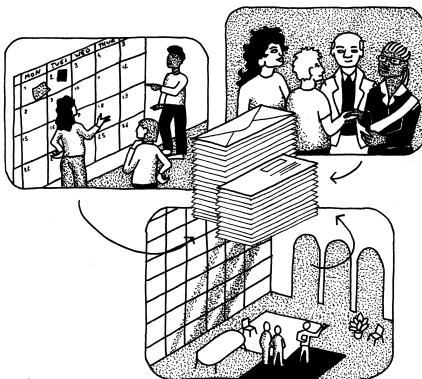# FIVE DIMENSIONS OF SCALING DEMOCRATIC DELIBERATION: WITH AND BEYOND AI

Sammy McKinney (University of Cambridge and DemocracyNext) and Claudia Chwalisz (DemocracyNext)
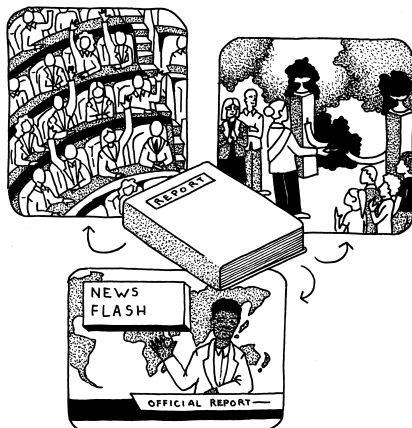
Executive summary

17 June 2025

We see the debate about how to scale deliberation through a political lens, where our goals are focused on how we can enable a citizenry that is resilient to the forces of autocracy – one that feels and is more powerful and connected, where people feel heard and empathise with others, where citizens have stronger interpersonal and societal trust, and where public decisions have greater legitimacy and better alignment with collective values. Against this backdrop, we ask:

What does scaling democratic deliberation mean, why is it valuable, and what is the role of AI in enabling it?

In this paper, we make two core contributions to the field:

1. We offer an **expanded definition of scale** by breaking down the concept across five dimensions: **scaling out** (increasing deliberator numbers), **scaling up** (higher governance levels), **scaling across** (increasing number of processes), **scaling deep** (increasing impact), and **scaling in** (improving deliberative quality).

2. We propose that **scaling democratic deliberation is not a technological challenge alone**, but one that requires a diverse repertoire of technological applications to be developed and fruitfully combined with strengthened civic infrastructure.

5 dimensions of scaling democratic deliberation

	Meaning	Goals	Examples of AI applications
01 Scaling out	Increasing the number of citizens participating in the deliberative process	Increasing representative-ness & legitimacy, and bringing the benefits of participation to more people	AI facilitation, sense-making
02 Scaling up	Deliberation taking place at higher levels of governance	Addressing democratic and epistemic deficits in global governance	AI translation, interpretation
03 Scaling across	Increasing the number of deliberative processes in government & other institutions	Increasing citizen engagement and spreading the benefits of participation	Assembly Assistant (ease of set-up and implementation)
04 Scaling deep	Increasing impact through institutionalisation and stronger connections with the public sphere	Promoting meaningful impact and redistribution of power	Communicating outputs anchored in voice with wider public; supporting report writing
05 Scaling in	Increasing the quality of deliberation	Increasing legitimacy, inclusiveness, transparency, and trust in the process	Group-building and games to support shared values (e.g. Analogia); more inclusive learning materials; sense-making; idea visualisation; identifying absent perspectives or discourses

Future trajectories

01 *Expanding our repertoire of critically informed deliberative technologies*

We need to develop a broad and critically-informed repertoire of deliberative technologies that support and complement deliberative processes across the five dimensions of scaling. A holistic view of scale should guide technological innovation, and this should be reflected in broader explorations around the role that AI can play in increasing the quality, impact, and number of deliberative processes, as well as the number of citizens they reach.

An important next step for our action-orientated research is to **rigorously map out and critically analyse AI applications across the full life cycle of deliberative processes whilst keeping this holistic understanding of scale in mind.**

02 *The limits of AI and the importance of civic infrastructure*

Scaling democratic deliberation is not susceptible to a technological fix alone; it requires careful technological integration alongside broader processes of social and political change. We cannot overlook the contextual, relational, and time-intensive work that is required to advocate for, deliver, and connect high-quality deliberative processes to decision-making for sustained impact across governance issues.

There are limits to AI's potential for scaling deliberation, and therefore exploring the civic infrastructure that is required for catalysing scaling is necessary. To this end, in a forthcoming paper we are planning to do a **deep dive into what we consider as a leading example of robust civic infrastructure for scaling deliberative practice: [Arantzazulab](#)**, a democracy innovation lab in Spain's Basque Country.

Conclusion

The path toward scaled deliberation will ultimately require bridging technological innovation with democracy's fundamental human elements – trust, connection, understanding, and collective agency. **By embracing this hybrid approach, we can work toward a democratic future where technology enhances rather than replaces the rich interpersonal dynamics at the heart of effective deliberation, helping to build democratic resilience in an increasingly complex world.**

Contact: Sammy McKinney (sm2885@cam.ac.uk) and Claudia Chwalisz (claudia@demnext.org)