

Applied Research Center for Civility

UC San Diego



APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER FOR CIVILITY

CIVILITY IN DEMOCRACY 2025-2027

ADVISORY BOARD

THAD KOUSSER (CHAIR)



Thad Kousser, who studies American state and national politics, voting reforms, direct democracy, and how politicians use social media, joined the department in 2003 and served as its chair from 2016-2022. His work has been published in journals such as the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Political Science Review, the Revue Francaise de Science Politique, the Journal of Politics, and Political Analysis. He has authored or edited the books The Logic of American Politics, Politics in the American States, The Power of American Governors, The New Political Geography of California, Term Limits and the Dismantling of State Legislative Professionalism, and Adapting to Term Limits: Recent Experiences and New Directions. He has been a visiting professor at Stanford University, held the Flinders Fulbright Distinguished Chair at Flinders University in Australia, received UCSD's Academic Senate's Distinguished Teaching Award, served as co-editor of the journals Legislative Studies Quarterly and State Politics and Policy Quarterly, and has worked as a staff assistant in the California, New Mexico, and United States Senates. Kousser also comments on American politics for venues such as NPR, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, Politico, and the Los Angeles Times.

EMILY SANDUSKY, PHD



Emily leads Public Agenda's work to catalyze, translate, and synthesize rigorous research on the core institutions of American democracy, and to communicate findings to the people and organizations who can put them into action.

She has a wealth of academic experience, recently completing a PhD in sociology at Cornell University, where her research focused on the links between social inequality, income segregation, and public opinion. She has also taught undergraduates at Cornell and the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Prior to joining Public Agenda, Emily held various research consultancy roles at Karen Karp and Partners, a consulting firm specializing in food and agriculture. She engaged diverse stakeholders to deliver actionable research addressing economic development, equity, and sustainability for clients such as the Appalachian Regional Commissions, Northwest Arkansas Regional Council, and the New York City Department of Education.

Emily's work has been cited in peer-reviewed publications such as *City and Community* and *The New Handbook of Political Sociology*. In addition to earning her PhD, she holds a bachelor's degree in women's studies from Boston University and a master's degree in urban policy analysis and management from the New School.

PAZ MAGAT



Paz (she/her) is a Senior Director on the Democracy Team at Third Plateau and Senior Facilitator for Patriots & Pragmatists, a cross-ideological, cross-disciplinary network and convening space through which civic leaders and influencers debate, envision, and realize a brighter future for American democracy.

Before joining Third Plateau, Paz created and directed the Peace With Women Fellowship at Halifax International Security Forum, a program for senior ranking female military officers that facilitated the professional growth of women from allied countries and fostered a network of experts and decision-makers that does not exist anywhere else in their profession. Paz has worked and lived in 39 countries, including several years training African Union and United Nations peacekeepers in conflict management communication. Her work in social change includes designing programs to improve police-villager relations in Namibia and programs to align gang leaders for safe passage in Cité Soleil, Haiti.

Based in Washington, D.C., Paz is tri-lingual and holds a B.A. in Spanish from Wellesley College and a master's in Applied Social Change from Future Generations University.

AARON DORFMAN



Aaron Dorfman is a trusted nonprofit executive and democracy advocate with over a decade of experience designing and leading human rights, education, and civic engagement initiatives. He currently serves as Founder and Executive Director of A More Perfect Union: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy, mobilizing the American Jewish community to strengthen democratic participation and civil discourse, including efforts to ensure free, fair, safe, and accessible elections.

Previously, Aaron served as President of the Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, Vice President for Programs at American Jewish World Service. Across these roles, he has led large-scale strategic planning, outcomes-based programming, organizational change, and coalition-building efforts in both domestic and international settings.

Known for his collaborative, values-driven leadership style, Aaron brings deep expertise in integrating social justice principles into practice, building high-performing teams, and creating partnerships across diverse communities—from grassroots organizations to philanthropic boards and policymakers. He holds a Master's in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School and a BA in English and Political Science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

MARIANNE VIRAY



Marianne Holt Viray is a nonprofit leader, researcher, and civic dialogue advisor with extensive experience advancing initiatives that strengthen democratic engagement and improve the quality of public discourse. She has served as a founding managing director for multiple organizations, building teams and boards, designing legislative and research agendas, developing strategic advocacy partnerships, and leading operational functions including grants management, finance, and human resources.

Her investigative research and reporting have been published in books, professional journals, and award-winning newsletters, and her work has been cited by a U.S. Supreme Court Justice in an opinion of the Court. Early in her career, Marianne worked in Washington, D.C., for the Center for Public Integrity and co-founded the Campaign Legal Center, focusing on issues of ethics, election law, and democratic accountability.

Marianne is currently an executive advisor to Disagree Better, an initiative launched in partnership with the National Governors Association to model healthy political conflict and promote dignity in public dialogue. Her work centers on cultivating intellectual humility, decreasing political animus, and equipping leaders and communities with the skills to navigate differences respectfully and productively. She brings a deep commitment to bridging divides and advancing a culture of respectful engagement as a foundation for a healthy democracy.