



IDEA Quarterly Newsletter – Q4 2025

Updates, highlights, and news from the Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability.

IDEA's Malawi Project to Launch in 2026

IDEA's new research initiative will examine how direct, structured dialogue between Members of the Malawian Parliament and local development planners can enhance public resource allocation. Through in-person Deliberative Town Hall events, MPs will interact with randomly selected members of Village Development Committees (VDCs) to discuss development strategies. These forums aim to reduce short-term bias in spending and foster trust in larger, community-wide infrastructure projects. As climate-related disasters become more frequent, the study investigates how deliberative events can





support sustainable development planning and strengthen democratic accountability.

Stay tuned for updates as this pilot launches in 2026.

AI Interviews Provide Deeper Insight on Public Opinion

A new IDEA study led by Ryan Kennedy, in collaboration with CloudResearch and the University of Houston, shows that using AI chatbots for political interviews generates significantly richer, more detailed data than traditional fixed surveys. The experimental paper, *An Experimental Comparison of AI-Enabled Semi-Structured Interviews and Fixed Surveys*, also found an interesting side effect: explaining their reasoning to the AI slightly polarized participants' opinions. The authors note that future research should examine how AI interview design — its tone, structure, and cues — shapes how people form and express opinions. Understanding these effects is key to judging the long-term reliability of AI-based public opinion research.



[Learn more](#)

Reducing “Voice Insecurity” to Revitalize Democracy

authored a new study exploring voice insecurity: the feeling that ordinary citizens have little real influence on policy beyond casting a vote. Adapting the “five pillars” of the food security paradigm — availability, access, use, stability, and agency — the authors show how democratic systems often fail to provide meaningful ways for people to be heard. The result is a cycle of distrust, low participation, and elite control. As a solution, they highlight Citizens’ Assemblies: randomly selected groups of citizens who deliberate and provide recommendations directly to policymakers. Citizens’ Assemblies are an important new part of IDEA’s deliberative engagement toolkit, and we are exploring opportunities to combine Citizens’ Assemblies and Deliberative Town Halls.

[Learn more](#)

Most Americans Reject Political Violence, New Research Finds

IDEA's Director for Strategy & Innovation, Ryan Kennedy, shared important new research at OSU's recent AI Summit. Kennedy challenged claims that many Americans support political violence. His study found that most respondents who said "the use of force" might be justified were referring to lawful or peaceful actions, not violence. Kennedy calls this a "failure to communicate," showing how vague survey questions and simplified headlines distort public understanding. Better-designed polls and clearer media interpretation are essential to reflect what Americans actually believe.



[Learn more](#)

Revisiting Madison's Ideals for Representation, Constitution Week, Sept. 17-23

For Constitution Week, we revisited Madison's vision of representative democracy and how today's digital tools could revitalize it. In *The Internet and the Madisonian Cycle*, David Lazer, Michael Neblo, and Kevin Esterling examine how online spaces might foster more authentic, two-way conversations between citizens and representatives. Their research highlights both the potential and limitations of digital deliberation—insights later developed through Deliberative Town Halls.



Storytelling as a Tool for Democratic Dialogue: Dr. Ralph Martins

Congratulations to IDEA alumnus and recent Ohio State PhD Ralph Martins, who successfully defended his dissertation on the role of personal storytelling in democratic dialogue. His research developed the first multilevel analysis of group dynamics in storytelling within deliberative settings, providing key insights into civic voice and individual participation. IDEA is proud to have provided data access and a collaborative environment to support Dr. Martin's valuable contribution to democratic theory and practice.



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