

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.

OFFICIAL

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 have made considerable efforts to limit users' exposure to misinformation and disinformation, in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

The Code currently has eight signatories that opt into commitments under the Code, including two mandatory commitments for signatories to implement measures to reduce the risk of harms that may arise from mis- and disinformation and to release an annual transparency report.

DIGI conducted a review of the Code in 2022 and published the review report and updated the Code on 22 December 2022. Information on the Code review and the transparency reports can be found here: [Disinformation Code | DIGI](#).

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (the ACMA) has oversight of the Code and reports on the adequacy of platforms' measures and broader impacts of disinformation. The ACMA has published two reports on the adequacy of the Code and efforts of platforms disinformation measures. The most recent report by the ACMA can be found here: [Digital platforms announce review of disinformation code | ACMA](#). The ACMA continues to engage with DIGI, code signatories and other relevant parties on the operation and review of the Code.

On 20 January 2023, the Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, announced the Australian Government will legislate to provide the ACMA with new powers to hold digital platforms to account and improve the efforts to combat harmful misinformation and disinformation in Australia.

On 25 June 2023, public consultation commenced on the new framework to empower the ACMA with information gathering, record keeping and code registration and standard making powers to combat harmful misinformation and disinformation online. Public consultation closed on 20 August 2023, with legislation to be introduced into Parliament in late 2023.