

First Forum on Democratic Evolution: **The Information Environment**

By Avril Haines



IGP Institute of
Global Politics

CONTENTS

Foreword	1
I. Executive Summary	4
II. Introduction	5
III. Framing the Challenge	7
IV. Working Group Discussions	13
V. Conclusions	22
VI. Acknowledgments	24
Participant Bios	25
Endnotes	32

FOREWORD

August 1, 2026

Dear Reader:

The attached report is the first in a series to be issued under the auspices of a democracy project that is focused on identifying and evaluating possible innovations in democratic governance that might improve the resilience of Western democracies in today's evolving technological, economic, and geopolitical landscape. The purpose of this project is to produce a corpus of work that sets forth the best possible ideas for how to adjust our political structures and decision-making processes in ways that are likely to improve the functioning of our democracies.

Over the last century, we've seen the rapid spread of democracy followed by an equally impressive backsliding of democratic governance. At the turn of the 20th century, only a handful of countries were democracies—most of the world was governed by empires, monarchies, or colonial rule. After decolonization and post-Cold War transitions in the late 1980s and 1990s, the number of electoral democracies surged, but since then, under almost every metric, democracies have been on the decline. What is increasingly apparent is that today's democracies are insufficiently resilient in the face of the challenges they are confronting.

Even as citizens of Western democracies continue to affirm that representative democracies are a good way to govern, the majority are dissatisfied with how their democracy is functioning and do not believe their elected representatives care what they think.¹ Perhaps the most obvious sign of discontent is the number of incumbent parties losing elections globally.²

This project seeks to understand and address the source of this dissatisfaction while recognizing that our democracies remain vulnerable to elected leaders with authoritarian tendencies who are able to take advantage of the real grievances that exist by using them to dismantle the democratic institutions that we rely on to keep their power in check. The result is that the existing institutions and processes through which decisions are made are perceived as less effective and less legitimate.

As a starting point, the project is focused on five key trends facing Western democracies that extensive research and scholarship have identified as presenting challenges to democratic governance: (1) the current information environment, which is fragmented, privatized, and fueled by the development of transformative technologies; (2) regressive distributions of wealth and the increasing influence of money in politics; (3) growing global migration; (4) the rising influence of private-sector multinational institutions and individuals capable of contesting the state's power; and (5) the increasing number of crises facing governments that have produced a significant gap between people's expectations and what government is actually capable of delivering, which can provide a basis for the concentration and abuse of executive power.³

For each trend, the plan is to bring together extraordinary and diverse thinkers and doers across a range of fields and disciplines to better understand the trend and its impact on democratic governance, and then to identify potential innovations that might offer structural correctives. After the five

trends have been discussed in separate fora, there will be at least one additional discussion that looks across the various challenges posed, considering proposals that are perceived as having the potential to address more than one. Although there is no single corrective action that will resolve every problem democracies face today, there are likely to be certain constellations of ideas that may promote a more effective and therefore more resilient system capable of addressing today's landscape; this could bring us closer to a political system that can effect results more aligned with the interests and the values of the people it is intended to serve.

In every case, I expect the experts gathered will discuss certain cross-cutting themes as they relate to each challenge being discussed, such as declining political and social trust; the relationship between human dignity, social coherence, and identity politics; the erosion of checks and balances; the growing desire for agency in our societies;⁴ and the diminished space for civil society and social interaction. Every discussion will also undoubtedly be affected by the profound transformative impact that advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and its adoption in our society is likely to produce in the coming years.

To help us think through the implications and potential advantages AI may provide, a digital democracy group has been formed. This group is able to submit proposals for each of the discussions held and sit in on each forum to ensure that digital democracy group's thinking is represented in the discussion. If the project proceeds as planned, the convenings held on these different challenges will reveal a series of ideas worth pursuing, as we collectively seek to promote the evolution of our political systems so as to address developments that are distorting the functioning of Western liberal democracies while simultaneously reversing the degree to which existing political structures have legitimized certain regressive outcomes over time.

The purpose of this project is to lay out the best possible ideas for innovating on today's democratic systems and approaches, together with the pros and cons that should be weighed when considering implementation. To do this, each group of experts gathered will be asked, as they evaluate the proposals under consideration, to set aside the question of whether those proposals are politically viable. Too often, discussions regarding democratic innovations are shut down because the political barriers to adoption appear insurmountable, yet the problems such innovations are intended to address often meaningfully limit the political space for producing change—creating a self-reinforcing dysfunction. Moreover, proposals that are likely to produce significant change also tend to require a supermajority to achieve, which is especially challenging in a politically polarized environment.

Thus, in every forum, we will discuss all worthy ideas with the view that what is not politically viable today may be politically viable in the future. This is not simply based on a blind hope that one day an opportunity may arise—it is based on the idea that the potential for greater change in the future is high because the challenges we are discussing are intensifying. It is, therefore, plausible that they will lead to an increasing number of crises, some of which will create greater political space for change. When such moments occur, however they manifest themselves, it will be crucial that we have ideas to offer for how to improve our systems so that we are able to seize that precious and likely narrow window for making real change.

For this first forum, I partnered with Nick Lemann, the Pulitzer-Moore Professor of Journalism and dean emeritus of Columbia University's Journalism School. Not only is he an exceptional human being,

but he is also an expert who has written numerous articles on the information environment, as well as the author of *Transaction Man: The Rise of the Deal and the Decline of the American Dream*, a book about the forces that shaped American economic and social life over the course of the 20th century. I am grateful for Nick's thought partnership, guidance, and hard work to improve this report. We invited a relatively small group of people with a wide range of substantive and institutional perspectives to Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) to explore the relationship between the current information environment and democratic governance, and to identify and evaluate concrete ideas for how to address the challenges posed.

The attached report reflects the outcome of that discussion, which took place on February 20, 2026. A list of the experts who participated in the forum and helped draft the report is included at the end, but the ideas and views contained in the report should not be attributed to individual participants or organizations unless they are specifically named. The report does, however, seek to specify relative support for various ideas or points of view expressed, ranging from individual observations to a consensus view. As I think you will find, the discussion surfaced several fascinating and innovative ideas that have the potential to improve democratic governance. My hope is that this work does more than inform—that it spurs the kind of experimentation and action our democracies now urgently need.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Avril Haines', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Avril Haines

Carnegie Distinguished Fellow at the Institute of Global Politics (IGP)

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the first in a series to be issued on democratic innovation. Each report will summarize expert discussions focused on identifying, evaluating, and then proposing possible solutions to various challenges facing democratic governance today. This first report summarizes a discussion held in February 2026 on the contemporary information environment. The clear consensus of participants—both academics and practitioners—was that the current information environment presents serious challenges to democratic governance, challenges that are likely to be exacerbated by artificial intelligence, and that it was worth discussing how to mitigate or manage some of these challenges.

After the Introduction section, the structure of this report follows the sequence of the forum itself: It begins by summarizing the main insights regarding the challenge (Section III); it then provides an overview of the proposals discussed in working groups, along with pros and cons identified with respect to each (Section IV); and it concludes with views from the closing plenary, including which ideas were most promising (Section V).

II. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the advent of the internet, we are living in the most free and open information environment in world history, in terms of both the ability to publish and the ability to have access. To say it this way sounds wonderful—but three decades in, few people still seem to regard the internet as the information paradise it was meant to be. It is home to a great deal of misinformation and outright hatred, which seem to poison the political environment. It has economically devastated some parts of the information environment, especially traditional newspapers. It has enabled the worldwide rise of populism, with not entirely positive results. A handful of the biggest companies in the world have figured out how to monetize the internet in ways that seem to incentivize them to make the information problem worse. The dreams of the designers of the internet have substantially come true: There are no more gatekeepers, and material from citizen journalists—both evidence and commentary—that the public previously would not have seen is now universally available. Although this means that good information that otherwise might not have been revealed is published, it also means that far too much information comes to all of us without the careful vetting that the traditional media at their best did, and that algorithms generally rank information and direct it to audiences in ways that not only promote a highly fragmented information environment but also exacerbate and reinforce existing social divisions, reduce the tolerance of audiences to different points of view, and ultimately erode trust in institutional information.⁵

The idea that the relationship between the information environment and the health of a society is complicated goes back at least to Plato's cave (380 BC).⁶ When "mass media" emerged, 100-plus years ago, in the form of radio and then television, the impulse was to stave off the problems that might result by getting government into the picture, via either public media regimes (like the BBC) or regulation of the private sector (like the FCC). But the internet, a far more powerful mass medium because of its potential for two-way and point-to-point communication, arrived at a far more libertarian moment.

What, if anything, should we do about this? Solutions are not easy to find. As often happens with major issues that cross several domains, the denizens of each domain tend to think one of the other domains should take the lead. Non-tech people are drawn to content moderation and other forms of regulation, but tech people are skeptical that this can work, especially in the age of AI, and it has obvious free-speech-limiting potential. Non-journalists are drawn to initiatives designed to enhance the trustworthiness of journalism, but journalists don't see how this is possible in a world of radically shrinking resources. People who work in public-sector and nonprofit-sector institutions such as universities, think tanks, and intelligence agencies are drawn to mechanisms that protect the integrity of their work from political influence by, for example, reducing the degree to which elected officials have direct control over their work and funding, but these mechanisms may be unattainable or unenforceable. Moreover, although the current information environment is widely perceived as posing a challenge to democracy, it is not easy to evaluate with precision the impact that social media has on democratic deliberations. For example, it is often challenging to be confident that the negative effects on democratic governance identified are a result of the information environment itself, rather than a

combination of confounding variables that may be relevant to the environment but unrelated. Additionally, the technology is constantly evolving. Findings from a few years ago may thus no longer be relevant—and in many cases, sufficient time has not passed, or sufficient data has not been collected, to allow us to reach conclusions regarding the cumulative impact of the environment. Regardless, no one doubts the obvious crisis of democracy, so identifying possible approaches now, even if our evaluation of the problem and the likely effectiveness of possible solutions is imperfect, is better than waiting to learn more.

III. FRAMING THE CHALLENGE

We discussed the most important challenges posed by the current information environment that negatively affect democratic governance, in order to provide a foundation for the discussion of proposed interventions. As we did so, it became clear that although there was wide agreement among participants that the current information environment poses a challenge, there was not wide agreement on the prioritization of the various challenges identified as relevant to democratic governance. Nevertheless, the key systemic issues that participants generally agreed on are as follows:

THE SHRINKING ROLE OF TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM, STATISTICS GATHERING, AND RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

We need durable institutions capable of producing and disseminating accurate, trustworthy information and knowledge. Democratic accountability requires that citizens know what their representatives are doing so they can judge whether their actions serve their constituents' interests. This is especially important in the case of local reporting that helps citizens evaluate the decisions being made by their local representatives on issues of local importance. Yet over the last few decades, the ecosystem responsible for producing and disseminating trustworthy information and knowledge, as imperfect as it may have been, has been significantly diminished.

We need durable institutions capable of producing and disseminating accurate, trustworthy information and knowledge. The availability of good information is essential to the health of a functioning Democracy.

As an initial matter, professional journalism has been devastated, and this is especially the case when it comes to local reporting. Employment in newspaper newsrooms within the United States has declined by roughly 80 percent, if one compares the average number of jobs in 1990 with the average number in 2024.⁷ Furthermore, almost 1,800 newspapers, most of them local weeklies, have closed since 2004.⁸ The demise of newspapers across the country is especially significant because they are traditionally where most American journalists worked, and where most original reporting was done.

Moreover, the United States is not an outlier among Western democracies in this respect. Since 2005, the United Kingdom has lost 293 print newspapers; UK regional daily newspaper print sales dropped 16 percent from 2023 to 2024 alone.⁹ Canada's trajectory is even more extreme, with 603 local

news outlets in 388 communities closing between 2008 and 2025, 73 percent of them community newspapers.¹⁰ The picture is more varied across Europe, but the trajectory is unambiguous. A 2024 landmark study done by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom spanning all 27 EU member states found that the decline in local journalists was widespread across the European Union.¹¹ In short, this is a problem facing most Western democracies today, one likely to get even worse with AI adoption. Most AI chatbot platforms already summarize information from news sources but do not send monetizable web traffic back to the publishers, which will continue to undermine local news revenue models.¹²

Of course, journalism feeds on an ecosystem of public institutions and research universities that produce and disseminate accurate and trustworthy information. This ecosystem is also under pressure. Public institutions that produce official statistics perform a critical and often underappreciated democratic function, creating the shared factual basis on which the public can hold the government accountable. Without reliable data, policymakers, journalists, academics, and citizens cannot evaluate the consequences of public policy. Yet we've seen, in a number of democracies, two related problems: a declining trust in official statistics and the degradation or elimination of official data. Trust in the US national government fell from 73 percent in 1958 to 24 percent in 2021, and Western Europe has seen a similar decline in public trust since the 1970s.¹³ More specifically, as this relates to statistical agencies, the Federal News Network reports that a national decline in trust in government directly corresponds with lower response rates for federal statistical surveys, creating a structural feedback loop in which distrust produces less data, which in turn limits the ability to produce reliable statistics that might be used to restore trust.¹⁴ This feedback loop is exacerbated by budget cuts and the politicization of data, which are also responsible for the degradation or elimination of official data on a variety of important issues. Ironically, this is happening just when one would expect an increase in the dissemination of high-quality data from official sources, given technological advances in collecting and analyzing such data.

For example, in the United States, the Department of Agriculture defunded its annual food security survey beginning with 2025 data, eliminating the ability to track household hunger.¹⁵ The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration removed data tools that forecast the impacts of climate change and various other data projects that, for example, were used to monitor weather and track deadly disasters.¹⁶ And the Internal Revenue Service, which produces critical data that shapes tax policy, federal budgeting, and economic research through its Statistics of Income (SOI) program, suspended its Joint Statistical Research Program in 2026 because of a 29 percent reduction in staff.¹⁷ These are just a few examples of what is a substantial and growing problem in the United States, exacerbated by the politicization of data, which was especially clear in the case of President Trump's firing of the former commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics based on a claim, without evidence, that an unfavorable jobs report she released had been "rigged."¹⁸ This is a challenge not only for the United States, but also for other Western democracies, even though the story for why the availability of data is declining is different in different countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, the national statistics agency was forced to delay the publication of headline labor market statistics in 2023 owing to concerns over data quality; weeks later, the regulator revoked the official status of the underlying

labor force survey.¹⁹ In 2022, even the UK data on the size of populations of different nationalities was discontinued due to underlying data issues.²⁰ This has been part of a trend dating back to at least 2010, largely due to lower response rates that have increased volatility and uncertainty in the numbers but resulting in this headline from the *Financial Times*: “Britain’s statistics scandal means it cannot answer its most pressing questions.”²¹

Universities also play a crucial role in the production of knowledge and information. Unfortunately, the government funding that these institutions’ research relies on is no longer assured in the United States and elsewhere, without conditions that undercut their independence. Universities provide infrastructure for conducting systematic inquiry. They make it possible to generate knowledge that is cumulative, replicable, and subject to contestation. Mechanisms such as peer review, methodological transparency, and tenure are meant to insulate knowledge claims from the preferences of whoever is funding the research or holding political power. They play an indispensable role in generating technical knowledge that is usable by policymakers, journalists, and citizens. Yet by most metrics, government support for higher education and academic research institutions appears to be falling. In the United States, the executive branch’s budget request for fiscal year 2026 would cut funding for the National Science Foundation by a staggering 56 percent and for the National Institutes of Health by roughly 40 percent.²² Even if Congress opts for a smaller cut, it is likely to be substantial, which is significant because together these agencies provide the largest share of federal research dollars in the United States. In Europe, the trend is less a decline in funding and more a shift toward funding with more strings attached.²³ In both cases, the vision of independent academic research funded by the public no longer appears to rest on solid ground.

We also discussed whether any or all of these institutions are as important to democracy as we think they are, given that professional journalism, independent statistical agencies, and research universities are largely 20th-century constructions that democracy predates. As one participant noted, the Founding Fathers did not discuss the importance of the institution of journalism, even as they did focus on the relationship between an informed citizenry and self-governance. Another participant pointed out that even the premise that citizens rely—whether through education or the media—on the information that they are taught or that they obtain when casting votes may be incorrect. Some scholarship indicates that people largely vote on the basis of heuristics rather than on the information they read in the newspaper or online. Such voters might, for example, be guided by their daily activities and the information they glean from such activities, such as homeowners who learn about interest rates and workers who learn about trade policy, whereas others rely on social identities, party labels, and ideological cues.²⁴ However, numerous studies also indicate that news does matter and certainly that accurate, trustworthy information and knowledge are crucial for purposes of policy-making. Even beyond local coverage’s capacity to shape voter perspectives, studies show that citizens exposed to a lower volume of local coverage are less likely to vote,²⁵ and another participant noted that we are often too focused on voting and not on what happens in between votes.

The consensus of this portion of the discussion was that (1) enhancing the capacity and independence of organizations and mechanisms for producing accurate and trustworthy information and knowledge has the potential to improve democratic governance; (2) the capacity of such institutions

is eroding; and (3) although enhancing the capacity of such institutions will not alone address the challenges to democratic governance presented by the information environment, it is important. Participants further noted that the degree to which AI tools might help or hinder the production of such institutional information is currently unknown. Thus, we focused on supporting institutional journalism in our discussions, as a key institution through which accurate, trustworthy information and knowledge is disseminated to citizens, often through social media platforms. At the same time, there was broad recognition that public institutional and university-derived information and knowledge also play a vital role in any ecosystem designed to promote decision-making that is effective and likely to achieve democratic outcomes.

PROBLEMS EXACERBATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

The second key systemic issue involved social media. Participants broadly acknowledged that social media platforms are incentivized to engage as many people as possible for as long as possible to maximize advertising revenue, and that this creates systemic challenges for democratic governance, particularly when social media is enabled by AI.²⁶ Social media platforms monetize attention through advertising, and what maximizes engagement tends to be content that promotes anger, outrage, and anxiety;²⁷ novelty and surprise over accuracy;²⁸ confirmation of existing beliefs over challenge;²⁹ simple narratives over complex truths;³⁰ and tribal identification over individual reasoning.³¹ Technology, furthermore, not only enables the degree to which social media is able to deliver content that promotes these results but has systematically amplified their impact. Platform mechanisms operate at unprecedented speed and scale yet can provide an increasing amount of tailored content for individuals.³² The result is that voters are increasingly affected by fragmented realities, reinforced divisions, declining tolerance, information overload, and an erosion of trust in institutional information.³³

For example, researchers have documented how social fragmentation has been exacerbated by the current information environment. Algorithms that optimize for engagement do so in part by showing us content similar to what we have engaged with before, which produces scenarios in which (1) different social groups are able to exist in different information environments;³⁴ (2) the factual foundation for democratic deliberation may not be shared across such groups;³⁵ and (3) the cross-cutting exposure to other perspectives and reasoning that might otherwise occur across such groups is algorithmically suppressed.³⁶ The result is that not only do individuals' perspectives remain relatively uncontested, but they tend to become more radicalized as algorithmic selection shows us the most extreme examples of opposing views. Further, as studies have consistently demonstrated, false information spreads more quickly than true information on social media.³⁷ This is not to say that social groups have fully different realities, but even modest differences in information exposure—combined with motivated reasoning and misinformation—can significantly distort perceptions of what is true or important.³⁸ This social fragmentation and radicalization makes it harder for citizens in a democracy to evaluate the performance of politicians, make good decisions, and engage in constructive deliberation to reach compromises.

Social fragmentation and radicalization make it harder for citizens in a democracy to evaluate the performance of politicians, make good decisions, and engage in constructive deliberation to reach compromises.

Similarly, this business model incentivizes the delivery of content that ultimately exacerbates divisions and declining tolerance. For example, research shows that moral-emotional language results in a 20 percent increase in the retweet rate for every moral-emotional word added, thereby substantially increasing the sharing of such language, which incentivizes moral extremism.³⁹ As a consequence, more nuanced positions are ignored, extreme moral grandstanding is amplified, political discourse becomes performative outrage, and actual persuasion and compromise become far less likely. Furthermore, the treatment of all content as equal erodes trust in institutions that produce and disseminate accurate, trustworthy information and knowledge, such as traditional journalism, universities, research institutions, and the courts. This erosion of trust has led to further democratic disengagement, and the abundance of conflicting claims has been found to produce cynicism and withdrawal, which can be observed in the form of lower voter turnout and diminished civic participation for certain groups and greater support for anti-system candidates, even as such mistrust can lead in some circumstances to increased engagement in particular information communities.⁴⁰ Information overload is another pervasive consequence of today's information environment and the business model that governs it, which produces a range of negative effects, at least one of which is directly relevant to democratic governance. Specifically, research demonstrates that information overload can lead to decreased accuracy, quality, and effectiveness in decision-making and the avoidance of information.⁴¹

MALICIOUS ACTORS

The third key systemic issue we recognized is that democracies are asymmetrically vulnerable, in the current information environment, to manipulation of political debate by malicious actors, including foreign governments, criminal groups, and other illegitimate actors that stand to gain from influencing the information environment in order to achieve specific political outcomes. Today it is easier and less expensive than it was several decades ago to attempt to influence the political debate in democracies covertly at scale. In part this is because of the digital environment and in part it is because of emerging technologies, in particular generative AI and big data analytics, which have made it easier to produce seemingly authentic and tailored messaging more efficiently, at greater scale. This has led to an increasing number of foreign state actors and non-state actors engaging in information influence activities, including election influence activities. Additionally, there are more commercial firms today, such as the Internet Research Agency, through which such actors conduct these influence efforts,

enabling them to increase the sophistication of such activities while making attribution more challenging.⁴² The inherent openness of democracies makes them more vulnerable to interference than autocracies that can protect themselves by controlling information flows. And although considerable debate remains regarding the degree to which such influence campaigns are effective in manipulating the political debate in a democratic society for specific outcomes,⁴³ there is clear evidence that disinformation and misinformation are so widespread that many Americans doubt basic facts and cannot reliably vet sources.⁴⁴ Furthermore, research convincingly indicates that such manipulative activities are effective at exacerbating existing social divisions and increasing distrust in the information environment, which creates challenges for democratic governance regardless of whether they are determinative of a particular election outcome.⁴⁵ Moreover, over time, such efforts are likely to become more effective, as the technology and its adoption improve. Consequently, it is worth considering the degree to which any proposed intervention is likely to affect the challenge of malicious actors attempting to manipulate political debate.

IV. WORKING GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The forum participants separated into two working groups. The first group focused on proposals that were intended to change the current information environment. The second group assumed the current information environment would remain as it is or become more difficult, and it focused on proposals for changing the way we conduct decision-making in democracies to significantly reduce the challenges posed by the information environment. Both groups included a proposal that was authored by Anthropic’s large language model, Claude, which is identified below as “Claude’s proposal.”

IDEAS FOCUSED ON IMPROVING THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

One proposal from Steven Waldman was focused on reversing the collapse of local reporting by funding an increase in local reporters. Specifically, the proposal aimed to achieve a concentration of roughly 20 reporters for every 100,000 people and about one reporter for roughly every four local public bodies making decisions affecting public money and public welfare. The funding for this endeavor could be split, with two-thirds coming from a mix of philanthropy and public support, and one-third from the earnings derived from such local reporting.⁴⁶ Another source of funding could be a fee assessed against the top social media companies (Meta, ByteDance, Alphabet, and X Corp.) equal to 0.5 percent of US advertising revenue. Whatever funding mechanism is chosen, it will be necessary to address concerns regarding whether the mechanism would successfully insulate local reporting from political pressure from either private or public actors, and the degree to which it would be reliably sustainable. Waldman pointed to certain public policy mechanisms either under consideration or being implemented that attempt to address these questions, while also acknowledging that none of them are perfect. Examples included (1) an Illinois pilot program that issues refundable tax credits for the retention and hiring of local reporters;⁴⁷ (2) tax credits for small businesses that advertise in local news outlets;⁴⁸ (3) fellowships that place subsidized reporters into local newsrooms—often administered by university journalism programs and subsidized by a US state;⁴⁹ and (4) requirements in law that a significant percentage of government advertising spending go to local media outlets, as in the case of New York City.⁵⁰

Another proposal, from Joel Simon, suggested that a new and independent public media system in support of local news be created with public funding and be tied to local needs. Specifically, the new entity would have a mandate to support and sustain civic culture and transparency through support for local news by tapping into the existing public media networks and emerging networks of nonprofit media, as well as other civic institutions. The new entity would be encouraged to make grants that equal less than 25 percent of any grantee’s operating budget, and preferably less than 10 percent. The one exception would be for innovation grants to support new forms of civic engagement, particularly those that intersect with emerging AI technology. With respect to this proposal, the point was made that the United States is the only Western democracy that has eliminated federal public broadcasting support, and seems to have done so at a moment when the market failure in local journalism is

especially acute.⁵¹ This proposal would reverse that decision and bring the United States more in line with other democracies. One question that arose was how to protect such an entity from political pressure, given that it is publicly funded. In response, Simon noted that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in the United States, while unable to save itself from being defunded, was nevertheless able to withstand pressure from the government to influence news coverage. Also, it is worth noting that this proposal was particularly focused on local news, which participants agreed will not survive without public investment. Finally, Simon made the point that emerging AI systems rely on local news organizations to generate accurate responses to queries about specific communities, making them that much more important as the use of large language models becomes more widespread and relevant to democratic decision-making.

The United States is the only Western democracy that has eliminated federal public broadcasting support.

Participants were generally supportive of these proposals—perhaps especially of Simon’s public media proposal—and viewed them as likely to be effective interventions. However, they found the social media challenges posed to be considerably more difficult to address.⁵² The six proposals that addressed this aspect of the challenge included policy ideas, technical ideas, and a mix of both.

A proposal from Olivier Sylvain suggested that the US Congress narrow the liability protection that online services distributing third-party content currently enjoy under Section 230 of the Communications Act of 1934⁵³ in the United States, so that it protects such online services only if they take reasonable steps to address online abuse and harm, including implementing “reasonable content moderation” guidelines. This would, Sylvain argued, return the doctrine to its focus on “good Samaritans” and exclude bad actors. Other options that Sylvain proposed included (1) making plain that the statute shields protected speech, rather than information more generally; (2) denying the protection to companies that are deliberately indifferent to unlawful content; and (3) specifying circumstances under which companies would never be able to invoke Section 230 protection. This proposal would almost certainly mitigate the degree to which false information was disseminated. It would not, however, address the challenges of fragmentation, confirmation bias, and declining tolerance driven by an algorithmic bias toward moral-emotional language.

A proposal from John Wihbey recommended that a new digital regulator be established to facilitate industry scrutiny and transparency. Such a regulator could, for example, use new powers and tools such as public scrutiny, data transparency, and auditing to push platforms to (1) use algorithms focused on “long-term user value” rather than immediate engagement; (2) implement specific safeguards for press freedom and protecting journalists from online harassment and disinformation campaigns, recognizing them as special actors in the digital space; (3) establish renewed arm’s-length economic support for news production to reverse the “depreciation” of news as a democratic asset, which might include

giving high-quality fact-checked content a higher weighting in ranking and recommendation algorithms; and (4) improve platform interfaces to provide prominent source information and contextual cues that help users distinguish between high- and low-quality information.⁵⁴ This proposal could also mitigate the degree to which false information was disseminated and could resuscitate journalism, but would not directly address the challenges of fragmentation or declining tolerance driven by an algorithmic bias toward moral-emotional language.

One participant suggested that certain proposals might be supplemented with other interventions that address the challenge of misinformation, and offered as an example a “prebunking” technique called *psychological inoculation* that has been pioneered by researchers including Jon Roozenbeek and Sander van der Linden. In short, individuals who are exposed to weakened “microdoses” of manipulation tactics can build up cognitive resistance or “mental antibodies” against online misinformation strategies across different cultures. Although this technique addresses only one aspect of the social media challenges discussed, it could contribute to a broader effort in combination with some of the proposals outlined here.⁵⁵

Jasper Doeninghaus proposed widespread access to a user-side tool called Myranda, designed to make algorithmic profiling and feed shaping visible, measurable, and steerable without requiring platform cooperation or a regulatory change.⁵⁶ Myranda reconstructs the user’s information diet across platforms in a weekly “Rewind” report covering creator concentration, topic drift, reliability of information, and the gap between stated and revealed preferences. It runs entirely on a device, so raw behavioral data never leaves the user’s phone or laptop, which promotes privacy. It also equips users with a directed agent that browses content on the user’s behalf to influence the recommendation system and rebalance exposure, without the user having to manually retrain their feed. An early prototype has been piloted with adolescents in collaboration with researchers at the Oxford Internet Institute and MIT Media Lab. Operating from the user’s side is the tool’s main strength and its main structural limitation. Adoption is self-selecting, so the tool cannot on its own reach the users most affected by fragmentation, and its coverage depends on platform data-export regimes, which vary in what behavioral data they include. Although the tool does not directly address the accelerated dissemination of false information, by rebalancing exposure, it may mitigate the impact of such information on any given user. Finally, Myranda could serve as a complement to the platform-facing proposals above, offering an independent audit channel and, where users opt in, a population whose information environments can be studied in ways platforms are otherwise unlikely to permit.

Next, Daanish Masood Alavi made a proposal that included both technical and policy elements. He took as a starting point that ranking—how platforms order and prioritize publicly available information for users—is, by its nature, not neutral. Consequently, his proposal was to require as a matter of policy or law that a certain process be followed for any ranking intervention that is deployed by platforms to rank online content. Before deployment, the ranking intervention would have to be auditable, tested, and evaluated to ensure it meets certain standards.⁵⁷ This process would ultimately incentivize algorithmic development to mitigate many of the challenges identified above—such as optimizing for: (1) engagement across clustered epistemic bubbles; (2) moral-emotional de-amplification, reducing the algorithmic reward for moral-emotional phrasing without suppressing content; and

(3) viewpoint diversity. To do so, it would be necessary for platforms to first implement tests that (1) reduce the potential for algorithmic bias; (2) ensure that any ranking interventions operate only in regimes within which they have been tested (and if not, turn them off); (3) ensure that any ranking intervention will work only when the evidence being relied on for the ranking is sufficient; and (4) ensure the presence of safety limits on measurable risks including harassment amplification, manipulation, and destabilizing feedback effects. If a ranking intervention doesn't pass these tests, the platform's systems would be required by regulation or law to effectively prohibit the relevant ranking intervention. Furthermore, mandated auditable records would make it possible to check whether the systems were adhering to the new regime. And those same auditable records would make it possible for a third party to evaluate whether the ranking interventions deployed were in fact optimizing for the kinds of behaviors identified above, such as the de-amplification of moral-emotional content or cross-cluster engagement. Alavi made the additional point that deploying ranking interventions without adversarial pretesting, however well-intentioned such interventions might be, would not be responsible. Stress testing for gaming, manipulation, and destabilizing feedback effects is crucial to ensuring that such interventions do not amplify the very harms they were meant to reduce.

Of course, any approach to ranking is likely to be subject to critiques, as there is no objectively correct approach, but presumably there are ways to address the problem that are either more or less protective of democratic deliberation. One distinguishing feature of this approach is that it is intervention-agnostic: Instead of advocating for a particular algorithmic reform, it provides the evaluation infrastructure against which other proposals could be tested before deployment. For example, the Citizen Boards of Governance proposal discussed below could be complemented with an audit and testing harness of this kind. Of course, platforms are likely to resist audit requirements for a number of reasons, including cost and disclosure of proprietary algorithms.

Alavi referenced certain additional proposals worthy of consideration to address the social media challenges identified, including those associated with Aviv Ovadya and Jonathan Stray, as well as work done by Audrey Tang. Each of their ideas seeks to optimize for cross-cluster agreement rather than within-cluster engagement. Ovadya's idea, as reflected in a paper titled "Can Algorithmic Recommendation Systems Be Good for Democracy?"⁵⁸ is that rather than "engagement-based ranking," which prioritizes content that will lead a user to engage the most, recommendation systems should prioritize content that decreases the extent of algorithmically inferred societal divisions, hence prioritizing content that "bridges" the division across clusters rather than perpetuating it. Ovadya calls these "bridging-based" content recommendation systems. To be effective, however, it is necessary for an algorithm to effectively understand "local language" and non-textual forms of media such as audio and video, which leads him to conclude that it is critical to increase investment in developing technology capable of such sophisticated bridging-based ranking systems. As Jonathan Stray's work indicates, this effort is ongoing and shows considerable promise.⁵⁹

Audrey Tang's work on vTaiwan is similarly designed to facilitate constructive conversations and consensus-building among diverse opinion groups — by creating a separate public platform for deliberation that enables citizens to express their views at scale and enables government officials to determine where there is agreement and where there are differences. The vTaiwan platform provides an

alternative to social media platforms and relies on a mix of open-source tools for sharing information, soliciting opinions, and holding polls, but the key component is a machine-enabled software product called Polis. Polis facilitates the formation of a rough consensus among citizens who participate and, once consensus is reached, a livestreamed face-to-face meeting among key stakeholders and policy-makers during which specific recommendations are drafted. Among other features, Polis effectively gamifies the process of finding consensus—encouraging users to propose and refine viewpoints to win greater support from all sides of a discussion, because the greater the consensus around a viewpoint, the more attention it receives. The final viewpoints may not resemble any of the ones made at the beginning of the discussion, and the new consensus can be turned into laws and regulations.⁶⁰ More generally, Tang’s work seeks to create space for community-governed democratic tools, rather than those controlled by platforms—tools that can help neighborhoods, schools, and civic groups deliberate at scale.

Erik Severson, drawing on work by Uğur Aytaç, a political philosopher and professor at Utrecht University, proposed an alternative approach that addresses some of the same issues focused on in Alavi’s proposal, but in a slightly different way. Specifically, Severson proposed the establishment of a Citizen Boards of Governance,⁶¹ which would be integrated into the governance of digital platforms, hear expert testimony, and be given the power to accept or reject algorithmic designs based on their potential societal, political, and economic impact. Such boards, made up of randomly selected individuals, would promote greater “citizen control” over the design of algorithms and potentially serve as a constraint on the current economic incentives driving platforms to engage as many people as much of the time as possible. Although the content of the discussion would be highly technical, there are certainly examples of public juries dealing with highly technical information through the provision of expert testimony and extensive studies regarding mini-publics that have resulted in informed, diverse, and high-quality deliberations related to technical matters.⁶² This discussion also led to the question of whether such boards might not be captured over time—that is, gradually come to serve the interests of those they are meant to oversee rather than the public’s—including by the experts who testify before them, who would presumably have considerable power to sway the citizens involved. Public hearings might help to mitigate such concerns, at least in part. Finally, such hearings, particularly if public, would likely require the disclosure of proprietary information; this disclosure would be vigorously resisted by the platforms.

Claude’s proposal (the AI proposal) was to establish Algorithmic Accountability Juries (AAJs), which were quite similar to the proposed Citizen Boards of Governance, but had a few key differences. Specifically, Claude’s approach was to have permanent, rotating panels of randomly selected citizens called AAJs that would have a narrower mandate than the Citizen Boards: to determine whether a platform algorithm systematically distorted discourse on a specific policy or electoral question. AAJs also would not approve or reject algorithms but rather would make findings that could trigger mandatory referral to the FTC or FCC, which would then shift the burden to the platform to demonstrate compliance rather than requiring regulators to initiate an investigation independently. Furthermore, AAJs would have the power to investigate and compel the disclosure of information from the platforms, under grand-jury-style confidentiality protections backed up by civil contempt authority, analogous

to securities disclosure requirements. The AAJs, as envisioned, would receive structured testimony from balanced expert panels and publish formal findings certifying whether distortion occurred, along with remediation recommendations. Any remediation efforts would be further monitored by an AAJ audit, which would create a public compliance record. As with the Severson proposal, the issue of institutional capture was raised, for although the random selection of members reduces the risk of such capture, risk is not eliminated. For example, the sampling frame, the expert panel selection process, and the facilitation infrastructure are all vulnerable to some form of capture by well-resourced actors with strong incentives to influence such chokepoints in the design. Finally, it is worth noting that the enforcement mechanism ultimately depends on regulatory capacity and political will, which may also be subject to political pressure.

Finally, one of the participants, Felix Beer, noted that these proposals largely accept as a given that the digital information environment will remain privately owned and are focused on how to “repair” the public square rather than asking how we might design it differently to support democratic governance. Changing the frame of the question—asking, instead, what the ideal design, governance, and ownership structure would look like if we were focused on promoting democratic governance—could lead to new ideas worth exploring. Beer further noted that the continued adoption of AI-assisted technologies is likely to make this question more urgent, because within a few years, people are likely to access political information almost exclusively through AI-mediated interfaces, such as personal assistants, chatbots, and synthetic feeds. These systems may become the new mediation layer through which citizens interpret events, understand disagreement, assess credibility, and decide what forms of collective action are possible. Work by Audrey Tang, discussed above, as well as others, points in this direction—providing an alternative infrastructure designed to support democratic governance and reduce the potential for private-sector capture of our information environment.

DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS THAT ASSUME THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT WILL NOT CHANGE SIGNIFICANTLY

The first two proposed interventions for the second working group focused on creating an information infrastructure that would engage citizens across different epistemic communities, disseminate high-quality information from trusted voices, and promote greater communication between the public and elected officials.

One proposal, presented by Kris Rose on behalf of the Digital Democracy Group, suggests establishing a new institution called a Signal Forum, which would deploy a community AI sensing tool—an AI system that aggregates and clusters input from residents, gathered through everyday community touchpoints, to identify and prioritize emerging topics of concern—to reveal topics of interest. The Signal Forum, composed of community pillars, such as public libraries and chambers of commerce, would then create content on the topics of interest, which would then be shared with citizens through the community’s preferred, trusted information channels. This proposal also suggests setting up a Civic AI platform, which would foster deliberation based on this information by deploying pedagogical

agents designed to surface alternative perspectives and thereby avoid confirmation bias. The final piece of this proposal suggests pairing these two entities—the Signal Forum and the Civic AI platform—with a government-backed AI-facilitated deliberation platform. This platform would make it possible to convene community members, facilitate deliberations, and feed advisory recommendations to elected officials.

John Gastil put forward the idea of establishing a public digital infrastructure that would similarly promote a shared epistemic reality, while also promoting “high-quality public engagement” at the state and local level to address the concern that officials do not have effective ways to understand public needs, priorities, and trade-offs in today’s information environment. Furthermore, although a shared epistemic reality will not necessarily lead to a consensus, it is at least more likely to refine genuine disagreements and promote understanding. Gastil’s proposal suggests creating digital tools with which citizens can share experiences, concerns, and ideas between elections with elected representatives, giving such officials real-time insight into the needs and interests of the public with a feedback loop in which elected officials would report to the public on how their input influenced decisions.

Both the Rose and Gastil proposals to establish digital platforms that promote quality information and engagement run the risk of being captured by a particular political perspective, or of being perceived that way, either of which would undermine their legitimacy and reduce their value as a tool for promoting inclusive democratic engagement. Although both proposals are tied to community or public institutions intended to reduce this concern, the potential remains and would need to be addressed in any effort to establish such a platform. Therefore, some method for monitoring the degree to which they are being used by a representative cross-section of the community might be useful, as a way of determining whether they are in fact serving their purpose. Deliberative bodies (discussed below) could potentially assist in monitoring.

Two other proposals focused on citizens’ assemblies and citizen juries, respectively—that is, mechanisms by which a relatively small,⁶³ demographically representative group is randomly selected, given access to high-quality information, and offered the opportunity for structured deliberation to produce well-informed policy recommendations, which are ultimately presented to elected officials and the broader polity. Citizens’ assemblies and citizen juries are both well-tested democratic innovations, and consequently considerable data is available for evaluating the effectiveness of these options. Different variants of citizens’ assemblies have been deployed more than 700 times internationally in multiple countries on constitutional, parliamentary, and regulatory matters, including in the United States, and citizen juries have been conducted for over 50 years.⁶⁴

Although the data demonstrates the degree to which citizens’ assemblies and citizen juries, when well-constructed, can result in informed and high-quality deliberations and recommendations that carry enhanced legitimacy, there was discussion regarding the challenge of obtaining participation, of the cost associated with such efforts, and how—or whether—to scale such efforts. In particular, on the question of participation, one member of the discussion noted that critics argue that although sortition—the random selection of participants, as with jury duty—helps reduce the biases observed in purely participatory bodies, the mechanism often (depending on how it is established) entails an element of self-selection, in that invited participants may still refuse to participate. Random selection

also relies on scale to obtain a representative sample, and stratification can help reduce the risk of over- or underrepresentation but still requires the identification of relevant strata. Of course, these challenges can be mitigated in various ways, which is also discussed in the literature, and these challenges are not unique to mini-publics. Furthermore, various incentives can be deployed to encourage the participation of those selected through sortition, such as paying people for their time, or by making participation compulsory.⁶⁵

Marjan H. Ehsassi discussed citizens' assemblies, indicating that they are most usefully deployed when the government (1) has a public problem that is perceived as a pressing issue; (2) is seeking meaningful input from a cross-section of voices within a community; and (3) is committed to taking into account the recommendations developed when engaging in policy reform. Ehsassi stressed the importance of the learning phase of citizens' assemblies, which allows participants to learn about the topic area on which they are going to deliberate from a diverse range of experts, community stakeholders, and those with relevant lived experiences. This process provides an opportunity for a shared epistemic reality as a basis for discussion and is critical to the later consensus-building phase, in which the participants agree on a series of policy proposals addressing a given issue through open deliberation oriented toward the best interests of the community as a whole.⁶⁶

Kyle Bozentko presented a proposal on citizen juries, which typically follow a prescribed process in which: (1) 15–24 jurors are drawn by a stratified random sampling that attempts to ensure that those selected resemble the community in characteristics such as age, education, geographic location of their residence, race, and political affiliation; (2) expert witnesses, including those with competing views, present to the jury and answer questions; (3) trained moderators facilitate jury deliberations; (4) the jury develops concrete recommendations or options for decision-makers; and (5) a formal report is provided to the commissioning body, with the jurors expressing final recommendations in their own words. In response to questions about scaling, participants familiar with these mini-publics noted that it is not necessary for them to be used across every system or geography. Instead, appropriate scaling of these might be envisioned as targeted deployments when the right conditions are met.

No one argued that either citizens' assemblies or citizen juries should become the dominant or sole mechanism for making binding decisions, but rather that they should be deployed alongside existing political structures.⁶⁷ This is in line with a fair amount of survey data that indicates most citizens view mini-publics as attractive institutional innovations that promote a fairer, more democratic, and more legitimate outcome that facilitates, for example, better communication between citizens and leaders but should not serve as a replacement for their existing democratic infrastructure.⁶⁸ Even those citizens who have participated in such mechanisms do not, as a rule, prefer binding mini-publics over advisory ones; however, there does appear to be increasing support for mini-publics to play a new complementary role, perhaps blended with representative institutions in various ways.⁶⁹

A related proposal from Jennifer Forestal focused on providing discrete institutional spaces in which citizens can make use of information for structured discussion for the purpose of making meaningful decisions in the course of everyday life, distinct from structured deliberative fora such as citizen assemblies or citizen juries. Forestal highlighted recent work in psychology and political science that makes clear that people's reasoning is shaped by the groups they are members of. Consequently, she

focused less on the problem of information quality or formal deliberative spaces and more on the ways that one's ordinary social groups are organized, which she explained can have profound effects on how and why individuals' reasoning unfolds. Intentionally creating space for collective discussion and deliberation that is linked to existing political decision-making in local communities, both on-line and offline, would enhance our societies' capacity for more tolerant and effective democratic decision-making. This approach is, perhaps, especially complementary to the scholarship regarding the importance of "discursive infrastructures" that promote diversity in opinions as well as rational and civil interactions within interpersonal networks and other venues for civilized interaction in the public sphere that can provide a better foundation for democratic discussion and deliberation of all forms.⁷⁰

Finally, Claude's proposal went in a different direction. The preceding proposals focused on ways to mitigate the challenges posed by the current information environment; Claude's proposal, in contrast, attempted to change the incentive structure created by the information environment for political candidates — making them less likely to produce content calibrated to inflame the electorate. In other words, Claude's proposal tried to target the upstream supply-side challenge of inflammatory content and instead incentivize politicians to produce higher-quality content not playing to an extreme. The proposal noted that partisan primaries in the United States, for example, are decided by small, highly activated bases. In most legislative districts, the effective primary electorate is less than 15 percent of registered voters, skewing sharply toward the most ideologically committed.⁷¹ This incentivizes candidates to produce content that appeals to that slice of the electorate. The proposal thus suggests that conventional partisan primaries be replaced with a process in which stratified, randomly selected citizen panels drawn from the general electorate of given districts convene over a structured weekend to hear candidates, deliberate in facilitated small groups, and select the party's nominee. In accordance with this structure, the panel's ranked-choice voting would determine the party's official nominee, and all candidate presentations, facilitated discussion summaries, and AI synthesis outputs would be published in full. The party's nominee would then run in the general election under the normal process. This proposal has many shortcomings, not the least of which is that it does not address the underlying fragmentation of the information environment, it assumes that candidates are primarily responsible for the majority of moral-emotional content, and it does not take into account the potential for problematic content being created by malicious actors interested in influencing the outcome of any particular election. Additionally, it would require both parties to agree to conduct primaries through the process outlined, which they are likely to resist.

V. CONCLUSIONS

When participants reconvened in a plenary session, they shared the outcome of their deliberations in the working groups and also provided their thoughts on proposals that were not reviewed by the working group to which they were assigned. A number of points emerged from this discussion, on which there was an apparent consensus:

- There is such a thing as verified, trustworthy information; not everything is a matter of opinion or perspective. Furthermore, the availability of good information is essential to the health of a functioning democracy, even though citizens do not make decisions solely on the basis of such information.
- Finding ways to produce and preserve high-quality, balanced, and trusted information, which is usually best produced in institutions by trained professionals and is insufficiently supported by the market, is critically important and requires public support.
- It is vital to sustainably support local reporting, which is both especially diminished and essential to democratic accountability, in ways that would insulate such reporting from political pressure.
- Promoting opportunities for two-way communication between voters and elected representatives is important, specifically in order to improve elected officials' understanding of their constituents' needs and priorities, while also allowing elected officials to directly explain their thinking.
- Social media platforms are incentivized to engage as many people as possible for as long as possible, which promotes the dissemination of information in ways that undermine productive collective democratic decision-making based on verified, trustworthy information. There was no consensus on how important this is to democratic governance and there was a fair amount of skepticism about the likelihood that any intervention likely to significantly improve the situation would be adopted. Nevertheless, most agreed that some form of regulation would be desirable and that any of the options discussed would be an improvement over the current situation. Furthermore, any algorithmic interventions intended to reduce the challenges posed by social media platforms should be auditable, should be stress-tested in an adversarial manner before deployment, and should be subject to rollback if they fail defined safety conditions.
- Creating space for structured deliberation that includes knowledgeable individuals with a diverse range of viewpoints who reflect a cross-section of voices, trained moderators facilitating deliberations, and the opportunity to have an impact on policy can be an effective way to mitigate today's information environment challenges. Such opportunities promote the development of effective and legitimate public policy decision-making and increase the potential for collective decision-making—but ideally such efforts should be integrated as reforms into existing political structures rather than being seen as a replacement for them.
- Effective space for structured deliberation could be created through the use of a series of tools, including by promoting the widespread development of discrete institutional spaces, as suggested by Forestal's proposal, that allow citizens to sort, process, and make use of information within their polity, alongside mechanisms that facilitate the deployment of mini-publics when the right conditions are met for doing so in support of decision-making linked to such deliberation. All these

mechanisms, importantly, promote collective learning, deliberation, and agency—while also connecting citizens to government.

- Interventions that improve the information environment must be linked to democratic innovations that increase the agency of citizens to make use of such information. More generally, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.
- Many, but not all, participants were of the view that it is important for us to think about not just incremental changes but radical options to address the challenges we face.
- Metrics for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of various options would be useful, even as they will almost certainly be contested.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of people helped organize and shape this forum, to whom we are profoundly grateful.

First, we thank the many individuals who gave generously of their time in advance of the forum, informing our understanding of the challenge, developing ideas for specific projects, and suggesting potential partners for implementation. Those who participated or submitted proposals are listed below. In addition, our thanks go to the leadership of Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs and in particular the Institute of Global Politics, which supported our efforts, and the Digital Democracy group, which provided invaluable advice. I also especially want to thank Senkai Hsia, Karen Smith, Tala Vahabzadeh, Susan Lee, and Lauren Hoffman—all of whom were instrumental in making this day possible.

PARTICIPANT BIOS

Nicholas Lemann

*Joseph Pulitzer II and Edith Pulitzer Moore Professor of Journalism and Dean Emeritus,
Columbia Journalism School*

Nicholas Lemann was born and raised in New Orleans. He began his journalism career there as a 17-year-old staff writer for an alternative weekly paper called the *Vieux Carré Courier*. He graduated from Harvard College, where he was president of *The Harvard Crimson*, in 1976, magna cum laude in American history and literature. He has worked as a reporter and editor at *The Washington Monthly*, *Texas Monthly*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic* (where he was national correspondent from 1983 to 1999) and *The New Yorker* (where he has been a staff writer for 25 years), and contributed to many other publications. From 2003 to 2013 he was dean of Columbia Journalism School, leading a period of significant growth and change for the school, and since then he has been a professor there. At Columbia he also helped launch Columbia Global Reports, a publishing venture that he continues to lead; Columbia World Projects; and the Knight First Amendment Institute. He is currently one of three cochairs of the university's antisemitism task force. His books include *The Promised Land* (1991), *The Big Test* (1999), *Redemption* (2006), *Transaction Man* (2019), and, most recently, *Higher Admissions* (2024). He is a member of several honorary societies, including the American Philosophical Society, the New York Institute for the Humanities, the Society of American Historians, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, where he serves as cochair of the academy's Commission on Reimagining Our Economy.

Avril Haines

*Carnegie Distinguished Fellow at the Institute of Global Politics and
Visiting Fellow at All Souls College in Oxford*

Avril Haines most recently served as the US director of national intelligence (DNI). In this position, Haines was a member of the Cabinet, led the United States intelligence community, which consists of 18 different elements, and served as the principal intelligence adviser to the president of the United States. Over the course of her career, Haines has served in intelligence, policy, and legal roles across the US government, including as assistant to the president and principal deputy national security advisor, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and legal adviser to the National Security Council. She also served in academia, as a senior research scholar at Columbia University and a senior fellow at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. She received her bachelor's degree in physics from the University of Chicago, received a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center, and founded and ran a bookstore café for five years while engaged in community service in Baltimore. She was additionally appointed by the president in 2017 to be a member of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, and has served on a number of boards and advisory groups over the years, including the Nuclear Threat Initiative's Bio Advisory Group, the Board of Trustees for the Vodafone Foundation, and the Refugees International Advisory Council.

Daanish Masood Alavi

Daanish Masood Alavi is founder and CEO of Cygnus X1, where he builds auditable decision systems for high-stakes settings. He spent 17 years at the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, where he co-led the Innovation Cell and developed operational AI systems used in conflict contexts, including Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Ukraine, and Colombia. His work there spanned geospatial early warning, large-scale digital deliberation, satellite-based accountability and analysis, and natural language systems. He remains engaged in Track-2 US–China dialogues on AI safety and in research on pluralistic AI alignment. Alavi studied analytic philosophy at New York University and speaks English, Arabic, Farsi, and Urdu.

Felix Beer

Felix Beer is a strategist and researcher working on governance innovation at the intersection of technology and democracy. His work focuses on designing new R&D ecosystems that can pilot, test, and scale next-generation institutional models capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century. He is particularly interested in how adaptive, experimental forms of governance innovation can help address the pacing problem—the growing mismatch between accelerating technological change and the slower evolution of public institutions. As a fellow of the Max Planck Society, he coleads the Futures Forum, a new incubator for institutional breakthroughs—moonshot projects aimed at advancing the frontier of democratic governance—in cooperation with leading partners such as Harvard Allen Lab, Demos Helsinki, and Dark Matter Labs. Beer is an MPA candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School and a PhD candidate at the Technical University of Munich.

Kyle Bozentko

Kyle Bozentko brings 20 years of political, public policy, and deliberative engagement experience to his role as executive director of the Center for New Democratic Processes. Bozentko has directly contributed to the design and implementation of more than 50 deliberative engagement projects with partners in the US, Canada, UK, Australia, Malawi, and Thailand. Bozentko has advised teams and governments on deliberative engagement projects and initiatives in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Japan, Portugal, Scotland, Singapore, South Korea, and Switzerland. He served on the International Association of Public Participation – USA (IAP2 USA) Board of Directors from 2015 to 2018, the MNsure (Minnesota) Health Industry Advisory Committee from 2016 to 2018, and the Bloomberg New Economy Health Committee, and is a member of Semafor Principals. He has contributed to articles and research featured in the Brookings Institution, *Real Clear Policy*, *GOVERNING*, *the Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *the Journal of Medical Ethics*, *the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, and *Springer Nature*. Bozentko received his MS in gerontology from St. Cloud State University and his MTS from the Boston University School of Theology.

Jasper Doeninghaus

Jasper Doeninghaus is a master in public policy candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School. He is one of eight social innovation and change fellows at Harvard and the cofounder of Myranda, a social

enterprise that helps users track their information diet, control their algorithms, and stay private so their data works for them, not against them.

Doeninghaus is a second-time founder and successfully exited his first startup, CarbonTag, which focused on tracking CO₂ emissions along the food supply chain. He studied philosophy, politics, and economics at King's College London, with a focus on public policy and behavioral economics. He has worked as a public-sector consultant at PwC on strategic information management and as a research associate to Professor Armin Steinbach, Germany's chief economist, at HEC Paris, focusing on economic and financial policy. His current research, in collaboration with SPRIND, focuses on how to bring an ARPA-style breakthrough innovation model to the European context.

Marjan Ehsassi

Dr. Marjan H. Ehsassi is a leading democracy advocate and sought-after expert on citizens' assemblies and their transformative impact on civic engagement. As the executive director of FIDE – North America, Ehsassi combines her extensive academic background with practical experience to advance institutional reform. Holding a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and a law degree from McGill University, she is the author of *Activated Citizenship: The Transformative Power of Citizens' Assemblies* (August 2024), which explores how citizens' assemblies can promote democratic renewal and social cohesion and can build mutual trust between elected officials and their constituents. Her book introduces the term *voice insecurity* to spotlight one of the drivers of political grievance. Prior to leading FIDE – North America, she held positions at the World Bank and the National Democratic Institute, where she led governance programs in Asia and the Middle East. She is a member of the OECD Innovative Citizen Participation network and serves on the Advisory Committee of the Democracy R&D Network. She is a frequent speaker at fora like the Athens Democracy Forum and the American Democracy Summit, and has been featured in prestigious publications, including the *New York Times*, *Toronto Star*, and the *Boston Globe*. Based in Washington, DC, Ehsassi is fluent in English, French, and Farsi.

Diane Feldman

Diane T. Feldman was born in Washington, D.C. in 1953 while her father worked on Capitol Hill and her mother worked in the Department of Labor. Within a year, the family returned to New York City, where Feldman grew up. For a while, Feldman turned away from the political interests that had absorbed her family. She graduated from Washington University in 1974 with a degree in psychology and then obtained a PhD at SUNY Binghamton (now Binghamton University) in experimental psychology and quantitative methods in 1979, followed by postdoctoral research at Yale University and Haskins Laboratories. Feldman's research during that period was in cognitive psychology—specifically the differences between verbal and pictorial information processing. She would leave academia but retain an interest in how people approach and process information.

While in New Haven, Feldman regained her interest in the political process and managed a couple of local campaigns. She accepted a second postdoctoral fellowship at Duke University in science and public policy, hoping to unite her political and research interests. The second year of that experience

was a congressional science fellowship. She stayed on Capitol Hill for a brief period as a legislative aide. She then joined a local advertising and communications company as director of research with local political and commercial clients before landing for an extended period on the practice of political polling, beginning as a senior associate at the Analysis Group.

In 1989, Feldman founded her own political research firm, first as Feldman & Lester, and then as The Feldman Group, based in Washington, DC. For 30 years, The Feldman Group helped elect members of Congress, US senators, governors, and local elected officials from Oregon to New York, south to Mississippi and north to Vermont, with concentrations of clients in southern California, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and the South. The Feldman Group also worked with unions, associations, and not-for-profit groups and was on the research team for Democratic presidential general election campaigns in 1992, 2000, 2004, and 2012. In 2025, the University Press of Mississippi published her first book, *Borrowed Land, Stolen Labor, and the Holy Spirit: The Struggle for Power and Equality in Holmes County, Mississippi*.

Jennifer Forestal

Jennifer Forestal is an associate professor of political science at Loyola University Chicago. Professor Forestal's research and teaching interests are in the area of political theory. Her research focuses on questions of social media platform design and governance, digital culture, institutional design, and democratic theory. Her first book, *Designing for Democracy: How to Build Community in Digital Environments* (Oxford, 2022), on the role of design in building more democratic social media platforms, was awarded the 2023 APSA Information Technology and Politics Best Book Award as well as the Don K. Price Award for best book in science, technology, and politics. Her work has also appeared in outlets like the *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *The Washington Post*.

Archon Fung

Archon Fung directs the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation and is the Winthrop Laflin McCormack Professor of Citizenship and Self-Government at the Harvard Kennedy School. He examines policies and practices that aim to deepen democracy, especially through public participation, deliberation, and transparency. His books include *Empowering Affected Interests: Democratic Inclusion in a Globalized World* (edited by Archon Fung and Sean W.D. Gray, Cambridge University Press), *Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency* (Cambridge University Press, with Mary Graham and David Weil), and *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy* (Princeton University Press). He served as academic dean of the Kennedy School from 2014 to 2018 and was its acting dean in 2015. He holds a PhD in political science and SBs in physics and philosophy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

John Gastil

John Gastil (PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison) is a distinguished professor in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, Department of Political Science, and School of Public Policy

at the Pennsylvania State University. Gastil also serves as senior scholar at Penn State's McCourtney Institute for Democracy. Gastil's research focuses on the theory and practice of deliberative democracy, group decision-making, political communication, and public opinion. He has published over 130 peer-reviewed articles and academic book chapters on these subjects in outlets such as *Political Communication*, *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, *Journal of Politics*, *PLOS ONE*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, and *Small Group Research*. The National Science Foundation has supported his research on the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review, the Australian Citizens' Parliament, jury deliberation, cultural cognition, and democratic innovation online. His most recent books are *Hope for Democracy* (Oxford, 2020) with Katherine R. Knobloch and *Legislature by Lot* with Erik Olin Wright. His current Democracy Machine project focuses on rebuilding the digital infrastructure that connects government with the public.

Shanto Iyengar

Shanto Iyengar is the William Robertson Coe Professor of American Studies and Professor of Political Science at Stanford University. Iyengar's areas of interest include the role of mass media in democratic societies and the psychology of public opinion. Iyengar has authored or coauthored multiple books, including *News That Matters* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), *Is Anyone Responsible? How TV Frames Political Issues* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), *Explorations in Political Psychology* (Duke University Press, 1995), *Going Negative* (Free Press, 1995), and *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (Norton, 2022).

Samara Klar

Samara Klar is Melody S. Robidoux Professor of Political Science at the University of Arizona School of Government and Public Policy. Klar studies how individuals' personal identities and social surroundings influence their political attitudes and behavior. She has published two award-winning books and dozens of articles in peer-reviewed journals, including *Science*, *Nature Human Behaviour*, and *American Political Science Review*. Her research has been supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences, the Social Science Research Council, and other organizations.

In 2025, she was named Scholar of the Year by the University of Arizona's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Klar earned her PhD in political science from Northwestern University and also holds degrees in political science from Columbia University and McGill University.

Kristopher Rose

Kris Rose is a tech governance leader whose career has spanned roles in public-sector institutions such as the Central Intelligence Agency, the White House and the US Congress, and major companies like Meta and IBM. He has led research programs at the intersection of technology and governance, and designed and operationalized AI-enabled initiatives to build more responsible, trusted technology. These have included the development of Meta's Oversight Board and large-scale public consultations across dozens of countries that have shaped AI and platform policy.

Rose now leads efforts to govern enterprise-wide AI transformation at IBM, focused on accelerating responsible AI across IBM's global footprint. He is a term member with the Council on Foreign Relations and a Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy Tech & Public Policy Visiting Fellow. Rose holds a bachelor's degree in political economy from Spring Arbor University and an MPP from Georgetown.

Erik Severson (absent from discussion but submitted a proposal)

Erik Severson is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of British Columbia studying democratic theory. His dissertation, titled *The Crisis of Attention in Democratic Politics*, provides a framework for understanding and contending with various transformations in our contemporary attentional landscape, including the attention economy. Severson also has ongoing projects concerned with language use as well as informal political representation.

Joel Simon

Joel Simon is the founding director of the Journalism Protection Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, part of the City University of New York. He is the author of four books, including *The New Censorship: Inside the Global Battle for Media Freedom* and *The Infodemic: How Censorship and Lies Made the World Sicker and Less Free* with Robert Mahoney. He writes on press freedom issues for *The New Yorker* and other publications and produces a monthly column on press freedom issues for *Columbia Journalism Review*. From 2006 to 2021, Simon served as executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Olivier Sylvain

Olivier Sylvain is a professor of law at Fordham University and a senior policy research fellow at Columbia University's Knight First Amendment Institute, where he researches information and communications law and policy. His most recent work is on the regulation of consumer-facing online services like social media, commercial surveillance, and AI. His recent book, *Reclaiming the Internet: How Big Tech Took Control—and How We Can Take It Back*, came out in March 2026. The National Science Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation have awarded him grants to support this work. He was a senior adviser to the chair of the Federal Trade Commission from 2021 to 2023.

Steven Waldman

Steven Waldman is the founder and president of Rebuild Local News. He is also the cofounder and former president of Report for America, a national service program that places journalists in newsrooms across the country. Before becoming an advocate for local journalism, Waldman was a journalist covering national politics for *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*, and *Washington Monthly*. Later, he wrote a report for the Federal Communications Commission, outlining the information needs of communities.

John Wihbey

John Wihbey is director of the AI-Media Strategies Lab (AIMES Lab) at Northeastern University and an associate professor of journalism and media innovation in the College of Arts, Media, and Design. He is a special adviser for AI initiatives in the Chancellor's Office and director for administration and operations at the Institute for Information, the Internet, and Democracy (IIID). He is also an affiliate associate professor in the Khoury College of Computer Sciences and a faculty researcher in the Ethics Institute.

His latest book is *Governing Babel: The Debate over Social Media Platforms and Free Speech—and What Comes Next* (MIT Press, 2025). Wihbey has served as a research consultant for foundations, government, and social media companies. From 2019 to 2024, he directed Northeastern's graduate programs in media innovation and data communication, journalism, and media advocacy.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Solid majorities in each of 24 countries surveyed by Pew Research Center in 2023 describe representative democracy, or a democratic system where representatives elected by citizens decide what becomes law, as a somewhat or very good way to govern their country." Nevertheless, "a median of 59% were dissatisfied with how their democracy is functioning" and "74% think elected officials don't care what people like them think." See Pew Research Center, "Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People Around the World Are Critical of How It's Working," February 28, 2024, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/>.
- 2 Among democracies that held elections in 2024, over 80 percent saw the incumbent party lose seats or vote share from the last election. See Cooper Burton, "Democrats Aren't Alone—Incumbent Parties Have Lost Elections All around the World," ABC News, November 18th, 2024, available at <https://abcnews.com/538/democrats-incumbent-parties-lost-elections-world/story?id=115972068>.
- 3 See, e.g., Jonathan Sumption, *The Challenges of Democracy and the Rule of Law*, Profile Books, 2025; Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*, Simon & Schuster, 2011; Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency*, Penguin Press, 2019.
- 4 Pew's recent international surveys support this point, indicating that "people want a stronger public voice in politics and policy-making." See Richard Wike and Janell Fetterolf, "Global Public Opinion in an Era of Democratic Anxiety," Pew Research Center, December 7, 2021, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/12/07/global-public-opinion-in-an-era-of-democratic-anxiety/>.
- 5 See, e.g., Matteo Cinelli, et al., "The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media," *PNAS*, February 23, 2021, available at <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2023301118>; Emanuele Brugnoli, et al., "Recursive Patterns in Online Echo Chambers," *NIH*, December 27, 2019, available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6934735/>; Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Princeton University Press, 2018, available at <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400890521/html>; Ezra Klein, "Why We're Polarized," Simon & Schuster, January 28, 2020; Kimmo Grönlund, et al., "Political Trust, Satisfaction and Voter Turnout," *Comparative European Politics*, 2007, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/31960520_Political_Trust_Satisfaction_and_Voter_Turnout.
- 6 See, e.g., Daniel R. DeNicola, "Plato's Cave and the Stubborn Persistence of Ignorance," *The MIT Press*, September 12, 2024, <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/platos-cave-and-the-stubborn-persistence-of-ignorance/>.
- 7 See Chris Mooney, "The Lost Newspaper Jobs of 2024 – and So Many Years Before That," *ReportEarth*, March 14, 2025, available at <https://reportearth.substack.com/p/the-lost-newspaper-jobs-of-2024-and>.
- 8 See Keach Hagey, Lukas I. Alpert, and Yaryna Serkez, "In News Industry, a Stark Divide Between Haves and Have-Nots," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 2019, available at <https://www.wsj.com/graphics/local-newspapers-stark-divide/>.
- 9 See Bron Maher, "Regional Newspaper ABCs: No Daily Circulation above 20,000," *Press Gazette*, March 11, 2025, available at https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/regional-newspaper-abcs-no-daily-circulation-20000/; Thomas Hunter, "UK local newspaper closures update: 293 now gone since 2005," *Press Gazette*, August 14, 2024, available at <https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/regional-newspapers/local-newspaper-closures-uk-2022-to-2024/>.
- 10 See National Media Council of Canada, "Getting Caught Up with Changes in Canadian Media with the Local News Map," October 16, 2025, available at <https://nmc-mic.ca/2025/10/16/getting-caught-up-with-changes-in-canadian-media-with-the-local-news-map/>; this development is, in part, aided by Meta's 2023 decision to ban the sharing of news media in Canada following the passage of the Online News Act. See Kate McKenna, "One Year after News Ban, Canadian Journalism Is Suffering—but Meta Isn't Budging," *CBC*, August 1, 2024, available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/one-year-after-news-ban-canadian-journalism-is-suffering-but-meta-isn-t-budging-1.7281101>.
- 11 See Sofia Verza, Tijana Blagojev, Danielle Borges, Jan Kermer, Matteo Trevisan, and Urbano Reviglio, eds., *Uncovering News Deserts in Europe: Risks and Opportunities for Local and Community Media in the EU*, European University Institute, 2024, available at https://cmpf.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CMPF_Uncovering-news-deserts-in-Europe_LM4D-final-report.pdf.
- 12 For example, one analysis has found that a site previously ranked first in a search result could lose about 79 percent of click-through traffic for that query if results were delivered below an AI overview. See Michael Savage, "AI Summaries Cause 'Devastating' Drop in Audiences, Online News Media Told," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2025, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jul/24/ai-summaries-causing-devastating-drop-in-online-news-audiences-study-finds>.
- 13 See Jonathan Perry, "UN/DESA Policy Brief #108: Trust in Public Institutions: Trends and Implications for Economic Security," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, June 2021, available at <https://desapublications.un.org/policy-briefs/undesap-policy-brief-108-trust-public-institutions-trends-and-implications-economic>.

- 14 See Jory Heckman, “‘Bedrock’ Federal Data Sets Are Disappearing, as Statistical Agencies Face Upheaval,” *Federal News Network*, December 10, 2025, available at <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/big-data/2025/12/bedrock-federal-data-sets-are-disappearing-as-statistical-agencies-face-upheaval/>.
- 15 See Brookings Institution, “Around the Halls: The Cost of Compromising Federal Data,” Brookings, August 14, 2025, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/around-the-halls-the-cost-of-compromising-federal-data>.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 See Kathleen Bryant, “Suspending the Joint Statistical Research Program Will Weaken the Tax System,” The Tax Law Center, July 22, 2025, available at <https://taxlawcenter.org/blog/suspending-the-joint-statistical-research-program-will-weaken-the-tax-system>.
- 18 See Elisabeth Buchwald, “Former BLS Commissioner Says Firing Her Was a ‘Dangerous’ Step for the US Economy,” *CNN Business*, September 16, 2025, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/16/economy/former-bls-commissioner-mcentarfer-speaks>.
- 19 See Brigid Francis-Devine, “Has Labour Market Data Become Less Reliable?” House of Commons Library, October 30, 2023, available at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/has-labour-market-data-become-less-reliable/>. See “OSR’s Statement on the Labour Force Survey-Derived Estimates and Annual Population Survey-Derived Estimates,” UK Office for Statistics Regulation, December 12, 2024, available at <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/osrs-statement-on-the-labour-force-survey-derived-estimates-and-annual-population-survey-derived-estimates/>.
- 20 See “Population estimates from the 2024 APS by nationality and country of birth,” Office for National Statistics, October 17, 2025, available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/populationestimatesfromthe2024apsbynationalityandcountryofbirth>.
- 21 See John Burn-Murdoch, “Britain’s Statistics Scandal Means It Cannot Answer Its Most Pressing Questions,” *Financial Times*, August 22, 2025, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/c046be2c-5496-4e2c-b243-580224e9a459>.
- 22 See Kritika Agarwal, “White House Proposes Steep Cuts to Science and Education Funding,” Association of American Universities, June 6, 2025, available at <https://www.aau.edu/newsroom/leading-research-universities-report/white-house-proposes-steep-cuts-science-and-education>.
- 23 See Maximilian Fochler, et al., “Just Following the Money? How Research Funding Shapes the Governance of University Research,” *Science and Public Policy*, October 9, 2025, available at <https://academic.oup.com/spp/advance-article/doi/10.1093/scipol/scaf056/8280135>.
- 24 See Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*, 2017, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, available at https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691178240/democracy-for-realists?srltid=AfmBOoqh_TlDgkN2iCRSo1-ujvntLQ431VSOMmgCO4-ms-2UQFvFnlye; Samuel Popkin’s theory of “low information rationality” suggests voters are able to make rational choices using information shortcuts derived from daily experiences; see Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*, 1991, University of Chicago Press, available at <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/R/bo3636475.html>.
- 25 See Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, 1957, Harper and Row; Samuel L. Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*, 1994; and Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, “As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections,” *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 447–462, available at <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/679749>.
- 26 Conversation online is “ruled by algorithms that are designed to capture attention, harvest data, and sell advertising,” as Anne Applebaum and Peter Pomerantsev describe in “How to Put Out Democracy’s Dumpster Fire,” *The Atlantic*, March 8, 2021, available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/the-internet-doesnt-have-to-beawful/618079/?gift=hVZeG3M9DnxL4CekrWGK3wK6gNyJTg1TXkh45wi0pJ4&utm_source=copy-link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share; Maya MacGuineas, “Capitalism’s Addiction Problem,” *The Atlantic*, April 2020, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/04/capitalisms-addiction-problem/606769/>.
- 27 Studies reveal that engagement-based algorithms tend to amplify negative emotional charged content, particularly that which expresses anger and out-group animosity, with anger being by far the predominant emotion amplified by the algorithm. See Smitha Milli, et al., “Engagement, User Satisfaction, and the Amplification of Divisive Content on Social Media,” Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, January 3, 2024, available at <https://knightcolumbia.org/content/engagement-user-satisfaction-and-the-amplification-of-divisive-content-on-social-media>; research analyzing 12.7 million tweets found that social media’s incentives are changing the tone of political conversations, with some people learning “to express more outrage over time because they are rewarded by the basic design of social media.” See CORDIS Newsletter, “Social Media Making Us Angrier, Study Reveals,” European Commission, May 22, 2024, available at <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/430608-trending-science-social-media-making-us-angrier-study-reveals>.

- 28 See Sara Brown, “MIT Sloan Research about Social Media, Misinformation, and Elections,” MIT Management Sloan School, October 5, 2020, available at <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/mit-sloan-research-about-social-media-misinformation-and-elections>; Gordon Pennycook, et al., “Shifting Attention to Accuracy Can Reduce Misinformation Online,” *Nature*, March 17, 2021, available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03344-2>.
- 29 See Matteo Cinelli, et al., “The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media,” *PNAS*, February 23, 2021, available at <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2023301118>; Emanuele Brugnoli, et al., “Recursive Patterns in Online Echo Chambers,” *NIH*, December 27, 2019, available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6934735/>.
- 30 See N. Di Marco, et al., “Patterns of Linguistic Simplification on Social Media Platforms over Time,” *PNAS*, December 6, 2024, available at <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2412105121>.
- 31 Political out-group language was found to be the most powerful predictor of engagement, with posts about the out-group appealing to emotions such as anger, outrage, and mockery. See Steve Rathje, et al., “Out-group Animosity Drives Engagement on Social Media,” *PNAS*, June 23, 2021, available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8256037/>; M. Asher Lawson, Shikhar Anand, and Hemant Kakkar, “Tribalism and Tribulations: The Social Costs of Not Sharing Fake News,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, March 2023, available at <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/xge-xge0001374.pdf>.
- 32 As noted in a recent article: “The challenge is that modern AI doesn’t just copy voices or faces; it holds conversations, reads emotions, and tailors its tone to persuade. And it can now command other AIs—directing image, video, and voice models to generate the most convincing content for each target.” Tal Feldman and Aneesh Pappu, “The Era of AI Persuasion in Elections Is about to Begin,” *MIT Technology Review*, December 5, 2025, available at <https://www.technologyreview.com/2025/12/05/1128837/the-era-of-ai-persuasion-in-elections-is-about-to-begin/>.
- 33 This is especially the case for young adults, who are more likely to get their news from social media, to trust the information they receive on social media sites as much as they trust information from national news organizations, to get news incidentally rather than by searching for it, and to consume it in short form, which means with less detail and context. See, e.g., Naomi Forman-Katz, et al., “Young Adults and the Future of News,” Pew Research Center, December 3, 2025, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2025/12/03/young-adults-and-the-future-of-news/>.
- 34 See, e.g., Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 See, e.g., Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Princeton University Press, 2018; Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized*, Simon & Schuster, January 28, 2020.
- 37 See, e.g., Sara Brown, “MIT Sloan Research about Social Media, Misinformation, and Elections,” MIT Management Sloan School, October 5, 2020, available at <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/mit-sloan-research-about-social-media-misinformation-and-elections>. It is worth noting, however, that some recent research shows that the correlation with polarization in particular does not always hold. See, e.g., Andrew M. Guess, et al., “How Do Social Media Feed Algorithms Affect Attitudes and Behavior in an Election Campaign?” *Science* 381, no. 6656, July 27, 2023, available at <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abp9364>.
- 38 Research indicates that there is an asymmetry in how the algorithmic environment affects left-wing media outlets as compared with right-wing media outlets. For example, the findings from the 2020 US Facebook and Instagram Election Study, as well as complementary research evaluating platform data from that election cycle, make clear that structural fragmentation and the proliferation of problematic radicalizing content was disproportionately concentrated on the political right. See Sandra González-Bailón, et al., “Asymmetric Ideological Segregation in Exposure to Political News on Facebook,” *Science* 381, no. 6656, July 27, 2023, available at <https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.ade7138>. In part, this may be because of long-standing institutional, political, and cultural patterns in American politics that have resulted in a more isolated information landscape that produces a more secluded feedback loop in American conservative media. See, e.g., Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 39 See William Brady, et al., “Emotion Shapes the Diffusion of Moralized Content in Social Networks,” *PNAS*, 114, no. 28, (June 26, 2017): 7313-7318, available at <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1618923114>.
- 40 Research shows that deep-seated and stable distrust leads to disengagement from the democratic process. See, e.g., Carmen van Alebeek, Tom van der Meer, and Armen Hakhverdian, “Stable or Variable Distrust? Disentangling the Relationship between Political Trust and Electoral Behavior,” *European Political Science Review*, December 17, 2025, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-political-science-review/article/stable-or-variable-distrust-disentangling-the-relationship-between-political-trust-and-electoral-behavior/99867E5D3A74B489D4686D36C711750D>. Low trust leads citizens to believe that their vote will be futile, discouraging them from turning out in elections; evidence links lower levels of political trust with a greater propensity to abstain from voting. See Kimmo Grönlund and Maija Setälä, “Political Trust, Satisfaction and Voter Turnout,” *Comparative European Politics*, 5, no. 4 (December 2007): 400-422, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/31960520_Political_Trust_Satisfaction_and_Voter_Turnout.

- 41 See Leila Shahrzadi, et al., “Causes, Consequences, and Strategies to Deal with Information Overload: A Scoping Review,” *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 4, no. 2 (November 2024): 1-12, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667096824000508#sec0027>.
- 42 See Robert S. Mueller III, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*, March 2019, Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, available at [https://www.justice.gov/archives/sco/file/1373816/dl?inline=](https://www.justice.gov/archives/sco/file/1373816/dl?inline=;); see Avril Haines, “DNI Haines Opening Statement as Delivered to the SSCI for an Update on Foreign Threats to the 2024 Elections,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, May 15, 2024, available at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/congressional-testimonies/congressional-testimonies-2024/3823-dni-haines-opening-statement-as-delivered-to-the-ssci-for-an-update-on-foreign-threats-to-the-2024-elections>.
- 43 See, e.g., Ceren Budak, Brendan Nyhan, David M. Rothschild, Emily Thorson, and Duncan J. Watts, “Misunderstanding the Harms of Online Misinformation,” *Nature* 630, no. 8015, (June 5, 2024): 45-53, available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-07417-w>; Gregory Eady, Tom Paskhalis, Jan Zilinsky, Richard Bonneau, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua A. Tucker, “Exposure to the Russian Internet Research Agency Foreign Influence Campaign on Twitter in the 2016 US Election and Its Relationship to Attitudes and Voting Behavior,” *Nature Communications* 14, no. 62, January 9, 2023, available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-35576-9>.
- 44 Pew’s research found that “Most Americans see news they think is inaccurate, and about half say it’s tough to know what is true.” See Luxuan Wang and Joanne Haner, “Many Americans Say They Often Come Across Inaccurate News—and Have a Hard Time Knowing What’s True,” Pew Research Center, October 29, 2025, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/10/29/many-americans-say-they-often-come-across-inaccurate-news-and-have-a-hard-time-knowing-whats-true/>.
- 45 See, e.g., Sundara Kashyap Vadapalli, Sharuna Doyal, Frederique J. Vanheusden, Jens F. Binder, and Daria J. Kuss, “Exploring the Impact of Online Misinformation on Ideological Polarisation and Institutional Distrust: An Integrative Review and Strategic Framework for Counteraction,” *SN Social Sciences* 6, no. 87 (February 23, 2026): 1-30, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-026-01349-0>.
- 46 Steven Waldman indicated in his proposal that: “An increase of about \$3 billion per year in additional spending on local news would likely get us there. That could be \$1 billion from philanthropy (large and small), \$1 billion from improved business models and \$1 billion from public support.”
- 47 See Illinois Department of Commerce’s Local Journalism Sustainability Tax Incentive Program, available at <https://dceo.illinois.gov/expandrelocate/incentives/taxassistance/new-journalism-tax-incentive-program.html>.
- 48 See the proposed Community News and Small Business Support Act, bipartisan legislation introduced in the House of Representatives by Congresswomen Suzan DelBene (WA-01) and Claudia Tenney (NY-24), available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/4756>; Office of Suzan DelBene, “Press Statement: DelBene, Tenney Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Support Community News Institutions, Small Businesses,” July 21, 2023, available at <https://delbene.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3578>.
- 49 See, e.g., Report for America, a national service program that places journalists into local newsrooms, available at <https://www.reportforamerica.org/>.
- 50 See New York City’s Local Law 83, which mandates that city agencies allocate at least 50 percent of their annual print and digital advertising budgets to community and ethnic media outlets. For commentary on the law’s effectiveness, see Lori Henson, “To Save Community News, Refine NYC’s Bold but Flawed Local Ad Law,” Poynter, June 4, 2025, available at <https://www.poynter.org/commentary/2025/nyc-advertising-policy-local-news/>.
- 51 See, e.g., studies that have found the United States ranks at the bottom of Western democracies in terms of public funding for public service broadcasting, such as in Geoff Bickerton, *Bang for Our Buck: Comparing Public Service Broadcasting Funding in 19 Countries, Including Canada*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 2025, available at <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/bang-for-our-buck.pdf>.
- 52 It is worth noting that there is some bipartisan support for taking action to reform the social media ecosystem, even though the results have been relatively modest. For example, the Utah Digital Choice Act, which was signed into law in March 2025, and is poised to take effect on July 1, 2026, seeks to provide users more choice and ownership over their personal data through “middleware”—online tools like browser extensions and consumer-facing protocols that would enable people to take control of their online experiences across the web. As one of our participants made clear, however, this effort “proceeds on the disproven theory that consumers can control their online experiences in today’s networked information economy. As such, it distracts reformers from solutions that would redress the structural asymmetries that define today’s market for consumer-facing services, including social media.” See Olivier Sylvain, “Middleware and Illusory Promise of End-User Control,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 715, no. 1, December 17, 2025, available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5923284.
- 53 Commentators variously use “Section 230,” “the Communications Decency Act” (the 1996 amendment to the Communications Act), or simply “the CDA.”

- 54 See John P. Wihbey, "Bridging the News and Social Media Divide: An Emerging Imperative for Democracy," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 715(1), December 15, 2025, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00027162251370901>.
- 55 See Jon Roozenbeek, Sander van der Linden, and Thomas Nygren, "Prebunking Interventions Based on 'Inoculation' Theory Can Reduce Susceptibility to Misinformation Across Cultures," *The Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*, January 2020, Vol. 1, Issue 2, February 3, 2020, available at <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/global-vaccination-badnews/#0>.
- 56 See Myranda, accessed July 24, 2026, <https://myranda.ai/>.
- 57 See the original proposal at this link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kDnGzEToRuliLimfBzGjeXWj_mb6oTab/view?usp=sharing.
- 58 See Aviv Ovadya, "Can Algorithmic Recommendation Systems Be Good for Democracy?," *Tech Policy Press*, February 11, 2022, available at <https://www.techpolicy.press/can-algorithmic-recommendation-systems-be-good-for-democracy/>.
- 59 See Jonathan Stray, "It's Possible to Reduce Polarization Without Reducing Engagement," *The Prosocial Ranking Challenge*, March 23, 2026, available at <https://rankingchallenge.substack.com/p/its-possible-to-reduce-polarization>.
- 60 See Sebastian Cushing Rodriguez, "Consensus Building in Taiwan, the Poster Child of Digital Democracy," *Democracy Technologies*, October 4, 2023, available at <https://democracy-technologies.org/participation/consensus-building-in-taiwan/>; E. Glen Weyl and Audrey Tang, *Plurality*, 2024, available at <https://plurality.net>.
- 61 See Uğur Aytaç, "Big Tech, Algorithmic Power, and Democratic Control," *The Journal of Politics* 86(4), October 2024, available at <https://doi.org/10.1086/729938>.
- 62 For one example, public juries deliberated on the development of wind farms in Scotland and on adult social care in the UK. See Sara A. Mehlretter Drury, et al., "Deliberative Quality and Expertise: Uses of Evidence in Citizens' Juries on Wind Farms," *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 17(2), December 2, 2021, available at <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.986>; House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, "Citizens' Assembly on Social Care: Report," Session 2017–19, June 2018, London: House of Commons, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/citizens-assembly-report.pdf>.
- 63 When it comes to citizens' assemblies, one participant noted that they are typically composed of between 30 and 180 members.
- 64 See OECD, "Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave," 2020, OECD Publishing, Paris, available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>; and The Center for New Democratic Processes' work on citizen juries since 1971, available at <https://cndp.us/>.
- 65 See, e.g., Oran Doyle and Rachael Walsh's work, which argues that the citizens' assembly in Ireland played a significant role in the process of public will formation, helping—among other things—legislators avoid the incentives of electoral politics and formulate an amendment proposal that attracted wide support despite intense opposition. Their work, however, also raises concerns about the normative legitimacy of the assembly's impact, based on deficiencies in its representativeness and suggests that if mini-publics are to be institutionalized into constitutional and legal change processes, consideration should be given to compulsory participation in citizens' assemblies as a civic requirement, akin to jury duty. Oran Doyle and Rachael Walsh, "Constitutional Amendment and Public Will Formation: Deliberative Mini-Publics as a Tool for Consensus Democracy," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 20, May 11, 2022, available at <https://academic.oup.com/icon/article/20/1/398/6583502>.
- 66 See, e.g., Marjan H. Ehsassi, *Activated Citizenship: The Transformative Power of Citizens' Assemblies*, (New York: Routledge, 2025), available at <https://www.routledge.com/Activated-Citizenship-The-Transformative-Power-of-Citizens-Assemblies/Ehsassi/p/book/9781032798561>.
- 67 As a consequence, we did not delve into the criticism of mini-publics from some political philosophers who argue that the vast majority of citizens who cannot participate in a mini-public cannot expect that those selected will share their policy views and visions. See, e.g., Cristina Lafont and Nadia Urbinati, *The Lottocratic Mentality: Defending Democracy Against Lottocracy*, Oxford University Press, November 14, 2024, available at <https://academic.oup.com/book/58966>.
- 68 See Saskia Goldberg, Marina Lindell, and André Bächtiger, "Empowered Minipublics for Democratic Renewal? Evidence from Three Conjoint Experiments in the United States, Ireland, and Finland," *American Political Science Review* 119, no. 3 (2025): 1393-1410, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/empowered-minipublics-for-democratic-renewal-evidence-from-three-conjoint-experiments-in-the-united-states-ireland-and-finland/BDA560EC5E4823A3007F3507B36645B2>; Eric Kramon, "Are Democratic Innovations Legitimate to the Broader Public? Evidence from Survey Experiments in Ghana," *British Journal of Political Science* 55, November 5, 2025, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-political-science/article/are-democratic-innovations-legitimate-to-the-broader-public-evidence-from-survey-experiments-in-ghana/57ECD796E9300CE4E81652F30ECF9221>.
- 69 See Saskia Goldberg, Marina Lindell, and André Bächtiger, "Citizens' Assemblies Can Work Together with Electoral Institutions to Improve Democracy," *LSE Blogs*, February 14, 2025, available at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2025/03/14/citizens-assemblies-can-work-together-with-electoral-institutions-to-improve-democracy/>.

- 70 See, e.g., Andre Bächtiger and John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy for Diabolical Times*, Cambridge University Press, March 28, 2024, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/deliberative-democracy-for-diabolical-times/34E7B0C19B1120C3981A9B218A6B1D04>.
- 71 For example, Unite America found that only 7 percent of voting-age Americans were “decisive” primary voters, and these voters were far less moderate than the general population. See Joseph Cerrone, “Research Brief: Primary Voters Elect Most of Congress. They’re Not Like Most Americans,” Unite America, January 30, 2026, available at <https://www.uniteamerica.org/articles/research-brief-primary-voters-elect-most-of-congress-theyre-not-like-most-americans>.



IGP Institute of
Global Politics

International Affairs Building
420 West 118th Street
New York, NY 10027

212-853-4720
igp.sipa.columbia.edu
igp@sipa.columbia.edu