INNOVATING FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD
R&D FOR DEMOCRACY

Building an Engine for Democratic Innovation

Innovating for the Public Good: R&D for Democracy (IFPG) is a center that tests, applies and scales new tools and approaches to address underlying dynamics threatening US democracy and develops long-term solutions.

Our democracy is increasingly performative. The United States is now becoming an authoritarian country; not just on the Federal level but also on the state level, with basic rights being challenged at every level. Democratic backsliding is a fact.

We lack a strategy that understands how to build for the long-term, create generational change, revitalize the public sector in ways that deliver programs that serve the American public, and reform a political process that thwarts progress. Our efforts are structurally optimized around election cycles; those who would weaken our democracy have structured their investments around infrastructures and long-term power building.

The Right has invested in narrative dominance through universities, media concentration, think tanks, mega churches and now artificial intelligence platforms to provide everyday Americans a narrative that explains their lives, identifies who is to blame for their struggles, fosters distrust in the public sector and promotes a zero-sum game mentality. These narratives are designed to promote fear, polarization, racial animus, and an "us versus them" view of the world



Elections matter. But elections alone cannot address the underlying forces weakening American democracy. We must advance bold policies that improve people's lives, develop narratives that resonate, rebuild trust in public institutions, and help ensure that electoral outcomes reflect the will of the majority of American voters.

The work of IFPG will result in short-term gains and new strategies, but the goal is to produce longer-term foundational change to restore America. IFPG brings together diverse subject matter experts to identify foundational challenges and develop tools and actionable strategies that result in fundamental change.



Identifying the Critical Gap

After the 2004 election, a problem that no single campaign could solve was identified. Republicans were gaining an advantage through sophisticated voter data, while Democrats and their allies lacked a comparable shared resource.
A number of individuals came together to build something new.

With early support from donors associated with the newly formed Democracy Alliance, they created Catalist: a national voter-data platform that combined registration records, demographic information, and advanced analytics for use by Democratic campaigns, labor unions, and progressive organizations.

Catalist showed what can happen when people recognize a critical gap, bring together the right expertise, and invest in a solution with the potential to serve an entire ecosystem. Imagine making that kind of innovation a sustained, repeatable practice.

That is the opportunity behind **Innovating for the Public Good (IFPG).**

A New Model for Innovation

American democracy faces a set of challenges:

- declining public trust
- democratic backsliding
- technological disruption, a changing electorate

and an increasingly fragmented information environment. The organizations confronting these challenges face intense pressure to deliver immediate results, often with limited time and resources to develop fundamentally new approaches.

At the same time, advances in technology, behavioral science, communications, organizational design, and other fields offer possibilities the political and civic ecosystem has only begun to explore.

IFPG brings these worlds together. We are a research, development, and innovation center dedicated to protecting democracy and advancing social progress. Our purpose is to find promising ideas, turn them into practical solutions, and help bring the best of them to scale.

Our central belief is that some of the most consequential breakthroughs for democracy will come from bringing political and civic leaders together with people who have spent their careers solving different kinds of problems.

IFPG will draw on talent from across American life: scientists and entrepreneurs, engineers and artists, behavioral researchers and business leaders, educators and public servants, community leaders and political practitioners. Together, they will help us spot overlooked challenges, anticipate emerging threats, and see possibilities that established institutions may miss.

We will carry those ideas through a disciplined process:

1. **Identify the opportunity.** Through research, expert networks, structured convenings, and conversations with organizations on the front lines, we will identify pressing problems and promising ideas. We will focus on opportunities with the potential for meaningful impact across the broader ecosystem.

2. **Build the solution.** For each priority challenge, IFPG will assemble a team with the expertise to solve it. Working toward clear objectives and measurable outcomes, these teams will develop practical innovations: new technologies, communications approaches, research-driven interventions, operational models, or shared institutional capabilities.

3. **Test what works.** We will turn promising ideas into prototypes and pilots, working with partners who can put them to the test in real-world conditions. We will measure results, refine the work, learn from failures, and invest further in the approaches that demonstrate promise.

4. **Bring success to scale.** IFPG will work with campaigns, advocacy organizations, civic institutions, donors, and other partners to put proven innovations into wider use. Depending on the opportunity, that could mean helping existing organizations adopt a new tool, building shared infrastructure, or creating an independent initiative that can carry the work forward.

This model gives donors an opportunity to invest in more than any single project.

An investment in IFPG builds a lasting capacity to find, develop, and spread solutions that can strengthen the entire progressive ecosystem.

Some of those solutions may help organizations meet urgent challenges in the next election cycle. Others may change how democratic institutions earn trust, how government serves people, or how civic organizations use technology and engage their communities for years to come.

Catalist demonstrated the enduring value of one transformative idea. **IFPG aims to create the conditions for many more: a continuing source of the tools, strategies, and institutions needed to protect democracy and empower social progress for generations to come.**

From Vision to Practice: IFPG's Work in 2026

IFPG has already begun putting this approach into practice. In 2026, we have supported and undertaken projects that apply emerging technologies, behavioral science, data analysis, and innovative research methods to challenges facing American democracy.

Our early work spans four strategic pillars:

1. **Narrative Innovation:** Developing new ways to understand and shape the narratives, beliefs, and emotions that influence public opinion and democratic participation.

2. **Electoral Innovation:** Identifying emerging voter groups, understanding a changing electorate, and improving the tools and approaches used to engage voters.

3. **Innovation to Restore Trust:** Confronting disinformation, understanding the impact of artificial intelligence, and strengthening confidence in democratic institutions and information.

4. **Policy Innovation:** Exploring how better policy and more effective public services can rebuild trust and strengthen democratic legitimacy.



The projects that follow offer a first look at the work underway and the larger opportunity ahead: expanding IFPG's network, testing more promising ideas, and helping successful innovations reach the people and organizations that can put them to use.

Narrative Innovation

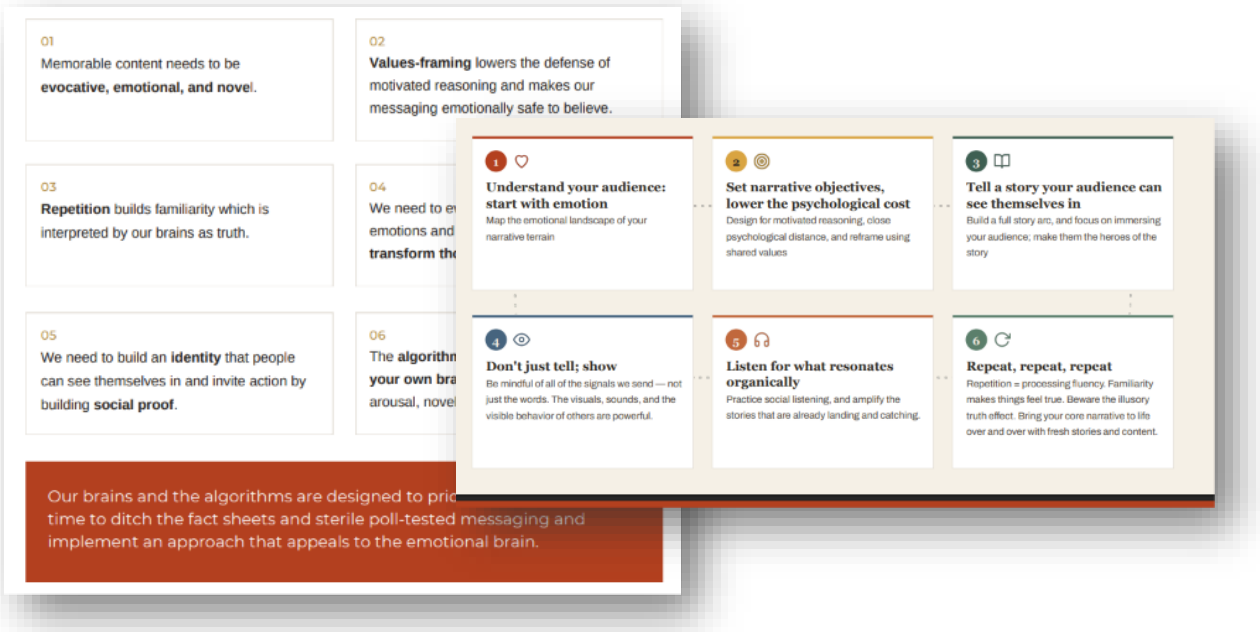
The Right has created powerful narratives to gain power, creating false mental shortcuts for Americans to understand their lives. The ability to revitalize our democracy depends upon being able to compete on the narrative front. Our greatest challenge is to change the conversations people have in their heads about our country, its leaders and its direction.

Our Work to Date and Future Projects:

a. **Othering**: The "Us versus Them" and dehumanizing certain groups has been the path to power for the Right. In many ways, it is their go-to strategy. IFPG partnered with Hart Research on seminal research demonstrating how to effectively combat this and weaken its power broadly. There is much more to do on this in terms of field pilot programs and scaling. This is particularly important in terms of preparing for 2028.

b. **Feelings Over Facts**: IFPG released a report that breaks down the neuroscience and psychology behind why fact-based messaging so often fails, what works instead and how practitioners can apply an emotions-first framework to narrative. The entire project included a scientific report, a practitioner's guide, an implementation workbook, website and video.

   We have an extensive Phase II that includes a training module and roadshow for organizations and candidates, midterm analysis of successful and unsuccessful use cases, a video series, an in-person convening, a podcast/influencers tour, etc.



c. **The Bandwagon Effect for Persuasion**: We know from basic behavioral science that people want to consider themselves part of an "in-group" or exhibit similar behaviors to "people like me."

   This is why social pressure works so well. IFPG conducted a short 1,200 voter survey—voter file matched—that posed two questions in a split sample to determine if there is any difference. The first question was a straightforward question about vote intention, the second signaled that neighbors are voting a certain way and then asked the vote question. The results demonstrated movement toward the candidate that the voter believed the neighbors were supporting. The greatest movement came among weak Republicans. This result could lead to important new strategies and increase the salience of signaling.

   Field tests are needed in 2027 and 2028 to demonstrate if the survey results replicate themselves in the field and in what types of races.

Electoral Innovation

The American electorate is changing rapidly and dramatically. These changes include demographics, geographic locations, employment, education, marital status, the impact of social media and the fragmented media landscape.

This category of work includes identifying new cohorts of voters, the development of new models to target key cohorts and use resources more effectively, designing new measurements to determine ROI, and to look ahead and plan for 2030 and 2032.

We cannot bring about true innovation unless we understand our audiences and the contexts in which elections are held.

Our Work to Date and Future Projects:

a. **Double Negative/Double Haters**: This is a large cohort of voters that have determined the outcomes of elections for more than a decade. IFPG developed a model to help identify these voters.

   These voters are here to stay. They need to be understood, and many fall out of persuasion universes. This model was used successfully in 2026 by one of the largest Independent Expenditures in 32 Congressional districts and three statewide. Target Smart offered the model on its media platform.

We want to continue to socialize this model throughout this cycle and into the next as these are the voters who have decided Presidential elections.

b. **2030-2032 Survey**: The 2030 census will bring about a sea change in American politics. IFPG has developed scenarios outlining what these changes will mean electorally. We have an extensive study of the changes, state by state, in Congressional Districts.

   The next phase would examine scenarios regarding the refashioning of state legislative districts based on a variety of factors, including population changes, the post-Callais environment where critical guardrails of the Voting Rights Act have been removed, the new gerrymandering efforts and much more.

c. **Cost Per Net Electoral Vote**: In 2024 IFPG developed the first Electoral Vote Model relatively late in the cycle. The CPEV (Cost Per Electoral Vote™) tool is designed to be leveraged by Democratic Presidential Campaign operatives to support decision making on allocating funds across states, media channels, and non-media efforts to provide the highest probability of winning.

   The CPEV tool leverages an econometrics model trained with historical US Presidential polling data, voting outcomes, campaign expenditures and other inputs to derive an algorithm that provides recommendations on spending decisions. This model can be used by campaigns and organizations to enter in proprietary data with added fields. IFPG offers technical support.

   Democrats have lost two of the last three elections despite outspending Republicans at a ratio of 1.8 to 1, highlighting potential inefficiencies in spending strategies.

   The 2024 model produced a dashboard tracking national and state-level spending, polling, and produced a voter persuadability index.

   The goal is to develop the model earlier in the cycle so it can be incorporated in strategic decision making throughout.

Innovation to Restore Trust

Our work here centers increasingly on the use of artificial intelligence and mis- and dis-information.

Our Work to Date and Future Projects:

1. LLM Report: **LLMs (AI Large Language Models)** have become part of everyday life. Systems such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Meta AI (Llama) and X.ai's Grok handle billions of interactions daily. They increasingly shape what information people encounter and in what order, subtly deciding what's important and even what is true, sometimes without users realizing it. Because LLMs wield growing power over information exposure, it is vital to recognize the political and ideological structures at multiple stages of their design, and to identify manipulation risks.



This report examines how an ideological skew can enter AI systems both "accidentally", for example through omission during training, and "on purpose", through deliberate attempts to skew training data or tuning processes. Our research discovered that the largest single source of AI LLMs training data is dangerously skewed and available for continuous manipulation.

2. **Inoculation Report**: IFPG produced a groundbreaking inoculation report for candidates, campaign staff, civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and others who run political and issue-based campaigns that give them tools to inoculate themselves against disinformation. This groundbreaking report serves as a practitioner's guide on how to conduct large-scale disinformation countermeasure strategies.

3. **AI & The Midterms:** IFPG is measuring how open the campaign websites of competitive 2026 candidates are to AI crawlers, and we are tracking that posture through Election Day on November 3, 2026. The field covers every 2026 U.S. Senate, Governor and House race rated a toss-up or lean by the Cook Political Report or Sabato's Crystal Ball, including both major-party candidates in each race, plus the leading contenders where a primary is still pending.

   AI Answers and Actions, Tracked at Scale: The second part of the engagement takes those same races and candidates and tracks what the top AI systems say about each of them, every day, at scale. We run daily audits across the seven leading AI systems from now through the election.

   For every race, we ask the same nine questions each day, and we capture every answer and every citation, every day, from now through Election Day. Six are grounded in what people search for on Google: the state of the race, each candidate's record and positions, the head-to-head, the controversies in play and how to vote. A seventh covers the candidates' background and biography. The final pre-election questions track the top attack narratives forming against the Democratic candidate as they develop over the cycle.

   That comes to roughly 60,000 prompt runs by Election Day. Because each prompt is answered by all seven systems, that is on the order of 420,000 individual AI responses, and we capture every one of them along with every citation attached to it. At the end of each day, we hold all that data, both for this report and for future research.

   The final set of questions will include queries as to the results of the elections in each of the races to determine the existence and extent of false narratives about voting outcomes.

This work only increases in importance as AI is frequently used by voters to ask basic questions about voting, the candidates, the veracity of ads, and the integrity of US elections. To date, we have found a significant number of errors reported by AI platforms, the use of betting markets as representative of polling data, the use of fake surveys, and the like.

This work needs to continue, along with our work on creating tools for campaigns and organizations to address AI issues and accuracy.

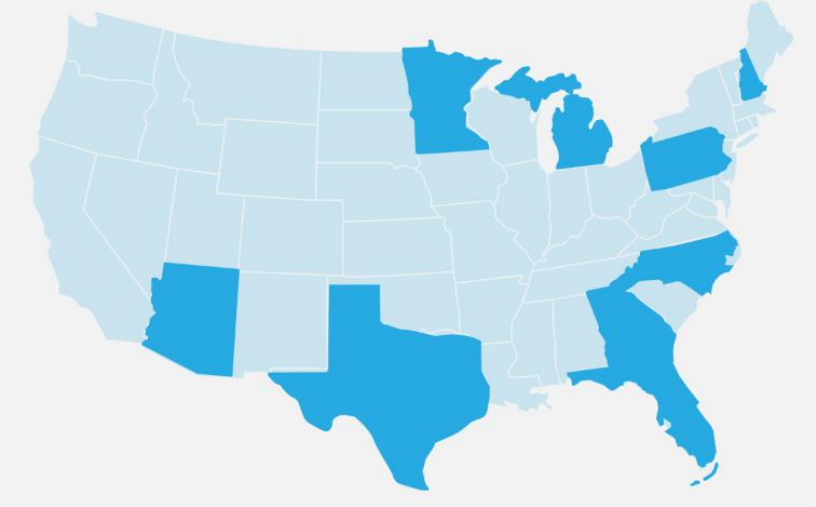
Policy Innovation

Americans are increasingly reliant on public sector services. The difficulties in accessing basic services like SNAP, TANF and Medicaid have only increased as state governments have been defunded. The burden is on the individual to prove they qualify for services. The paperwork and documentation are overwhelming.

Our Work to Date and Future Projects:

a. IFPG produced a report, ***Barriers to Benefits: The Decline in Public Trust*****,** that is a groundbreaking and detailed examination of one of the reasons for increasing dissatisfaction with and distrust of the public sector.

   The report details the requirements to qualify for SNAP, TANF and Medicaid in nine representative states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas.



   This report did a state-by-state analysis of the populations receiving aid, the cuts enacted under the Trump Administration and the qualifying process. We examined nine states to determine (1) if they had a combined form, (2) how many pages there are in the application, (3) how many pages of instruction, and (4) whether there is an in-person interview required within 30 days.

   Survey Research/ Regression Analysis. This project is designed to determine if there is a causal relationship between the delivery of services and public trust in democracy and the public sector.

The ability to demonstrate through a survey and regression analysis that public trust can be either further eroded or increased through the way services are delivered is a game changer.

Restoring public trust is central to the ability to safeguard our democracy from further erosion. Proving causality between the delivery of services and public trust demonstrates the importance of designing new systems and creating new narratives.

The Four Pillars: Landscape Analysis: Challenges to Democracy: 2027-2028 Context

Executive Summary

Much has been written, and said, about the growth of authoritarianism in democratic countries, especially in the United States. Despite numerous studies of structural, psychological and other factors contributing to this movement, little has been done to integrate such research, examining the full range of such factors and incorporating both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The proposed research project, ***From Democracy to Authoritarianism*****,** aims to fill that gap.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

For those who wish to bolster democracy, it is imperative to recognize that winning the next election is crucial but is not nearly enough. If the underlying conditions that create authoritarian vulnerability are deeply rooted, and the threat extends beyond any single leader or election, leaders need to offer bold public-sector solutions that address the structural, institutional, social, and psychological forces that have brought us to this perilous moment.

Before developing a playbook approach and a narrative strategy, we need a more rigorous understanding of the problem we face and a clearer theory about its causes. Specifically, we need to systematically investigate:

- What are the structural, institutional, social, and psychological dynamics that matter most in setting the stage for fascism?
- Which of these forces are already present in the United States, and how far have they progressed?
- What democratic protections still remain for advocates to build on?
- Is the pace of democratic erosion accelerating, holding stable, or declining?
- What forms of government action and leadership can most effectively counteract these forces and change our trajectory?

In short, this landscape analysis is the first step in building a practical research agenda capable of informing policy solutions, narrative strategies, and democratic reforms.

Democracy Grants

IFPG and IFUS plan to offer three-year "Democracy Grants" to working groups of individuals who have different professional backgrounds. These grants will begin at 1.5MM.

We will award competitive prizes to boost innovation that can benefit pro-democracy battles in the short, medium and long term. These grants and prizes will help find and elevate new ideas and create excitement around supporting democratic innovations among researchers, scholars, core allies, philanthropists, elected officials and others.

Innovation Summits
One major national summit will cover a wide range of topics with opportunities for organizations, scholars, researchers, and other innovators to submit proposals for presentation in defined innovation areas.

Two topic specific summits will be held in different regions of the country annually in partnership with local organizations and universities.

Summary

Elections matter. But elections alone cannot address the underlying forces weakening American democracy. We must advance bold policies that improve people's lives, develop narratives that resonate, rebuild trust in public institutions, and help ensure that electoral outcomes reflect the will of the majority of American voters.

IFPG's four pillars bring these efforts together. By connecting diverse expertise with the people and organizations confronting these challenges, we can develop practical solutions that strengthen our democracy and advance social progress.





We have already begun this work, but our reach remains limited while IFPG is launching its new phase.

Significant startup capital will allow us to launch fully: building the team, assembling interdisciplinary working groups, and moving promising ideas into testing and use.

With that investment, IFPG can make an immediate contribution by equipping partners with new tools and strategies to meet urgent challenges. It can also build a lasting capacity for innovation, producing solutions that strengthen our society well beyond any single election or project.

Funding Programs: The costs of these programs can be divided between IFPG, a 501©(4), and Innovating for U.S., a fiscally sponsored 501©(3).