

Disinformation and Misinformation

What is disinformation and misinformation?

Misinformation is false information that is spread due to ignorance, or by error or mistake, without the intent to deceive.

Disinformation is knowingly false information designed to deliberately mislead and influence public opinion or obscure the truth for malicious or deceptive purposes.

The Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce (Taskforce) is concerned with electoral disinformation that is deliberately created with the intent to disrupt electoral processes. The EIAT does not arbitrate truth in political advertising.

Who is spreading disinformation/misinformation?

Disinformation and misinformation are perpetrated by a range of different actors and groups for various purposes. Online media platforms have identified numerous instances of groups using disinformation and misinformation as a vehicle to interfere with domestic and foreign politics.

Foreign governments have tried to use disinformation to influence elections by targeting particular groups of voters. Public relations firms and social media marketing companies have also been hired to use inauthentic behaviour to promote a political agenda without disclosing a connection to candidates or parties.

Internet trolls sometimes band together to spread disinformation and financially motivated criminals may also spread misinformation and disinformation as a means to make money.

Indicators of disinformation/misinformation

Actors seeking to influence Australia's electoral processes may use disinformation and misinformation tactics to obscure who they are or make it appear that their cause is more popular than it really is. For example, using automated bots with no obvious affiliation to inflate the popularity of a political message or a hashtag. Sometimes the motive behind the actions can be unclear and may just be designed to confuse a situation or cast distrust in parts of the electoral process.

A key element of disinformation is inauthentic behaviour. Inauthentic behaviour can take many forms, for example social media accounts that use photos and fake names to pretend to be Australians, or news sites claiming to be based in Australia but are based overseas. Content posted by these types of accounts may be contentious and/or include elements of truth, however if it is also being amplified using inauthentic behaviour, then it can become dis- or misinformation.

Sometimes activity can look like it is disinformation when it is not. Politically active groups and citizens often use tactics, especially on social media, that might look inauthentic but are merely the actions of a group of politically active people acting in unison. For example, an organisation might encourage its members to spread a link to a petition on social media.

What is the Government doing?

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) promotes transparency by enforcing legislation within the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* which requires electoral communications be authorised by the publisher. The AEC also encourages all voters to '[Stop and Consider](#)' the source of all electoral advertising and material.

The Australian Government is committed to combatting false material on digital platforms. Major online media platforms, such as Google, Meta and Twitter, have made considerable efforts to limit users' exposure to misinformation and disinformation, in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December 2019, the Government asked the major digital platforms to develop a voluntary code of conduct for disinformation and news quality. The Government asked the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to oversee the development of the code.

The *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation* was released by DiGi in February 2021 and committed a diverse set of technology companies to reducing the risk of online misinformation causing harm to Australians. DiGi is a not-for-profit industry association, which advocates for the digital platform industry in Australia, including on behalf of Google, Meta and Twitter.

On 22 May 2021, the Signatories published their transparency reports outlining the commitments they will adopt under the Code, including specific actions to address disinformation and misinformation on their platforms. They will also provide an annual report on their efforts under the Code. The transparency reports can be found here: [Disinformation Code | DiGi](#)

On 29 June 2021, ACMA provided the Government with a report on initial compliance with the code and its effectiveness in responding to the problems identified by the ACCC in its Digital Platforms Inquiry.

DiGi will undertake its own review of the Code and the Government will consider this report to see if further actions are needed to address this issue.