
Elizabeth McKenna

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Academic Appointments

HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

Assistant Professor of Public Policy (2022–)

Faculty Affiliations: Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Bloomberg Center for Cities, Carr-Ryan Center for Human Rights, Center for American Political Studies, Center for Public Leadership, the Stone Program in Wealth Distribution, Inequality, and Social Policy, and the Department of Sociology (Faculty of Arts and Sciences)

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Postdoctoral Scholar at the SNF Agora Institute and the P3 Lab (2020–2022)

Education

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Ph.D. in Sociology (2020)

– American Sociological Association Best Dissertation Award (2021) [\[link\]](#)

M.A. in Sociology (2015)

– Herbert Blumer Paper Prize, for master's thesis

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A.B. with high honors in Social Studies (2008)

– Thomas T. Hoopes Prize for outstanding undergraduate thesis [\[link\]](#)

Research

Books

Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa. 2021. *Prisms of the People: Power and Organizing in 21st Century America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Winner of the American Political Science Association's Michael Harrington Book Award (2022)
- Named to the *Stanford Social Innovation Review's* 2021 Book Recommendation List, Act Build Change's 2021 Best Books List, and the World Economic Forum's social innovation reading list.
- Reviews: *American Journal of Sociology*; *Social Forces*; *Mobilization*; *Perspectives on Politics*; *New Political Science*; *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*; *Journal of Public Interest Communications*
- Covered: *The Washington Post*; *The New Republic*; *HistPhil*; *Public Books*; *Mobilizing Ideas*; *Tectonica*; *The Connector*; *3 Streams*; *Reviews for Radicals*; *Social Science Research Council*; *Freedom Together Annual Report*; *National Endowment for the Humanities*.
- Authors-Meet-Critics Book Forums at the 2022 American Political Science Association and 2023 American Sociological Association Annual Meetings.

Elizabeth McKenna and Hahrie Han. 2014. *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Reviewed: *Perspectives on Politics; Party Politics; Choice; The International Journal of Press/Politics*
- Covered: *The New York Times; The New Yorker; The Boston Review; The Washington Post; CBS News; The Foundation Review; The Commons Library for Social Change*

Book Projects

Elizabeth McKenna. *The Paradox of Participation: Organizing Authoritarianism in Democratic Brazil*. Full manuscript submitted to Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics).

Elizabeth McKenna. *The Regulars: The Making and Measure of Democratic Agency*. Prospectus in final revision; data collection for all chapters complete.

Elizabeth McKenna (ed.). *Organized: The Mamdani Campaign and the Case for People-First Politics*. Edited volume with ten contributors; proposal complete; most chapters drafted; manuscript delivery spring 2027.

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Elizabeth McKenna and Catharina O'Donnell.[†] 2024. "Satellite Political Movements: How Grassroots Activists Bolster Trump and Bolsonaro in the United States and Brazil." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 68 (13): 1782-1803. [\[link\]](#)

Matthew Richmond and Elizabeth McKenna. 2023. "Placing the Peripheries Within Brazil's Rightward Turn: Urban Transformation and Electoral Realignment." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, Vol. 42(4): 509-26. [\[link\]](#)

Hahrie Han, Andrea Campbell, and Elizabeth McKenna. 2022. "Civic Feedbacks: Linking Collective Action, Organizational Strategy, and Influence over Public Policy." *Perspectives on Politics*, 21(4): 1432-46. [\[link\]](#)

Michelle Oyakawa, Elizabeth McKenna, and Hahrie Han. 2021. "Habits of Courage: Reconceptualizing Risk in Social Movement Organizing." *Journal of Community Psychology* 49: 3101-21. [\[link\]](#)
– Finalist for the 2022 *frank* Prize in Outstanding Research in Public Interest Communications

Elizabeth McKenna. 2020. "Taxes and Tithes: The Organizational Foundations of Bolsonarismo." *International Sociology* 35 (6): 610-631. [\[link\]](#)

Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna. 2016. "The Untilled Field of Field Campaigns." *Perspectives on Politics* 14(3): 750-57. [\[link\]](#)

Peer-Reviewed Chapters

Chapters below appear in edited volumes and were peer-reviewed by the volume editors and external reviewers.

Larissa Guimarães,[†] Matthew Richmond, and Elizabeth McKenna. 2025. "Misalignment, Realignment, or Deviation? The PT, Bolsonaro, and the Electoral Geography of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro" in *Ultraliberal Ideology and the Manufacture of Consensus*, Cristina Pereira de Araujo and Luciano Muniz Abreu (orgs.). São Paulo: Editora Alameda, 189-214.

Breno Bringel and Elizabeth McKenna. 2020. "Social Movements in a Global Context" in Walter W. Powell and Patricia Bromley, eds. *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook* (Third Edition). Stanford University Press, 631-647. [\[link\]](#)

Marshall Ganz and Elizabeth McKenna. 2018. "Bringing Leadership Back In" in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly McCammon, eds. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Second Edition). Wiley-Blackwell, 185-202. [\[link\]](#)

† Graduate student coauthor

Working Papers

Elizabeth McKenna. "From Mobilization to Organization: The Afterlives of Protest in the Digital Age." Revised and resubmitted at the *American Sociological Review*. [\[DASH\]](#)

Elizabeth McKenna. "Many Show Up, Few Return: Leadership and Retention in Civic Associations." Under review at the *American Sociological Review*. [\[DASH\]](#)

Elizabeth McKenna. "Political Redlining by Algorithm." Under review at *Socius*. [\[DASH\]](#)

James N. Druckman, Devorah Manekin, Lior Sheffer, Jennifer Oser, Tamar Mitts, Jae Yeon Kim, and Elizabeth McKenna. "Race, Violence, and the Effectiveness of Protest." Under review at the *American Journal of Political Science*. [\[SSRN\]](#)

In Progress

Elizabeth McKenna. "A Nation of Mobilizers: Franchising Contention from Chapters to Crowds."

Elizabeth McKenna. "Seeing Like a Movement: Depth, Scale, and the Infrastructure of Democratic Organizing."

Elizabeth McKenna. "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Social Movement Studies."

Christian Caballero,[†] Jae Yeon Kim, and Elizabeth McKenna. "Between Donors and Democracy: How Civic Organizations Navigate Competing Definitions of Success."

Elizabeth McKenna, Dorothy Manevich, and Yvette Bailey-Emberson. "Civic Perception Project: How State Legislators Evaluate Grassroots Groups"

Elizabeth McKenna, Marshall Ganz, and Emily Lin. "Democracy in Modern America: Cultivating Collective Agency in Contemporary Social Movements"

Grants and Fundraising

Principal Investigator, Harvard Kennedy School (2022–)

2026 Freedom Together Foundation (\$500,000)

2026 Democracy Fund (\$250,000)

2026 McKnight Foundation (\$150,000)

2026 Mertz Gilmore Foundation (\$20,000)

2025 Pro-Democracy Campaign (\$100,000 for convening)

2025 State Power Fund (\$250,000)

2024 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship, Carnegie Corporation of New York (\$200,000)

2024 Rx Foundation, renewed (\$350,000)

2023 Rockefeller Family Fund, multi-year, renewed (\$598,000)

Total external research funding raised as principal investigator: more than \$2.4 million

Internal Harvard awards:

- 2025 Bloomberg Center for Cities Research Grant (\$40,000)
- 2023 Harvard University Lemann Brazil Faculty Research Fund (\$179,750)
- 2023 Center for Public Leadership Faculty Research Award (\$10,000)

Fellowships

- 2026 Renaissance Philanthropy Fellowship
- 2024 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship
- 2018 Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship
- 2018 UC Berkeley Department of Sociology Leo Lowenthal Fellowship
- 2017 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Opportunities Worldwide
- 2016 Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society Pre-Doctoral Fellowship
- 2014 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (2014–19)
- 2014 UC Berkeley Center for Latin American Studies Travel Grant
- 2014 UC Berkeley Social Justice Fellowship
- 2013 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (for Brazilian Portuguese)
- 2008 Elliot and Anne Richardson Public Service Fellowship
- 2008 Alex G. Booth Travel Fellowship
- 2007 David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Grant
- 2006 Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Public Service Fellowship

Awards and Honors

- 2026 HKS Teaching Innovation Award [\[link\]](#)
- 2024 Andrew Carnegie Fellow (for award term 2025–2027)
 - Covered in the *New York Times* and the *Harvard Gazette* [\[link\]](#)
- 2024 CASBS Stanford Summer Institute on Organizations Participant [\[link\]](#)
- 2022 Finalist, *frank* Prize for Outstanding Research in Public Interest Communications
- 2021 American Sociological Association Best Dissertation Award [\[link\]](#)
- 2019 Herbert Blumer Paper Prize, UC Berkeley Department of Sociology, for master's thesis
- 2015 Public Sociology Prize, for service in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* editorial collective
- 2008 Harvard College Thomas T. Hoopes Prize, for outstanding undergraduate thesis [\[link\]](#)

Engaged scholarship

Elizabeth McKenna. 2026. "Protest Doesn't Scare Trump. Organizing Does." [The Boston Globe](#). June 19, 2026. Commissioned by the Globe's editors following the October 2025 essay.

Elizabeth McKenna. 2025. "The Left Knows How to Have Huge Protests. The Right Keeps Winning Elections." [The Boston Globe](#). Online October 22, 2025; in print the following Sunday.

Joy Cushman and Elizabeth McKenna. 2025. "Civic Power: The Role and Impact of Independent Political Organizations in Expanding the Electorate and Building Governing Influence." [Pro-Democracy Campaign and the Organizing Lab](#).

- Winner of a 2026 Expy Award from the Analyst Institute for political research innovation

Elizabeth McKenna and Elizabeth Wood. 2024. "It Takes Ten Years: Organizational Sources of State-Level Political Power." *Democracy and Power Innovation Fund*.

Joy Cushman and Elizabeth McKenna. 2023. "Power Metrics: Measuring What Matters to Build a Multiracial Democracy." *Democracy and Power Innovation Fund*.

Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, Michelle Oyakawa. 2021. "Media Depicts Activists as One-Issue Ideologues. The Good Ones are Anything But." *Washington Post, Monkey Cage*.

Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, Michelle Oyakawa. 2021. "Beyond Numbers." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

Michelle Oyakawa, Elizabeth McKenna, Hahrie Han. 2021. "Constituency as an Independent Source of Power." *Social Science Research Council*.

Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna. 2021. "To Learn About the Democratic Party's Future, Look to What Latino Organizers did in Arizona." *The Washington Post*.

Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, Michelle Oyakawa. 2021. "Book chat with the authors of *Prisms of the People*." *Markets, Power, and Culture*.

Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna. 2021. "The AMOS Project and the Campaign for Universal Preschool." *SNF Agora Case Studies Series*.

Doran Schrantz, Michelle Oyakawa, Elizabeth McKenna. 2020. "Building Political Bases to Make Multiracial Democracy Work." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

Elizabeth McKenna and Peter Levine. 2020. "The ISALAH Trash Referendum." *SNF Agora Case Studies Series*.

Matthew Richmond and Elizabeth McKenna. 2020. "Revoltas Regionais: Direitização Eleitoral no Brasil e nos EUA." *Horizontes ao Sul*.

Elizabeth McKenna. 2018. "The Life and Death of Brazil's New Republic." *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, Winter Issue: 14-19; 55-57.

Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna. 2017. "Hillary for America and the 2016 Election: A Field Organization Inquiry and Debrief." Confidential report.

Elizabeth McKenna. 2017. "Reforma Eleitoral: Mudar Tudo Para Não Mudar Nada." *NEXO*. Translation cross-posted on *The Berkeley Blog* and *Berkeley Center for Latin American Studies*.

Marshall Ganz and Elizabeth McKenna. 2017. "The Practice of Social Movement Leadership." *Mobilizing Ideas*.

Elizabeth McKenna. 2015. "Tottering Toward the Brink: Brazil's Political Unraveling." *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, Fall Issue: 22-27.

Rebecca Tarlau and Elizabeth McKenna. 2015. "The Myth of Unified Unrest in Brazil." *Berkeley Center for Latin American Studies*.

Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna. 2014. "Engaging Voters Can Kick Start Community Activism." *The Washington Post*.

Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna. 2014. "Getting Out The Vote: Not All Ground Games Are Alike."

Elizabeth McKenna. 2014. "Where Are The Protests? The Fitful Giant and Its *Futebol*." *Berkeley Center for Latin American Studies*.

Selected Invited Talks

- 2027 *Scheduled: "From Movement to Power,"* Columbia Global Paris Center (Paris, FR; January 14–15, 2027)
Scheduled: O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University (Bloomington, IN)
- 2026 Stanford University, Civil Society and Sustainability Conference (Palo Alto, CA)
Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting (Washington, DC)
- 2025 Keynote, Organize the Midwest: Metrics for Power Convening, "Contrasting Paradigms of Civic and Political Practice" (Chicago, IL)
Columbia World Projects Meeting on Civic Culture and Social Movements, "Strategies for Building Power and the Implications for Our Civic Fabric" (New York, NY)
Keynote, Meeting the Moment: Evidence-Based Strategies to Drive Impact (Democracy and Power Innovation Fund Annual Meeting), "Building Civic Power: What Works"(Virtual)
Keynote, Pro-Democracy Campaign Convening on Democratic Practice, "Metrics for Power, Agency, and Democracy" (Cambridge, MA)
Invited Speaker, Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation Annual Retreat
- 2024 Relational State Capacity Forum, University College London, "Citizen-State Relations & the Social Contract" (London, UK)
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Brazil Studies Program Faculty Flash Talks, delivered in Portuguese (Cambridge, MA)
- 2023 118th Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Authors-Meet-Critics Book Forum with Andy Andrews (org.) and discussants Catherine Corrigan-Brown, Adam Reich, Woody Powell, and Hajar Yazdani (Philadelphia, PA)
- 2022 Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy, Boston College, Respondent to Craig Calhoun's Distinguished Lecture on *Degenerations of Democracy* (Chestnut Hill, MA; November 17, 2022)
117th Meeting of the American Sociological Association, "The Global Rise of the Far Right" with Kathleen Blee and Marco Garrido (Virtual)
- 2021–22 Book Talks for *Prisms of the People: Power and Organizing in 21st Century America*:
- ACADEMIC
 George Mason University (Organization Studies Colloquium)
 Harvard Kennedy School (Ash Center for Democratic Governance)
 Scholars Strategy Network (Research-Practice Colloquium)
 University of California, Irvine (Center for the Study of Democracy)
 University of California, Los Angeles (Organization Studies Colloquium)

 PRACTITIONER

Climate Advocacy Lab Keynote Address
Leading Change Network
New Virginia Majority All-Staff Meeting
Ohio Organizing Collaborative All-Staff Retreat
Organizing Empowerment Project
PowerLabs

PHILANTHROPY

Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative
Democracy and Power Innovation Fund
Ford Foundation
Freedom Together (formerly JPB) Foundation
Funders' Committee for Civic Participation
Heising-Simons Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Rockefeller Family Fund
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

- 2021 Keynote, Australian Progress, "Flipping the Formula to Build Multiracial Governing Power in America" (Virtual)
- 2020 Ash Center for Democratic Governance, Harvard Kennedy School, "From Patients to Voters: Civic Engagement in Health Care" with Deborah Turner, Parissa Ballard, and Alister Martin (Virtual)
- 2019 *Grupo de Brasileiros Pesquisadores, Estudantes, e Profissionais de Tecnologia e Inovação*, "Democratic Dilemmas: Shifting Political Terrain in Brazil" (Stanford, CA)
Community College Instructors Workshop, "The Global Rise of Authoritarianism" (Berkeley, CA)
University of California, Santa Barbara, Public Talk, "People, Power, and Change: Democracy and Organizing in the U.S. and Brazil" with Marshall Ganz (Santa Barbara, CA)
- 2017 Social Science Research Council and the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, Democratic Anxieties, Democratic Resilience Conference, "How Movements Build Power: Leadership, Strategy, and Organization in Four American States" (Mainz, DE)
- 2015 Book Talks for *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America*, Stanford University and the Wellesley Club of the Bay Area (Palo Alto, CA and Berkeley, CA)

Teaching

Social Movements: The Art and Science of Social Change (MLD-370). Harvard Kennedy School.

- 2024 Dean's Teaching Award (Course: 4.78/5; Instructor: 4.91/5)

Qualitative Methods (API-203). Harvard Kennedy School MPP Core Course.

- 2024 Dean's Teaching Award (Course: 4.23/5; Instructor: 4.6/5)
- 2025 Dean's Teaching Award (Course: 4.32/5; Instructor: 4.65/5)
- 2026 Dean's Teaching Award (Course: 4.33/5; Instructor: 4.66/5)

Mixed Methods Analytics for Leaders and Policymakers (MLD-615). Harvard Kennedy School.

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- 2023 Dean's Teaching Award (Course: 4.6/5; Instructor: 4.73/5)
 - 2024 Dean's Teaching Award (Course: 4.44/5; Instructor: 4.67/5)

AI and Civil Society: Human Agency in an Age of Artificial Agents (MLD-371). Harvard Kennedy School (Fall 2026, new course).

Executive Education Faculty Co-Chair (with Archon Fung), Bloomberg Harvard Leading Civic Engagement in Cities Program. Harvard Kennedy School (2023, 2025)

- Participant ratings of professor effectiveness, McKenna sessions: 4.71/5 and 4.69/5 (2023); 4.70/5 and 4.65/5 (2025)
- Program usefulness: 4.63/5 (2023); 4.91/5 (2025)

Practicing Democracy (AS.191.367). Johns Hopkins University (2020)

Graduate Student Instructor for Sociology 5: Research Methods (2016)

Guest lectures: Harvard Kennedy School (DPI-325 Urban Politics Field Lab, qualitative methods crash course, 2x), San Francisco State, UC Berkeley Haas School of Business, Tufts, University of Toronto.

Service & Mentoring

- Doctoral committees: Dorothy Manevich (Ph.D. 2025, FAS Government)
- Senior thesis advisor: Iris Cheng (Harvard College, Social Studies, 2026–27)
- Independent Reading and Research supervision: joint MBA-MPA student, typologies of civil society and social capital (Fall 2022); MPP2, climate action and civic engagement
- Summer work-experience Reading and Research supervision (four students)
- Faculty Advisor, Bloomberg Summer Fellows (three fellows)
- Methods Lead, HKS Education Task Force student focus groups (Vision and Strategy Process), with SLATE (2026)
- Faculty Principal Investigator, Democratic Self-Governance Project / Structure Learning Group (2022–24)
- Member, HKS Subcommittee on Faculty Senate Planning Body (spring and fall 2024)
- Harvard Kennedy School MPP Admissions Committee (2023, 2024, 2025; 2026–27 planned)
- Faculty Advisor, Harvard Undergraduate Democracy House
- Faculty Mentor, Political Analysis track, Harvard Ph.D. Program in Health Policy
- Judge, Kenneth Maxwell Prize for the Best Senior Thesis in Brazilian Studies, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies
- Brazil Studies Program Steering Committee, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (three-year term beginning AY 2026–27)
- Senior Common Room, Winthrop House
- Advisory Board, Democracy and Power Innovation Fund (2019–present)
- Advisory Board, Leading Change Network (2014–19)
- Sub-theme Organizer, Latin American and European Organization Studies, Buenos Aires, AR (2018)
- Graduate Student Coordinator, UC Berkeley Social Justice Fellowship (2014–16)
- Editorial Board Member, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (2013–16)
- Conference Co-organizer, UC Berkeley Sociology Social Movements Conference, Berkeley, CA (2015)

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- Ad hoc reviewer for the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, *Mobilization*, the *Journal of Community Psychology*; book manuscripts for Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press
 - Policy Analysis Exercise advisees:

2025–26	Chet Agni, Christina Iruela Lane, Julia Long, Eli Melendrez (AFL-CIO), winners of the Susan C. Eaton Memorial Prize [§] Sarah Xu and Hannah San Sebastian (San Francisco Public Utilities Commission)
2024–25	Emily Gonçalves and Caren Royce Marasigan Yap (Southern Poverty Law Center), Winner of the William Julius Wilson Research Award [†] Casey Reimche and Zubair Merchant (MOVE Missouri)
2023–24	Jennifer Beltrán, Juan Felipe Maestre, Junho Hyun-Sack, and Huw Spencer (LUCHA) ^{† §} Jess Hao and Jamar Williams (AI Digital Democracy Tool)

[†] Selected for HKS PAE Showcase

[§] Sunshine Award Faculty-Driven Project

Skills and Training

Languages: Portuguese (fluent), Spanish (advanced)

Technical: R, Python, Qualtrics, Git/GitHub, NVivo, Dedoose, L^AT_EX; agentic AI development and analysis tools (Claude Code, Codex)

Other work experience

Obama for America (Columbus, OH): Field Organizer; Regional Field Director. 2008; 2012

New Sector Alliance (Oakland, CA): Founding Program Manager. 2010–2012.

Center for Digital Inclusion (Rio de Janeiro, BR): Manager, Public Sector Initiatives. 2009–2010.

ASPLANDE (Rio de Janeiro, BR): Volunteer, women’s economic solidarity cooperative. 2007–2010.

Personal

Children born: 2020, 2024

Citizenship: United States

Work authorization/residency permit: Brazil