

Mis and Disinformation Position Paper 2025



Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation pose significant threats to governance and the fight against corruption both globally and within Australia. These phenomena can obscure corrupt activities, undermine anti-corruption efforts, and erode public trust in institutions. The Australian Government must act swiftly to enhance capacity of institutions and civil society to manage, mitigate and push back.

The Problem

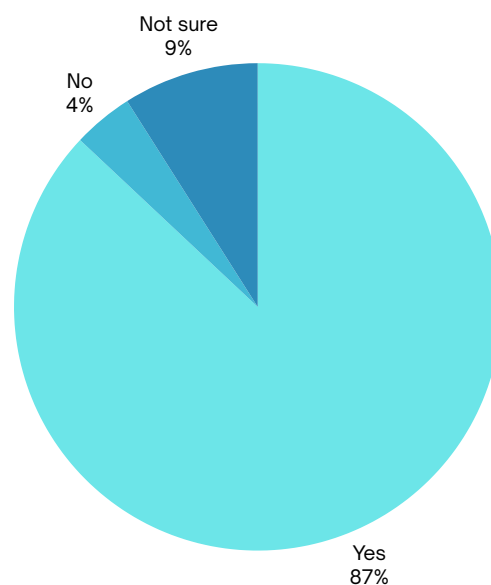
Mis-, dis- and malinformation*, while not new, are rapidly reshaping the landscape of news, information and even the concept of truth. Some is unintentional, some deliberate—but all erode public trust in institutions. This distorts our understanding of events, obscures corruption, and skews elections toward those willing to exploit the system. It also undermines belief in credible reports of wrongdoing.

Rising distrust in democracy—and the sense that the system is rigged—makes people more vulnerable to false information. Addressing this isn't just about facts; it's about restoring public confidence through more meaningful participation in democratic processes.

The issue is global and urgent. The World Economic Forum in 2025 identified mis- and disinformation as the greatest short-term risk to humanity. **Yet Australia still lacks federal laws requiring truth in political advertising**, despite overwhelming public support for holding politicians to basic standards of honesty.

The proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024 (known as the Truth in Political Advertising Bill) aims to empower the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to oversee digital platforms' responses to harmful content.

The Ethical Political Advertising Code, while voluntary, would help bolster efforts to keep political advertising honest.



*Malinformation: information which is based on fact, but removed from its original context in order to mislead, harm, or manipulate. Foreign Influence Operations and Disinformation. Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency. 2023.

Agreement with statement: "Truth in political advertising laws should be in place in time for the next federal election campaign: From The Australia Institute: Misinformation and the Referendum

Impact of mis, dis and malinformation on corruption

Mis/dis and malinformation intersect with corruption in several key ways:

- **Eroding trust in anti-corruption institutions:** false information can diminish public confidence in entities responsible for combating corruption, such as the free press and regulatory bodies. This hampers their ability to function effectively as they work to hold governments accountable and expose corruption.
- **Obscuring corrupt activities:** Disinformation can be strategically used to divert attention from corrupt practices. Corrupt actors may exploit terms such as 'fake news' which, together with the climate of public distrust in traditional media outlets and politicians, can discredit allegations or valid reports of corruption, making it harder to achieve accountability.
- **Distorting public policy:** it becomes difficult for governments to gain social traction on policies and projects that may run counter to the interests of corrupt actors, who spread mis/disinformation about these policies in order to maintain a lucrative status quo.
- **Manipulating public perception:** Corrupt actors may spread false information to shape public opinion in their favour, undermining support for anti-corruption initiatives. This has very real impacts on electoral outcomes with many voting on the basis of inaccurate or deliberately misleading information for officials who will not hold corrupt actors to account or who are themselves corrupt.

75%

of Australians are concerned about mis/disinformation, up 10% from 2024 & far surpassing global average of 54% [1]

- **Hindering corporate anti-corruption efforts:** When misled by mis/disinformation, companies may overlook corruption risks such as deepfakes or SEO hacking, or fail to perform adequate due diligence. They may share their own mis/disinformation to burnish their own image, through either greenwashing or reputation laundering.
- **Slowing climate action:** erosion of trust, lack of public confidence in the news they are being exposed to, and fossil fuel lobbying agendas have slowed investment in green energies as the social license to invest in new technologies is eroded. It also allows undue influence from the fossil fuel lobby to flourish.

“Recent elections around the world have shown us how misinformation and disinformation spreads like bushfires, corrupting public debate and misleading voters.

Voters should be able to make informed decisions at the ballot box that are based on accurate, precise and credible information.”

Clancy Moore, TI Australia CEO

Policy Recommendations

To respond to this urgent and swiftly proliferating issue, Transparency International Australia urges the Australian Government to implement measures that would enhance public media literacy, clamp down on misleading or untruthful political advertising, and empower institutions to push back on the spread of mis-, dis- and malinformation before it further erodes trust and paves the way for corruption to thrive.

Recommendations

Truth in Political Advertising Bill

Pass the Bill, regulating digital platforms and expand the Australian Communications and Media Authority's compliance and enforcement powers

Ethical Political Advertising Code

Adopt the EPAC and promote its uptake to help normalise truthful political communications

Critical thinking and media literacy skills

Support measures which educate the public in how to spot false or misleading information, including media literacy education in schools, independent fact-checking, and awareness campaigns

Independent media

Support reputable independent media outlets to ensure plurality of unbiased voices in the public information sphere, support funding for public interest journalism, and combat media capture through strong lobbying regulation*

**See our Lobbying Position Paper for more information*

For more information:



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