

# Constituent Engagement Survey Results

Technical Report

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## Executive Summary

This report summarizes findings from a 2025 survey of 1,001 US adults. The Institute for Democratic Engagement & Accountability (IDEA) at The Ohio State University designed the survey in partnership with the Subcommittee on Modernization & Innovation and House Digital Services. The survey assesses public attitudes toward Congress and their interest and receptiveness to constituent engagement reforms or modalities.

### Key Findings:

- Despite the public's frustration and increasing lack of trust in Congress, a majority (65 percent) believe Congress is interested in what people have to say.
- A majority of the American public is interested in engaging with members of Congress. More than 7 in 10 respondents are willing to engage directly with elected officials on important issues.
- Motivational and structural hurdles are the primary barriers that limit contacting Congress. 40 percent do not think members of Congress care. 47 percent of people who have not contacted their representatives think it is too difficult or takes too much time.
- A majority of people are willing to engage in activities that require greater time commitments like attending town halls or live Q&A sessions, and believe these modes are effective.
- People are skeptical of AI-powered chatbots as a means of interacting with Congress. More than half are unlikely to use AI chatbots on congressional websites. Only about 2 in 10 people think chatbots would be effective for communication.

**Americans are open to experimentation and willing to engage in novel ways of communicating with their members of Congress—especially when opportunities are authentic, transparent, and consequential.** Findings from both past research and this survey converge on a central tenet: citizens care deeply about the *process* of democratic engagement. The themes and responses from this survey suggest Americans want to reclaim agency in their representation.

**Engagement mechanisms should prioritize two-way interactions that promote inclusive, reasoned discussion that enables an authentic dialogue between elected officials and the public.** Efforts to strengthen the connection between Congress and the public should include structural changes that enhance transparency, improve how constituents engage, and increase responsiveness to the diverse perspectives citizens bring forward. Emerging technologies, particularly AI, can help make democratic engagement feasible at scale when integrated strategically. When meeting profound changes in information and communication technologies, it is important to emphasize a system where information faithfully circulates—where Congress listens, learns, and responds in ways that citizens can contribute to, see, and believe.

## About the Survey

This report discusses findings from a survey the Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability (IDEA) at The Ohio State University designed in partnership with the Subcommittee on Modernization & Innovation and House Digital Services. The survey assesses public attitudes toward Congress and their interest and receptiveness to constituent engagement reforms or modalities. The results provide systematic, data-driven perspectives into how US adults consider democratic innovations like Deliberative Town Halls, small group deliberations, or grant proposal review, their current civic engagement, and attitudes toward communicating with Congress. Results may inform discussions about effective strategies for public engagement and institutional reform, future research, and the development of practical tools for practitioners seeking to enhance civic participation.

PureSpectrum administered the survey between August 20 and October 2, 2025 through an online panel. We invited respondents to participate in a self-administered, online survey about communication with their representatives. PureSpectrum offered respondents monetary incentives for participation in accordance with its policies. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 1,001 respondents is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.<sup>1</sup> To ensure high-quality data, IDEA performed data quality checks to identify non-attentive survey respondents.

To ensure a nationally representative sample, we constructed survey weights based on 2023 ACS demographic benchmarks for age, race, sex, educational attainment, and geographic region. Weights also included partisan benchmarks from the 2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS). Weighted estimates are presented throughout the report unless otherwise specified.

This survey provides a snapshot of public attitudes and should be interpreted with standard caveats. Survey data capture self-reported opinions at a specific point in time and may be subject to social desirability bias, non-response bias, and measurement error. Weighting and design-based estimation mitigate but do not eliminate these sources of uncertainty.

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<sup>1</sup>This margin of error applies only to full sample; subgroup analyses presented in this report have a higher margin of error.

## The View of Congress

The public remains deeply pessimistic about Congress. Our survey results show low levels of congressional approval and trust that are comparable to other recent studies. 54 percent somewhat or strongly disapprove. Just 14 percent of respondents trust Congress to do what is right most of the time. This skepticism persists across race, gender, age and party affiliation.

**Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress has been handling its job?**

Strongly approve	8.4%
Somewhat approve	28.6%
Somewhat disapprove	29.4%
Strongly disapprove	24.7%
Don't know	9.0%

**How often can you trust the U.S. Congress to do what is right?**

All of the time	5.1%
Most of the time	14.2%
Some of the time	40.0%
Rarely	30.5%
Never	6.2%
Don't know	4.0%

## Contacting Members of Congress

We find about 21 percent of US adults self-report contacting their member of Congress in the last year. This is consistent with previous research. A 2018 poll found that 23 percent of Americans did so within the past year (Pew Research Center, 2018). However, survey respondents tend to be more engaged and commonly overstate their civic participation, resulting in reported rates larger than verified behavioral measures. Other estimates for contacting members of Congress place the rate between 8 and 15 percent.

**During the past 12 months, have you contacted or tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives, or have you not done this in the past 12 months?**

No	78.3%
Yes	21.7%

Note that only 219 respondents qualified to answer the question, "Which of the following have you done to express your views to a Member of Congress." As a result, these findings should be interpreted as reflecting the views of a *specific* subgroup rather than the general population.

**Which of the following have you done to express your views to a Member of Congress?**

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Sent an email	50.2%
Responded to an online poll or survey	32.1%
Signed a petition addressed to the Member of Congress	25.7%
Reached out via social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	24.6%
Called their local district office	23.0%
Sent a message through a third-party platform (e.g., advocacy website or app)	19.6%
Attended a town hall meeting in person	15.6%
Called their Washington, D.C., office	13.9%
Sent a letter or postcard via mail	13.8%
Attended a town hall meeting online	11.6%
Visited their office in person	10.3%
I don't remember	4.9%

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*Note: Select all that apply, percentages will not add up to 100%.*

*Asked if respondent contacted their member of Congress in last 12 months (n = 219)*

Estimates based on this limited subset are less precise and not generalizable to how all Americans contact their members of Congress, or how they would engage.

Respondents who have not contacted their congressional offices either do not think it will matter or find it difficult. More than 40 percent believe members of Congress do not care about their concerns, and 37 percent think their members of Congress will not change their minds on issues. More than 47 percent find it too difficult to contact congressional offices or say it takes too much time. Previous research shows that motivational barriers—such as low trust or alienation from the political process—and structural barriers, like unequal access to civic knowledge, social networks, income, or time—contribute to who feels empowered to reach out to government institutions (Leighley & Nagler, 2014; Verba et al., 1995).

**Which of the following are reasons you have not contacted a Member of Congress more often?**

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Member of Congress does not care about the concerns of people like me	40.5%
It is too difficult to contact a Member of Congress	37.1%
Member of Congress would not change their opinion	34.7%
Contacting a Member of Congress takes too much time	21.7%
Member of Congress is from a political party I don't support	17.6%
Member of Congress cannot really change anything	15.7%
None of these reasons apply	10.1%
Other	2.2%

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*Note: Select all that apply, percentages will not add up to 100%.*

*Asked if respondent did not contact their member of Congress in last 12 months (n = 782)*

This is reflected in general trends asked in the full sample as well. Very few respondents feel it's easy to let Congress know where they stand on issues.

**How easy do you think it is to let Members of Congress know where you stand on an issue?**

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Very easy	11.5%
Somewhat easy	14.8%
Neither easy nor difficult	19.0%
Somewhat difficult	33.3%
Very difficult	17.9%
Don't know	3.5%

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## Latent Willingness to Engage with Congress

More than 70 percent of respondents are willing to engage directly with members of Congress on important issues. This reflects a latent willingness the American public has to engage with Congress that can be activated. The public is not apathetic. Rather, frustration with Congress as an institution is a response to unmet democratic expectations. Meaningful exchanges are possible as disengagement is more about a deficit of credible avenues for communication (Neblo et al., 2010, 2018).

**Do you agree or disagree with this statement: People like me would like to talk about important issues with Members of Congress.**

Strongly agree	31.8%
Somewhat agree	40.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	19.0%
Somewhat disagree	7.4%
Strongly disagree	1.5%

A majority of respondents reported they think their congressional representatives are interested in what they have to say. This pattern is consistent with findings from the Congressional Management Foundation, which reports similar levels of public interest in engaging with Congress in its panel survey of U.S. registered voters (Goldschmidt & Sinkaus, 2021).

**What is your impression, how interested are your Congressional representatives in what you have to say?**

Very interested	25.1%
Somewhat interested	39.8%
Not very interested	15.3%
Rarely interested	7.5%
Not at all interested	8.3%
Don't know	4.0%

## Perceptions of Congressional Engagement

We asked respondents to evaluate a range of potential engagement channels, spanning both digital and dialogic options, to assess how Americans perceive the effectiveness of congressional outreach and their willingness to participate in new formats. Most respondents think that attending town halls—both in-person and online—will be one of the most effective ways to connect with Congress. A majority also believe online platforms with public commenting or question and answer sessions on social media platforms can be effective. All of these formats prioritize two-way communication, direct questioning, and genuine dialogue, which many see as lacking in one-way communication channels such as newsletters or even individual deliberation (Minozzi et al., 2024; Neblo et al., 2018). Our survey shows respondents are skeptical about how adaptations like short text message updates or AI-powered chatbots can be effective.

When interpreting survey results about interest in participating in new forms of communication, it is important to remember that what people say under current conditions is not necessarily how they would respond if institutions or opportunities changed. Research in public opinion underscores that attitudes expressed in the moment can differ from what people would prefer if given different options or better information. In other words, stated willingness captures a snapshot of opinion within today's institutional setting; it does not reflect how people may act or feel in a reformed or improved system. People's willingness to take part in something like a Deliberative Town Hall or other online engagement activity, can depend on factors such as who is organizing it, how fair or credible it seems, and whether they believe it would make

a difference. This means that survey results on willingness or interest are best understood as indicators of potential engagement, not firm confirmations of future behavior.

In the follow set of results, we randomly assigned respondents to one of two groups (A or B), for evaluating modalities for congressional engagement. This split-sample design allows us to balance the need for comprehensive coverage with the practical constraints of survey length and respondent burden.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, we included both "don't know" and "this doesn't matter to me" response options to distinguish between uncertainty and indifference for non-endorsement. A "don't know" may capture a lack of information or familiarity, while "this doesn't matter to me" reflects a judgment that the issue is personally unimportant or irrelevant. Differentiating these responses provides a sense of where low support reflects informational gaps versus genuine disengagement, which is an important consideration when designing effective outreach and communication strategies.

Overall, respondents expressed openness to engaging in more participatory forms of democracy when those processes are clearly structured and inclusive. A majority of respondents think novel ways of including the public in the process will be more legitimate—or justified and appropriate—compared to the status quo. More than 70 percent are interested in providing input on which local programs should be considered for federal funding. Support to engage in policy discussions also received strong interest—more than half were interested in participating. Respondents also felt confident these processes were more legitimate or representative than the status quo.

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<sup>2</sup>Research consistently shows that longer instruments and repetitive question formats can lead to fatigue, sacrificing, and reduced data reliability (e.g., Malhotra, 2008).

### Group A (N = 486)

Some Members of Congress invite constituents in their district to submit proposals for local programs they think should receive federal funding and provide input on previously submitted proposals. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates not at all interested and 5 indicates very interested, how much would you like to be a part of providing input like this?

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Very interested	25.2%
Somewhat interested	51.7%
Neither interested or disinterested	13.1%
Somewhat disinterested	0.0%
Not at all interested	10.0%

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Some Members of Congress invite constituents in their district to submit proposals for local programs they think should receive federal funding and provide input on previously submitted proposals. Compared to the current process, please rate how much more or less legitimate, or justified and appropriate, you consider events like this to be?

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Much more legitimate	20.8%
Somewhat more legitimate	47.5%
No more or less legitimate	21.9%
Somewhat less legitimate	8.9%
Much less legitimate	0.8%

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### Group B (N = 515)

Some Members of Congress invite citizens in their district to participate in policy discussions. In these discussions, randomly selected citizens meet online to evaluate policy options or determine which policy issues should get priority. The results of these discussions are shared with the Member of Congress to help guide their decision-making. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates not at all interested and 5 indicates very interested, how much would you like to be a part of providing input like this?

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Very interested	26.6%
Somewhat interested	39.8%
Neither interested or disinterested	18.1%
Somewhat disinterested	11.3%
Not at all interested	4.1%

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Some Members of Congress invite citizens in their district to participate in policy discussions. In these discussions, randomly selected citizens meet online to evaluate policy options or determine which policy issues should get priority. The results of these discussions are shared with the Member of Congress to help guide their decision-making. Compared to the current process, please rate how much more or less legitimate, or justified and appropriate, you consider events like this to be?

Much more legitimate	18.4%
Somewhat more legitimate	49.0%
No more or less legitimate	22.9%
Somewhat less legitimate	8.1%
Much less legitimate	1.5%

Respondents are willing to engage with relatively low-time, low-effort digital activities: at least 60 percent reported being very or somewhat likely to participate in reading short text updates, responding to online surveys, using platforms with public comments and voting features, or reading newsletters. They are also willing to engage in activities that require greater time commitments, such as attending town halls or live Q&A sessions on social media. Prior research shows that opportunity costs and perceived effort reduce some willingness to participate in deliberative or synchronous formats (Neblo et al., 2018).

**“Please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to participate in the following with your elected officials:”**

**Group A (N = 508)**

**Attend in-person town halls with an independent moderator**

Very likely	26.1%
Somewhat likely	35.0%
Somewhat unlikely	15.5%
Very unlikely	14.4%
This does not matter to me	3.4%
Don't know	5.7%

**Use an AI chatbot on their website**

Very likely	12.2%
Somewhat likely	18.8%
Somewhat unlikely	13.7%
Very unlikely	41.8%
This does not matter to me	7.2%
Don't know	6.2%

**Participate in a Q&A sessions on social media sites like Facebook or YouTube**

Very likely	23.4%
Somewhat likely	34.9%
Somewhat unlikely	11.8%
Very unlikely	18.9%
This does not matter to me	5.0%
Don't know	6.0%

**Read newsletters sent by email**

Very likely	24.5%
Somewhat likely	39.4%
Somewhat unlikely	11.6%
Very unlikely	14.5%
This does not matter to me	5.5%
Don't know	4.4%

**Group B (N = 493)**

**Respond to surveys posted on Member websites**

Very likely	24.6%
Somewhat likely	40.2%
Somewhat unlikely	18.2%
Very unlikely	11.4%
This does not matter to me	1.8%
Don't know	3.9%

**Engage with online platforms where comments can be publicly posted and voted up or down by other users**

Very likely	24.8%
Somewhat likely	40.4%
Somewhat unlikely	15.7%
Very unlikely	11.7%
This does not matter to me	2.7%
Don't know	4.7%

### Attend online town halls

Very likely	26.3%
Somewhat likely	31.5%
Somewhat unlikely	19.4%
Very unlikely	16.4%
This does not matter to me	2.6%
Don't know	3.8%

### Read short updates through text messages

Very likely	27.9%
Somewhat likely	40.0%
Somewhat unlikely	14.1%
Very unlikely	12.1%
This does not matter to me	3.4%
Don't know	2.5%

A majority of respondents report that attending town halls—both in person and online—will be most effective. A majority also believe online platforms with public commenting or question and answer sessions on social media platforms can be effective. All of these formats prioritize two-way communication, direct questioning, and genuine dialogue, which many see as lacking in one-way communication channels such as newsletters or even individual deliberation (Minozzi et al., 2015, 2024). Related research shows that when citizens participate in such activities, they report increased trust in their representatives and in institutions.

**“Thinking about some ways Members of Congress communicate with their constituents, how effective or ineffective are the following for Members of Congress to hear from people like you?”**

### Group A (N = 508)

#### Attend in-person town halls with an independent moderator

Very effective	26.9%
Somewhat effective	41.3%
Neither effective or ineffective	11.1%
Somewhat ineffective	6.3%
Very ineffective	4.5%
This does not matter to me	5.9%
Don't know	4.0%

### **Use an AI chatbot on their website**

Very effective	8.7%
Somewhat effective	12.1%
Neither effective or ineffective	16.2%
Somewhat ineffective	15.7%
Very ineffective	28.3%
This does not matter to me	9.3%
Don't know	9.6%

### **Participate in a Q&A sessions on social media sites like Facebook or YouTube**

Very effective	18.6%
Somewhat effective	33.5%
Neither effective or ineffective	18.1%
Somewhat ineffective	8.5%
Very ineffective	9.7%
This does not matter to me	7.6%
Don't know	4.0%

### **Read newsletters sent by email**

Very effective	10.3%
Somewhat effective	31.5%
Neither effective or ineffective	20.7%
Somewhat ineffective	15.4%
Very ineffective	10.7%
This does not matter to me	5.4%
Don't know	6.0%

### **Group B (N = 493)**

### **Engage with online platforms where comments can be publicly posted and voted up or down by other users**

Very effective	21.6%
Somewhat effective	34.4%
Neither effective or ineffective	14.5%
Somewhat ineffective	14.7%
Very ineffective	8.2%
This does not matter to me	4.0%
Don't know	2.6%

### Attend online town halls

Very effective	20.6%
Somewhat effective	37.2%
Neither effective or ineffective	13.0%
Somewhat ineffective	13.0%
Very ineffective	8.0%
This does not matter to me	4.2%
Don't know	4.0%

### Read short updates through text messages

Very effective	11.0%
Somewhat effective	30.1%
Neither effective or ineffective	22.5%
Somewhat ineffective	17.5%
Very ineffective	11.3%
This does not matter to me	3.7%
Don't know	3.9%

These results suggest that engagement mechanisms should prioritize two-way interactions. Respondents generally want authentic, accessible, and accountable political representation. Respondents want members of Congress to actively engage with their constituents meaningfully, to ensure all voices are considered, and to challenge the entrenched perceptions of elitism and disconnection associated with political figures.

When asked directly about social media posts, respondents were divided on whether social media content from members of Congress is intended to communicate directly with them. Since its onset a decade ago, Congress has increasingly used social media platforms to communicate directly with the public (Russell, 2021; Tucker et al., 2018). These platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, have allowed lawmakers to bypass traditional media structures and speak in their own voice, offering immediacy and authenticity that conventional channels often lack. However, the same features that make social media effective for connecting representatives and the public can also deepen polarization. The personalized, attention-driven nature of online communication often rewards partisan cues and emotionally charged content, reinforcing divisions rather than fostering deliberation. Taken together, these findings suggest that while social media enhances perceived accessibility, it also poses challenges for the kind of balanced and informative dialogue institutions strive to cultivate.

**Do you think most people agree or disagree with the following: When Members of Congress post on social media, they are communicating with people like me.**

Strongly agree	11.6%
Somewhat agree	25.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	25.2%
Somewhat disagree	16.4%
Strongly disagree	16.5%
This does not matter to me	4.8%

## Sample Demographics

### Age

18-29	20.0%
30-44	25.0%
45-64	32.0%
65+	23.0%

### Race/Ethnicity

White	69.7%
Black	12.1%
Asian	5.0%
Other	13.1%

### Sex

Male	50.0%
Female	50.0%

### Income

<50K	39.5%
50-100K	31.6%
100K+	28.9%

### Geographic Region

Midwest	21.3%
Northeast	17.2%
South	38.4%
West	23.1%

### Political Party

Republican	48.6%
Independent	3.7%
Democrat	47.7%

## Methodology

The Institute for Democratic Engagement & Accountability (IDEA) conducted a survey between August 20 - October 2, 2025. PureSpectrum recruited survey respondents and invited them to participate in a self-administered, online survey about communication with their representatives. PureSpectrum offered respondents monetary incentives for survey participation in accordance with its policy. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 1,001 respondents is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. Note that this margin of error applies only to full sample toplines and subgroup analysis will have a higher margin of error.

To ensure a nationally representative sample, we constructed survey weights based on 2023 ACS demographic benchmarks for age, race, sex, educational attainment, and geographic region. Weights also included partisan benchmarks from the 2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS). To ensure high-quality data, IDEA performed data quality checks to identify non-attentive survey respondents. IDEA and the U.S. House Administration Subcommittee on Modernization and Innovation jointly developed the survey questionnaire.

IDEA is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary research institute at the Ohio State University with a global network of collaborators and partners. IDEA has over nineteen years of experience designing, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based solutions for promoting and reviving democracy around the world.

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