to Home for the Source of Division." Midwest Sociological Society, Chicago, IL.

- 2018 “The Civic Engagement of Retirement-Aged People.” With Randy Stoecker and Elisa Avila. University of Wisconsin-Extension All Colleagues Conference, Madison, WI.
- 2018 “Overlooked: The Local Roots of Anti-Institutionalist Politics.” Minnesota Political Methodology Conference, Minneapolis, MN.
- 2018 “Overlooked: The Local Roots of Anti-Institutionalist Politics.” Chicago Ethnography Conference, Chicago, IL.

## SERVICE

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- 2021 - **Community Urban Sociology Section**, Communications Team
- 2021-2022 **Chicago Ethnography Conference**, Panels Committee Co-Chair
- 2021-2022 **Sociology Faculty Search Committee—Open. Rank, Open Area**, Graduate Student Representative
- 2020-2022 **UW Justice Lab**, Student Fellow
- 2019-2021 **Sociology Graduate Student Association**, Governing Board Member