



**MALAYSIAN COMMONWEALTH
STUDIES CENTRE (MCSC)**

**CAMBRIDGE MALAYSIAN EDUCATION
AND DEVELOPMENT TRUST (CMEDT)**



Cambridge Conference on Electoral Democracy

2025 Safeguarding Electoral Democracy Online Seminar Series

Seminar 1 – Combating False and Misleading Information: Practical Tools and Partnerships for Electoral Authorities

Overview and introduction to the 2025 seminar series

In 2023 the Cambridge Conference on Electoral Democracy (the Conference) embarked on a long term focus on how social media—and the rapidly advancing capabilities of artificial intelligence—are reshaping the information environment around elections. While social platforms themselves are neutral tools, their ubiquity, immediacy and low cost have made them a powerful vector for both traditional political claims and increasingly sophisticated misinformation or disinformation campaigns. Across an integrated series of online seminars and personal attendance meetings from 2023 to 2024 (<https://www.electoraldemocracy-cambridge.com/second-virtual-seminar-series>) the Conference’s objectives are to examine the threat posed by social media to the integrity of elections conducted by Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and to explore practical measures and strategies available to EMBs which might assist in countering its most deleterious affects.

Independent EMBs play a vital role in sustaining democracy, even as they confront growing threats from misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech propagated via digital platforms. Yet, efforts to manage the impact of social media so far have been hampered by outdated legal frameworks, voluntary industry “codes of practice” that go unenforced, and platform retrenchment from proactive moderation in favour of click-driven engagement models. Adding to the challenge, AI-generated content promises to blur fact and fiction even further, and regimes with authoritarian tendencies may exploit these tools to amplify their narratives.

The Conference identified potential long term remedies clustered into three broad approaches: public education campaigns that teach voters to “check the source,” reform of political-advertising and electoral-misconduct laws to cover online content, and deep collaboration between electoral commissions, social-media firms, civil-society monitors and other stakeholders. Voter and civic education, leveraging both traditional channels and social-media partnerships, has been used in some jurisdictions, most notably Australia, to build public resilience against falsehoods. In other jurisdictions, voluntary election integrity guidelines for technology companies have been used—the experience with November 2023 “Principles and Guidelines for the use of Digital and Social Media in Elections in Africa” will inform peer evaluations across the continent. And across both fronts, sustained collaboration with technology companies, civil society, media, and credible “influencers” was deemed indispensable for rapid information-sharing and resource mobilisation.

Recognising that geographic or political realities may limit broader alliances, the Conference saw value in EMBs developing their own national-level strategies. The Australian Electoral Commission's reputation-management approach—emphasising rapid, market-tested responses, visible and empowered spokespeople, and “pre-bunking” campaigns that educate voters before polls open—was held up as a best-practice model for bolstering institutional trust alongside operational excellence.

Notwithstanding these strategies, an underlying theme is the need for EMBs to bolster internal competencies—through regular staff training, investment in digital and AI tools, and strict adherence to impartiality—and to pursue “whole-of-society” approaches that link regulation, education, and trust-building. The Conference provides an opportunity for peer to peer learning, especially where EMBs face resource or other constraints on their ability to adopt mitigating measures to the threat of social media.

Building on online and regional discussions earlier in the cycle, the Conference sought to highlight practical, short-term measures that EMBs could adopt immediately to mitigate the damaging effects of misinformation in forthcoming elections. Emerging AI tools featured prominently on both sides of the ledger: malign actors' capacity to produce deepfakes and chatbots at scale, and EMBs' opportunities to deploy similar technologies for “electoral chatbots,” video-analysis tools, and real-time monitoring—so long as implementation remains transparent, accountable, and adaptable.

The Conference recognises however that even in the last 12 to 18 months, long-held assumptions about social media no longer hold true. Platforms are undergoing rapid and unpredictable change — from ownership and moderation policies to the rise of AI-generated content and shifting user behaviour. These changes have fundamentally altered how information is distributed and consumed, making it far more difficult to manage the spread of false and misleading content. Algorithmic amplification, declining trust in traditional verification methods, and the growing sophistication of misinformation tactics all contribute to a challenging environment. As the boundaries between authentic and artificial content blur, conventional responses have become less effective, demanding a rethinking of regulation, platform responsibility, and public resilience in the face of digital deception.

The seminar takes place at a critical time. Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when disinformation campaigns first gained widespread international attention, social media platforms made limited efforts to counter harmful content around elections. More recently, developments—including the weakening or dismantling of integrity teams at major tech firms, such as Meta and X (formerly Twitter), and legal challenges to platform accountability—have resulted in a near-total withdrawal of internal oversight mechanisms by technology platforms. In this context, the burden of defending electoral truth and process has fallen increasingly on EMBs themselves, often without clear mandates, legal backing, or technical capacity.

This seminar and two seminars to follow later in the year, aims to provide a pragmatic forum to identify tangible ways forward for EMBs working in increasingly complex digital environments. It is designed to provide actionable insights that can be applied during current or upcoming electoral cycles, particularly for institutions operating with limited capacity but a strong commitment to democratic integrity.

Seminar 1 – Combating False and Misleading Information: Practical Tools and Partnerships for Electoral Authorities (part of the 2025 Safeguarding Electoral Democracy Online Seminar Series)

Programme Outline

Time	Session	Lead Speaker(s)
9.30 AM	Welcome	Dr Seal
9.35 AM	Round table self introductions	All participants
9.45 AM	Practical experiences from several EMBs, including Australia, which have developed homegrown strategies for monitoring, mitigating, or countering false and misleading electoral information on social media. These case studies highlight low-cost, adaptable tactics that may be replicated or modified in other jurisdictions.	Tom Rogers (former Australian Electoral Commissioner), Jeff Pope Acting Australian Electoral Commissioner)
10.20 AM	Break	
10.25 AM	Presentation from the Electoral Commission of South Africa on its, and other EMBs experience with the regional application of the SADC Principles and Guidelines for the Use of Digital and Social Media in Elections in Africa launched in November 2023. Since launching the guidelines, South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius and Namibia have held elections. As one of the few cross-national frameworks to explicitly address misinformation in elections, this initiative offers insights into how regional cooperation and norm-setting may enhance national efforts and reinforce EMB legitimacy.	Mosotho Moepya (Chairman, Electoral Commissioner South Africa)

10.55 AM	Break	
11.00 AM	Guided overview of practical “off-the shelf” tools available to EMBs for identifying and responding to online false and misleading information affecting the conduct of elections, and the basic institutional underpinnings necessary make best use of these tools.	Marenco Kemp
11.35 AM	Break	
11.40 AM	Open discussion with participating EMBs to identify specific technical or operational support they may require from peers, international partners or the Cambridge Conference on Electoral Democracy. The aim is to foster peer-to-peer collaboration and strengthen the Cambridge Conference’s role as a convenor of practical electoral support networks.	
12.15 PM	Final comments	Dr Seal
12.30 PM	Seminar Concludes	