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LCSSP The Ronald and Maxine Linde Center for Science, Society, and Policy

Quarterly Newsletter **March 2026**

Building Trust and Capacity to Protect U.S. Elections: Key Insights from the 2025 Election Integrity Conferences

Last year, the LCSSP's **Caltech Election Integrity Project** convened two landmark international conferences—one virtual and one in-person—bringing together election officials, technologists, researchers, journalists, nonprofit leaders, and other stakeholders to address the rapidly evolving challenges facing U.S. elections. These events were co-organized by Caltech's Flintridge Foundation Professor of Political and Computational Social Science **R. Michael Alvarez**, LCSSP Co-Director, and Washington University in St. Louis Thomas F. Eagleton University Professor of Public Affairs and Political Science **Betsy Sinclair**, a Caltech alum and LCSSP Research Affiliate, and were designed to foster sustained, cross-sector dialogue on protecting democratic processes amid rising threats from misinformation, disinformation, and the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI).

The conferences—**Information & Misinformation in Elections** (Jan. 16-17, 2025) and **Protecting the Election: AI & Governance** (Oct. 16-17, 2025)—responded to a fragmented and contested information environment where false claims about election processes spread quickly and election administrators operated under intense scrutiny and resource constraints. The goal was not only to share technical solutions or academic findings but also to build trust, surface practical insights, and strengthen networks that extend beyond individual election cycles.

Learn more about these events, including key insights and recommendations in **the paper by Professors Alvarez and Sinclair** issued on January 20, 2026. You can also watch a special segment of **Professor Alvarez's Election Science Office Hours** webinar about the events and the paper **here**.

Announcements

Welcome Rafal Kocielnik, our new Postdoctoral Scholar Teaching Fellow in Science, Society, and Policy

Rafal Kocielnik will be joining the LCSSP on April 13th as a postdoctoral scholar teaching fellow at Caltech. Previously, he was an AI research scientist at Cedars-Sinai training human-centered multimodal AI (LLMs, VLMs, deep vision) and building transparent, user-facing interfaces for improving surgical skills. Prior to that, he was a postdoctoral researcher at Caltech where he was mentored by Anima Anandkumar, Michael Alvarez, and Andrew Hung. He received his PhD in Human Centered Design & Engineering from the University of Washington.

Rafal's primary research interests include Human-Centered AI, Human-AI Alignment, and AI Transparency & User Empowerment.

Read more about Rafal (on April 13) and other members of the LCSSP team **here**.

LCSSP Researchers are Presenting at Academic Conferences in April

Several LCSSP researchers will be presenting research at the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) Conference in Chicago on April 23-26 and one researcher will also be presenting at the Western Political Science Conference in San Diego on April 1-4, 2026. Here is a listing of the authors and their research:

- **Michael Alvarez**, "Assessing Trust in Elections Across Racial and Ethnic Groups," with Raquel Centeno (Postdoctoral Scholar Teaching Fellow in Science, Society, and Policy at Caltech).
- **Raquel Centeno**, "Latino Identity: Contestation, Construction, and Deployment" and will present a paper at the Western Political Science Conference, "Latinos Adrift? Latino Vote Choice, Partisanship, and Congressional Elections," with Jarred Cuellar (Cal Poly Pomona), Matthew Mendez Garcia (Cal State University Long Beach), and Christian Grose (USC).
- **Samantha Chang**, Caltech Undergraduate Student, "The Susceptibility of American Voters to Misinformation."
- **Mitchell Linegar**, Caltech LCSSP Graduate Student, "Extracting Topics from Unstructured Text via LLM Function Composition: Measuring Partisan Coverage Dynamics in American Television News, 2000-2025."

LCSSP Collaborations

At the Caltech-Cambridge Climate and Social Intelligence Lab (Caltech-Cambridge CSI Lab), our goal is to drive impactful climate action on a global scale through the innovative application of computational social sciences and responsible artificial intelligence (AI).

By combining the strengths of these fields, we aim to develop advanced analytical tools and models that can understand, predict, and influence human behavior and societal trends in relation to climate mitigation and adaptation.

Our approach involves several key objectives including data-driven insights, behavioral modeling, interdisciplinary collaboration, and people-centric solutions.

To learn more about this important collaboration, visit the **Caltech-Cambridge CSI Lab**.

New Research

AI Data Centers Are Not Popular, But Does It Matter?

While community opposition is halting projects, aging power grids and connection delays pose a far greater risk to the AI infrastructure boom.
by Ransi Clark and Alex Halsey, California Institute of Technology

The United States is undergoing an unexpected form of "reindustrialization," as old industrial sites—such as paper mills, smelters, glass factories, and even dormant nuclear plants—are being repurposed into AI-optimized hyperscale data centers. Despite the economic promise, local opposition to these facilities is widespread and growing.

A **national YouGov survey (Dec 2025, 2,247 registered voters)** shows that **over 60% of Americans oppose** having a hyperscale AI data center in their local area, with **about 25% unsure**. Opposition is consistent across regions and political groups, and presenting respondents with contextual information about water or electricity usage made little difference in opinions.

Survey correlations show:

- **Frequent AI users** are significantly more supportive of data centers.
- **Younger voters** and **supporters of nuclear energy** are also more favorable.
- **Education** and **gender** show little effect.
- **Partisanship matters:** Democrats and Independents are more skeptical, though regional differences are modest.

Read more about their research on the **LCSSP Blog**.

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