Artificial Intelligence, False Information, and Electoral Integrity Perceptions

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Acknowledgement and series note

In early 2024, the Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network was established as a collaboration between Australian researchers, civil society leaders and government agencies. The network is designed to encourage interdisciplinary, collaborative and applied research seeking policy-relevant insights that measure, diagnose and assess pathways strengthening Australia's democratic resilience. The network is dedicated to sharing the analysis publicly and to encourage the use of these ideas to prompt future research collaborations and actionable policy.

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming information environments, amplifying both opportunities and risks for democratic systems. Among the most pressing concerns are the ways in which generative AI and digital misinformation may affect citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity. Drawing on new data from two waves of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS) – a nationally representative longitudinal survey with relevant information on nearly 5,000 Australian adults – this paper examines how exposure to, and concern about, false information and AI are shaping Australians' trust in electoral processes and democratic institutions.

We explore three interrelated research questions:

- What did Australians think about the quality and reliability of political information they received during the 2025 federal election campaign?
- To what extent did perceptions of false information influence evaluations of electoral integrity across different stages of the election process?
- How are concerns about AI—particularly its potential to spread misinformation—linked to broader indicators of democratic resilience such as satisfaction with democracy and confidence in government?

Findings show that while Australians continue to express strong confidence in the conduct of core election procedures – vote counting, fairness of officials, and access to genuine political choice – concerns about the information environment surrounding elections are widespread. Nearly half of Australians reported that false information about candidates and parties was distributed online, and more than four in ten believed that AI would make elections less fair. Those who were more familiar with AI were also more likely to be concerned about its potential to spread misinformation. Both AI-related concerns and perceptions of false information are significantly associated with lower satisfaction with democracy and reduced confidence in the federal government.

The paper concludes that maintaining electoral integrity in the digital age requires not only robust institutions but also policies that address AI-driven misinformation through improved transparency, regulation, and public digital literacy.

1 Introduction and Overview

On May 3rd, 2025, following Australia's 2025 federal election, re-elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese addressed Australians in his victory speech. After acknowledging his opponent, Peter Dutton - leader of the Opposition and of the Liberal Party who had immediately prior delivered his concession speech – Mr Albanese addressed the Australian electorate emphasizing that campaign disagreements and their coverage by the media reflected legitimate party differences and are essential to democracy[i].

Taken together, the Prime Minister's peaceful post-election victory speech alongside the acceptance of election results by the then Opposition Leader stand as a positive example amid global trends of democratic backsliding and challenges to liberal institutions. However, the Prime Minister and former Opposition Leader's remarks rely on a very important democratic prerequisite – voters' access to accurate information during election campaigns. Yet, this assumption is challenged by the growing risks of false information in contemporary elections.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) upholds the principles and supports the delivery of fair elections in Australia. It operates within a framework designed to ensure transparent, accessible, and credible democratic processes. These institutional safeguards align with internationally recognized principles of electoral integrity. Electoral integrity, defined by Norris (2014, p. 21) as "agreed upon international conventions and universal standards about elections reflecting global norms applying to all countries worldwide" encompasses different dimensions of the electoral cycle including pre-election, campaign, election day and post-election processes. These conventions and standards include, but are not limited to, a commitment to elections being conducted in accordance with democratic principles of universal suffrage, transparency, fairness, and impartial administration. These principles are designed to ensure that outcomes reflect the genuine preferences of the electorate.

Electoral integrity relates not only to the technical administration of a given election but also the broader information ecosystem that shapes voter decision-making including perceptions about candidates, parties, policies, and electoral processes. One of the pressures on electoral integrity is the spread of false information online in the lead up to and during election campaigns.

In 2024, misinformation and disinformation were named as some of the most severe global risks anticipated over the next two years by the World Economic Forum in 2024. They have been widely identified as risk factors facing modern democracies, gaining more prominence in the age of social media and with the development of different forms of Artificial Intelligence or AI (James and Garnett 2025).

Specifically, misinformation is false content that is spread without the intention of causing harm, whereas disinformation is false content spread with intention of causing harm (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017). Mis/disinformation is not new to the Australian political context. Misleading narratives have been found during the 2016 and 2019 Federal elections and 2023 Voice Referendum, and we know that more than half of Australians consider misinformation about politics as a 'big' or 'very big' problem (Carson et al. 2020; Carson et al. 2021; Carson et al. 2024).

During the 2025 Australian Federal election campaign, the AEC Disinformation Register identified and corrected nine pieces of significant instances of disinformation. This included disinformation about six million missing ballots, substantial errors in the electoral roll and a video showing AEC official erasing votes marked with pencil (Disinformation Register 2025).[ii] The limited number of occurrences is, however, explained by the fact that the Disinformation Register covers only pieces of disinformation about the election process, which AEC oversees and therefore is in a position to correct.

While longstanding, mis/disinformation is a more daunting prospect for governments and institutions to deal with as AI becomes more ubiquitous and more powerful. AI is a rapidly evolving technology and

there is no universally agreed definition. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) uses the following definition:[iii]

> An AI system is a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment.

For a lay reader, the above is somewhat technical, so following Kalota (2024) we can use the following working definitions for the aspects of AI that are particularly relevant for understanding false information and electoral integrity:

- Artificial Intelligence: 'computer systems that demonstrate human-like intelligence and cognitive abilities, such as deduction, pattern recognition, and the interpretation of complex data' (Jaggia et al. 2023: p.386)
- Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) 'describes algorithms … that can be used to create new content, including audio, code, images, text, simulations, and videos' (McKinsey & Company 2024)

In this context, a number of crucial questions emerge: Did the spread of mis/disinformation have an impact on electoral integrity perceptions? If so, are some parts of the election process more vulnerable than others? And, how do the issues of mis/disinformation relate to views on Artificial Intelligence? The aim of this paper is to utilise new survey data on the topic to provide some answers to these questions.

Specifically, the paper addresses three interrelated research questions:

Information environment and exposure: What did Australian voters think about the quality and reliability of information about candidates and parties they received during the 2025 federal election campaign?

Perceived democratic impacts: What impact did the spread of false information have on democratic processes, and on perceptions of electoral integrity in particular?

Technology and trust: How are concerns about false information and artificial intelligence connected, and to what extent do they shape broader indicators of democratic resilience such as satisfaction with democracy and confidence in government?

To answer these questions, the paper draws on new, nationally representative data from the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS)—a four-wave longitudinal study conducted between October 2024 and May 2025. The analysis links respondents' pre-election attitudes to their post-election assessments of electoral integrity, providing a unique opportunity to trace how perceptions evolved across the campaign and in response to the election outcome.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section introduces the EMSS dataset, outlining the survey design, weighting procedures, and the relevant measures of attitudes toward artificial intelligence and information integrity. Section 3 examines public familiarity with, and concern about, AI—particularly its perceived risks to electoral fairness and misinformation. Section 4 analyses Australians' perceptions of false information during the 2025 federal election and how these relate to assessments of electoral integrity across the pre-election, campaign, election-day, and post-election periods. The fifth section integrates these two strands of analysis to explore how attitudes toward AI and perceptions of false information interact to shape broader democratic outcomes, including satisfaction with democracy and confidence in government. The final section summarises key findings and sets out policy recommendations for strengthening electoral integrity and democratic resilience in the digital age.

2 Introducing the Data

The analysis presented in this paper is based on the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series or EMSS. Wave 1 of the series commenced with a pilot survey on Monday 14th of October. Full data collection commenced on the 15th of October, with data collection finishing on the 25th of October. There was a total of 3,622 respondents with a median survey length of 17 minutes. Data collection for Wave 2 of the survey commenced with a pilot collection on the 29th of January. Full data collection commenced on the 31st of January and concluded on the 12th of February with 3,514 respondents.

Data collection for Wave 3 commenced on Thursday the 26th of March with a pilot data collection. Full data collection commenced on Friday 28th March, the day the 2025 Federal Election date of May 3rd was announced, and finished on the 8th of April with 3,608 respondents. The fourth wave of data collection commenced on the 5th of May, immediately after the 2025 Federal Election. Between then and the 13th of May, a total of 3,720 surveys were completed.

After the first wave of data collection for the EMSS, each subsequent wave has been a combination of a new, refreshed sample, and a longitudinal component. There was a total of 7,319 Australians that completed at least one wave of data collection. The particular waves that are used in this paper are Wave 3 (3,608 respondents) and Wave 4 (3,720 respondents). Across the combined 4,967 respondents 25.1 per cent completed Wave 3 only (n=1,247), 27.3 per cent completed Wave 4 only (n=1,359), and 47.5 per cent completed both waves (n=2,361)

Survey weights were used in the analysis, using the iterative proportional fitting or raking method, implemented in STATA.[iv] Population benchmarks that are used for weighting purposes are age, sex, education, and current employment. The first two of these measures come from population estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the third (education) from the 2021 Census, and the fourth (employment) from the September 2024 Labour Force Survey.

Only those that stated their age and sex were included in the analysis presented below. Those that gave a sex other than male or female were included in analysis apart from sex-based cross-tabulations, with the weight for those that reported they were either ‘Non-binary‘ or that ‘I use a different term’ based on the sample proportion. Missing values for employment and education were imputed for weighting purposed only using the mi impute chained command in STATA, with random seed set to be 10121978.

The ethical aspects of data collection for all three waves of the EMSS have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (2021/430).

3 Views towards Artificial Intelligence

In Wave 3 of the EMSS, we asked respondents: 'How much have you heard or read about AI?' While 30.9 per cent of Australians said they had heard a lot, the vast majority said that they had only heard a little (62.2 per cent) or nothing at all (6.9 per cent). In addition to a general lack of knowledge on AI, there was a great deal of concern regarding the technology. We asked about the increased use of AI in daily life, with only 16.0 per cent of Australians saying they were more excited than concerned, compared to 48.3 per cent that said they were more concerned than excited. When you add the 35.7 per cent that said they were equally concerned and excited, that is a large number of Australians that are not very enthusiastic about the increased use of AI.

In Table 1, we analyse the factors associated with whether or not someone had heard a lot about AI. There are clear demographic and socioeconomic predictors. Younger Australians (those aged 18 to 34) are far more likely to have heard a lot about AI whereas older Australians (aged 65 years and over) are less likely to have. Females are also less likely to say that they have heard a lot about AI. Familiarity is higher for those with a degree, as well as those born overseas or who speak a language other than English at home. Finally, geography matters, with those that live in an electorate outside of inner metropolitan areas having less familiarity with AI.

The second part of Table 1 uses the same explanatory variables, but switches focus to the probability of being more excited than concerned about AI as the dependent variable. In the first model, we find some similar covariates to the above. Younger Australians, males, and those with relatively high levels of education were more likely to be excited than concerned about AI. Given this overlap in explanatory variables, it is not surprising that in the final model we find that those that have heard a lot about AI are more likely to be excited than concerned than those that have heard little, or nothing at all. We find a similar relationship outside of the modelling framework. Specifically, 22.9 per cent of those that had heard a lot about AI were more excited than concerned about AI, compared to only 12.8 per cent of those that had heard a little or none at all.

Table 1 Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are associated with familiarity and excitement with AI

Explanatory variables	Familiarity		Excited vs concerned			
			Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.
Familiar with AI (explanatory)					0.224	***
Aged 18 to 24	0.713	***	0.201	*	0.138	
Aged 25 to 34	0.275	***	0.038		0.016	
Aged 45 to 54	0.047		-0.068		-0.070	
Aged 55 to 64	-0.134		-0.326	***	-0.318	***
Aged 65 to 74	-0.267	**	-0.572	***	-0.561	***
Aged 75 plus	-0.420	***	-0.817	***	-0.786	***
Female	-0.259	***	-0.333	***	-0.318	***
Has not completed Year 12 or a post-school qual.	-0.160	*	0.042		0.054	
Has a degree	0.320	***	0.204	***	0.178	***
Born overseas in an English-speaking country	0.209	***	0.114		0.097	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.222	**	0.137		0.116	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.151	*	0.057		0.049	
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	-0.159	**	-0.029		-0.022	
Lives in a provincial electorate	-0.139		0.203	*	0.202	*
Lives in a rural electorate	-0.303	***	-0.126		-0.104	
Constant	-0.487		-0.823		-0.895	
Sample size	3,526		3,476		3,469	

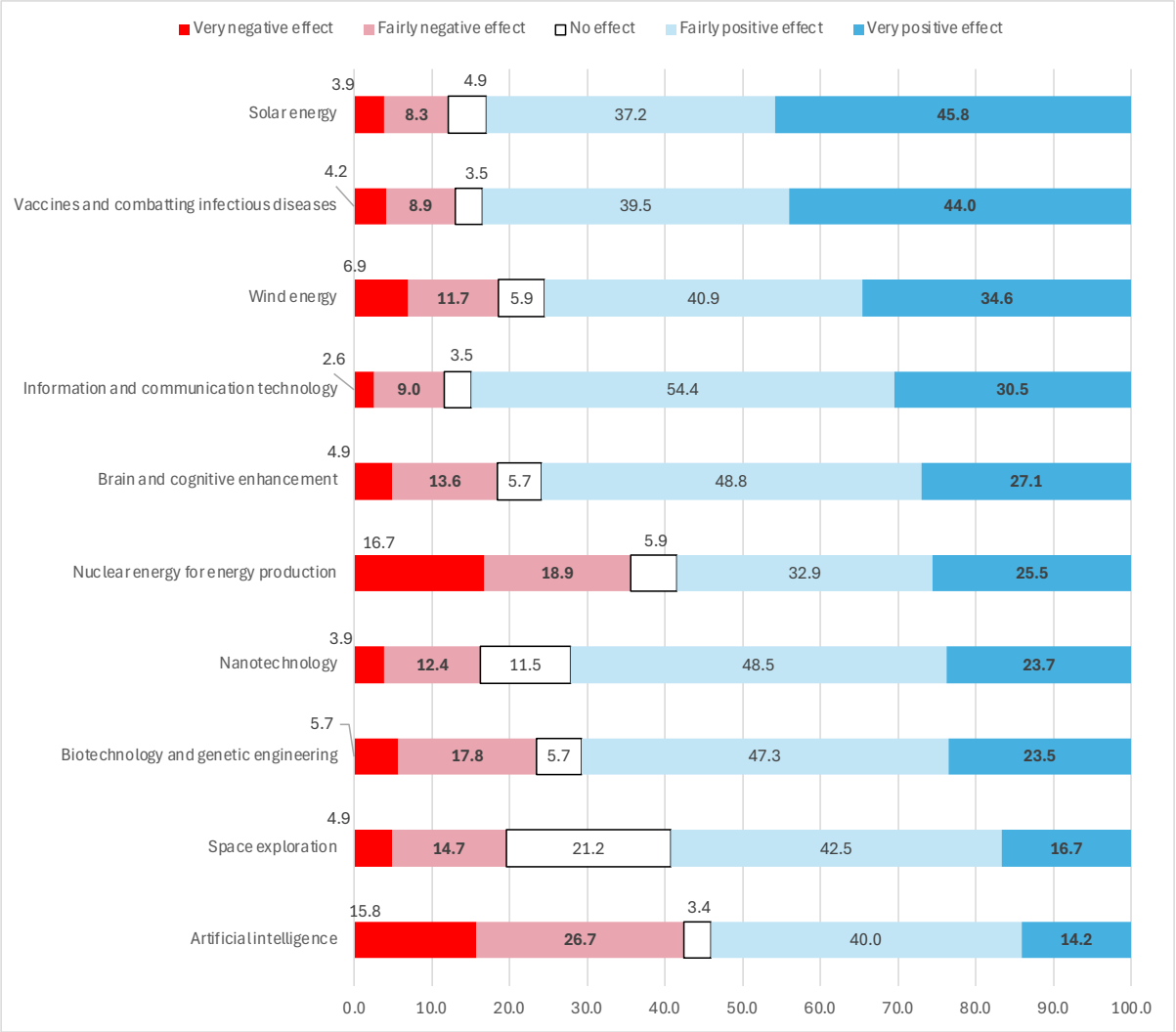
Notes: Binary probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

It is not just that Australians are concerned about technological change in general. There appears to be a particular concern towards AI. Prior to delving into AI in particular, we asked respondents 'The following is a list of areas where new technologies are currently being developed. Do you think each of these will have a positive, a negative, or no effect on our way of life in the next 20 years?' Figure 1 gives the per cent of Australians that think each of 10 technologies will have a positive effect, negative effect, or no effect. We order responses by the proportion that think it will have a very positive effect. Looking down the figure, Australians are least likely to think that AI will have a very positive or positive effect, and most likely to think it will have a very negative or negative effect. 54.2 per cent of Australians think it will have a positive effect, however it is the technological development that concerns more Australians than any of the other ten considered.

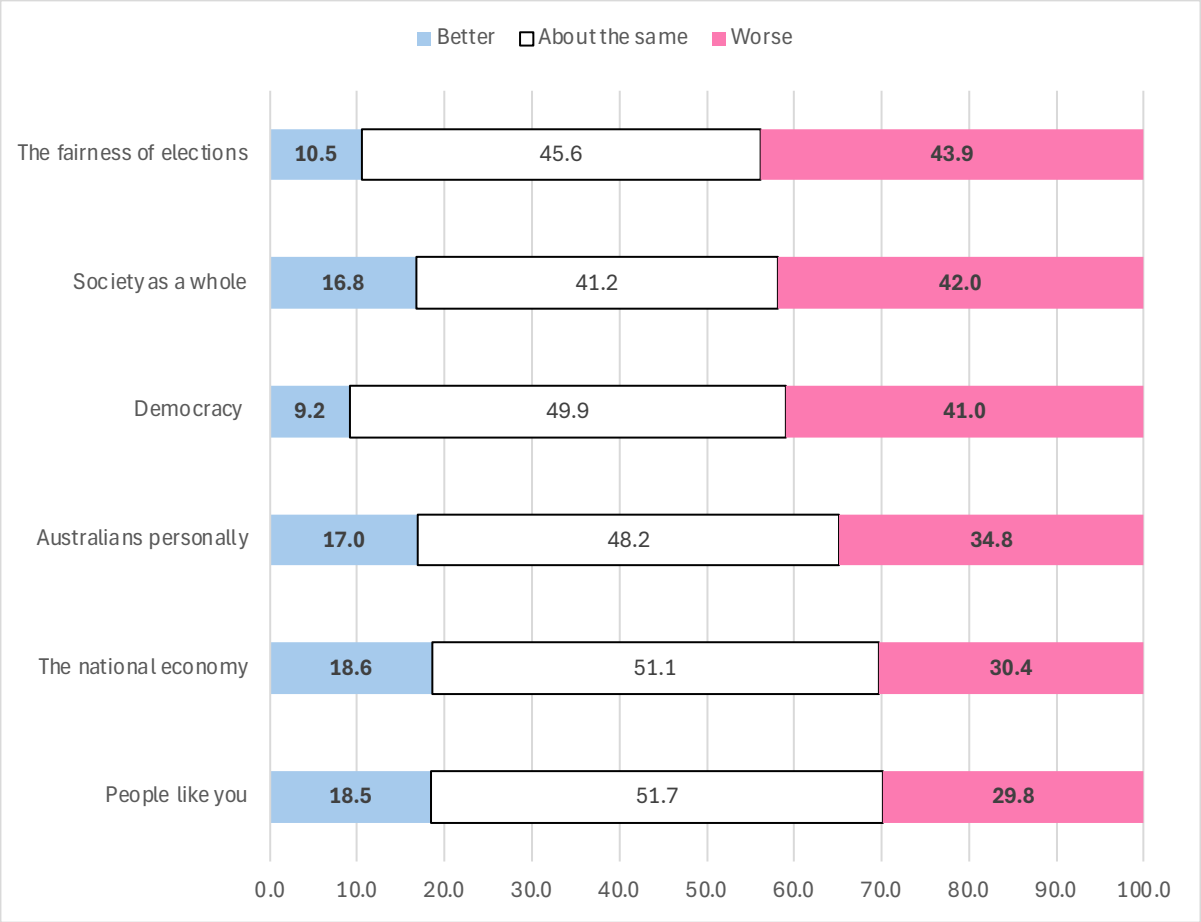
Figure 1 Views on the likely effect over the next 20 years of various technologies



Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

These patterns of low levels of knowledge, low enthusiasm, and a strong relationship between the two has been found consistently when asking the Australian public about AI. However, the particular focus of the module in Wave 3 of the EMSS was the way in which views on AI related to views on electoral integrity. And the data shows a very high level of public concern. When asked whether AI can make things better, worse, or about the same for six specific aspects of life in Australia, the biggest concern that people had was for the fairness of elections. Specifically, respondents were prompted with the following: 'Some people might worry about the risks and negative impact of generative AI.' They were then asked 'In general, would you say that generative AI can make things better, worse or about the same for …' As shown in Figure 2, 43.9 per cent of Australians thought that AI would make things worse for electoral fairness, compared to only 10.5 per cent that thought it would make things better.

Figure 2 Per cent of Australians that thought AI would make things better, about the same, or worse for aspects of life in Australia.



Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

We drilled further into concerns that Australians had about Gen-AI specifically with regards to democracy. Across seven possible threats, Australians are most concerned that AI would spread misinformation. In March 2025, 45.1 per cent of Australians were very concerned about this, with a further 38.9 per cent somewhat concerned. Only 12.9 per cent of Australians were not too concerned, with a very small 3.1 per cent not concerned at all. While misinformation was the threat the highest per cent of Australians were concerned about, all seven potential threats had at least seven-in-ten Australians responding that they were either somewhat or very concerned.

Figure 3 Level of concern for different aspects of generative AI threats to democracy.

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

In Table 2, we replicate our analysis of demographic and socioeconomic factors associated with perceptions of AI, but this time with a focus on specific concerns regarding democracy. In our first set of models, our dependent variables is whether or not people thought that AI would make things worse for the fairness of elections. There were fewer demographic factors that had an association than in Table 1, with females being more likely to think that AI would make things worse for the fairness of elections, and those that had not completed Year 12 or who spoke a language other than English being less likely to think that AI would make things worse for the fairness of elections.

The second dependent variable analysed in Table 2 focuses on whether a person is very concerned about Gen-AI spreading misinformation. We find that older Australians and those that were born overseas in an English speaking country were more likely to be very concerned about Gen-AI spreading misinformation. None of the other variables in the model had a statistically significant association.

In the second model for each of these two dependent variables, we include people's familiarity with AI as an additional explanatory variable. Quite interestingly, those that report that they had heard a lot about AI were both more likely to think that AI will make things worse for the fairness of elections, and were also more likely to be very concerned about Gen-AI being used to spread misinformation.

Familiarity appears to be breeding discontent. The magnitude of this association is quite large. Without controlling for other characteristics, 48.5 per cent of those that had heard a lot about AI thought that it would make things worse for the fairness of elections. This is almost seven percentage points lower than those who had only hear a little about AI or none at all. Similarly, 51.0 per cent of those that had heard a lot were very concerned about Gen-AI being used to spread misinformation compared to 42.4 per cent of those that had not heard a lot about AI.

Table 2 Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are associated with concern about different aspects of AI

Explanatory variables	Election fairness				Misinformation			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.
Familiar with AI (explanatory)			0.283	***			0.324	***
Aged 18 to 24	-0.062		-0.125		0.129		0.062	
Aged 25 to 34	-0.057		-0.088		-0.005		-0.032	
Aged 45 to 54	0.011		0.006		0.049		0.040	
Aged 55 to 64	0.144		0.161	*	0.230	**	0.252	**
Aged 65 to 74	0.183	*	0.210	**	0.269	***	0.306	***
Aged 75 plus	0.046		0.073		0.414	***	0.462	***
Female	0.170	***	0.194	***	-0.007		0.019	
Has not completed Year 12 or a post-school qual.	-0.177	**	-0.163	*	-0.104		-0.087	
Has a degree	-0.033		-0.062		-0.029		-0.064	
Born overseas in an English-speaking country	0.048		0.034		0.212	***	0.202	***
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.144		-0.163	*	0.017		-0.001	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.235	***	-0.254	***	-0.059		-0.081	
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	-0.062		-0.037		0.005		0.030	
Lives in a provincial electorate	-0.075		-0.052		0.023		0.052	
Lives in a rural electorate	0.100		0.144		0.046		0.080	
Constant	-0.161		-0.262		-0.254		-0.372	
Sample size	3,192		3,181		3,413		3,398	

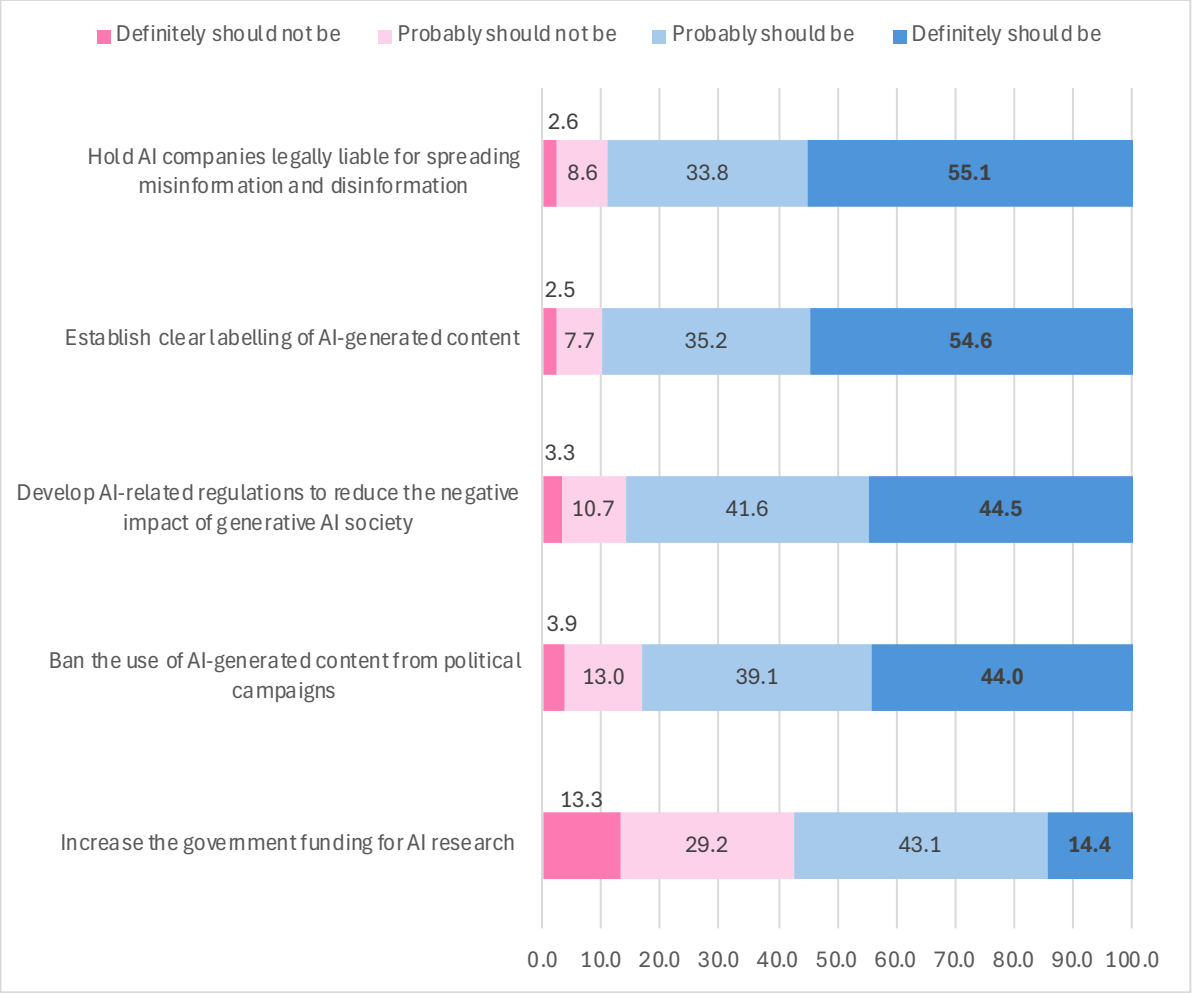
Notes: Binary probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

The general public is very supportive of a strong government role when it comes to AI, although that support is a little context specific. In Figure 4 we can see that only 14.4 per cent of Australians thought it definitely should be government's role to increase funding for AI research, but a further 43.1 per cent thought it probably should be. So, that is qualified support for funding. However, 55.1 per cent of Australians thought it definitely should be the government's responsibility to hold AI companies legally liable for spreading misinformation and disinformation, with 54.6 per cent thinking it definitely should be the government's role to establish clear labelling of AI-generated content.

Figure 4 Views on the role of government regarding AI.



Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

In the final set of regression analysis in this section, we consider the factors associated with support for the two roles of government discussed. Specifically, our first dependent variable is the probability of a person thinking that it should definitely be the responsibility of government to hold AI companies legally liable for spreading misinformation and disinformation. That is, the most supported of the five potential responsibilities. Our second dependent variable is the probability of thinking it is definitely the government's responsibility to increase government funding for AI research – the least supported of the potential responsibilities.

Looking at the first of these dependent variables, older Australians, females, and those that live in a rural electorate were more likely to say that it definitely should be the responsibility of government to hold AI companies accountable. Those that had not completed Year 12, and those that spoke a language other than English at home were less likely. Regarding the second dependent variable (supporting increased funding), there was no association with age, sex, or region. Those that had a degree were

more likely to say that increasing government funding for AI research was definitely a responsibility of government, as were those born overseas.

In terms of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, there is very little overlap in the explanatory variables. However, both were strongly, and positively associated with knowledge about AI, when controlling for other characteristics.

Table 3 Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are associated with perceived role of government and AI

Explanatory variables	Hold companies liable				Increase government funding			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.
Familiar with AI (explanatory)			0.258	***			0.251	***
Aged 18 to 24	-0.075		-0.128		0.152		0.092	
Aged 25 to 34	-0.132		-0.164	*	-0.065		-0.092	
Aged 45 to 54	0.149		0.147		0.185		0.183	
Aged 55 to 64	0.374	***	0.387	***	0.061		0.061	
Aged 65 to 74	0.648	***	0.667	***	-0.098		-0.070	
Aged 75 plus	0.663	***	0.686	***	-0.202		-0.171	
Female	0.166	***	0.189	***	-0.096		-0.083	
Has not completed Year 12 or a post-school qual.	-0.156	*	-0.151	*	-0.051		-0.024	
Has a degree	-0.062		-0.095	*	0.154	**	0.132	*
Born overseas in an English-speaking country	0.003		-0.014		0.203	**	0.198	**
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.023		-0.040		0.179	*	0.159	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.212	**	-0.230	***	-0.073		-0.090	
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	-0.003		0.012		0.046		0.057	
Lives in a provincial electorate	-0.031		-0.020		-0.006		-0.009	
Lives in a rural electorate	0.180	**	0.208	**	0.009		0.027	
Constant	-0.073		-0.151		-1.123		-1.210	
Sample size	3,435		3,420		3,282		3,269	

Notes: Binary probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3, March 2025.

4 False Information and the 2025 Federal Election in Australia

4.1 Overall perceptions of electoral integrity and false information

In this section, we explore the views of the Australian population about the extent of false information during the most recent election. The analysis is based on Wave 4 of the EMSS, which had a total of 3,720 respondents. Some questions were only asked of those that voted, which we note for the relevant table or figure.

The most direct question was how often in the person's view was false information about the candidates and parties distributed online. This was asked as part of a larger module that started with 'In your view, how often did the following things occur during this Federal Election?' In addition to asking about false information, we also asked about 12 other dimensions of the election, consistent with the (Norris 2013) electoral integrity framework.

Figure 5 shows the per cent of respondents that thought each of the electoral dimensions occurred never, not often, sometimes, often, and very often. We order the 13 dimensions by the per cent of respondents that thought the dimension occurred very often.

Our survey shows that Australian voters demonstrate strong confidence in core electoral processes while expressing notable concerns about external influences and information integrity. This analysis of electoral integrity perceptions reveals a clear hierarchy of trust, with fundamental democratic processes receiving high confidence and emerging challenges around data misuse and wealthy influence generating greater concern.

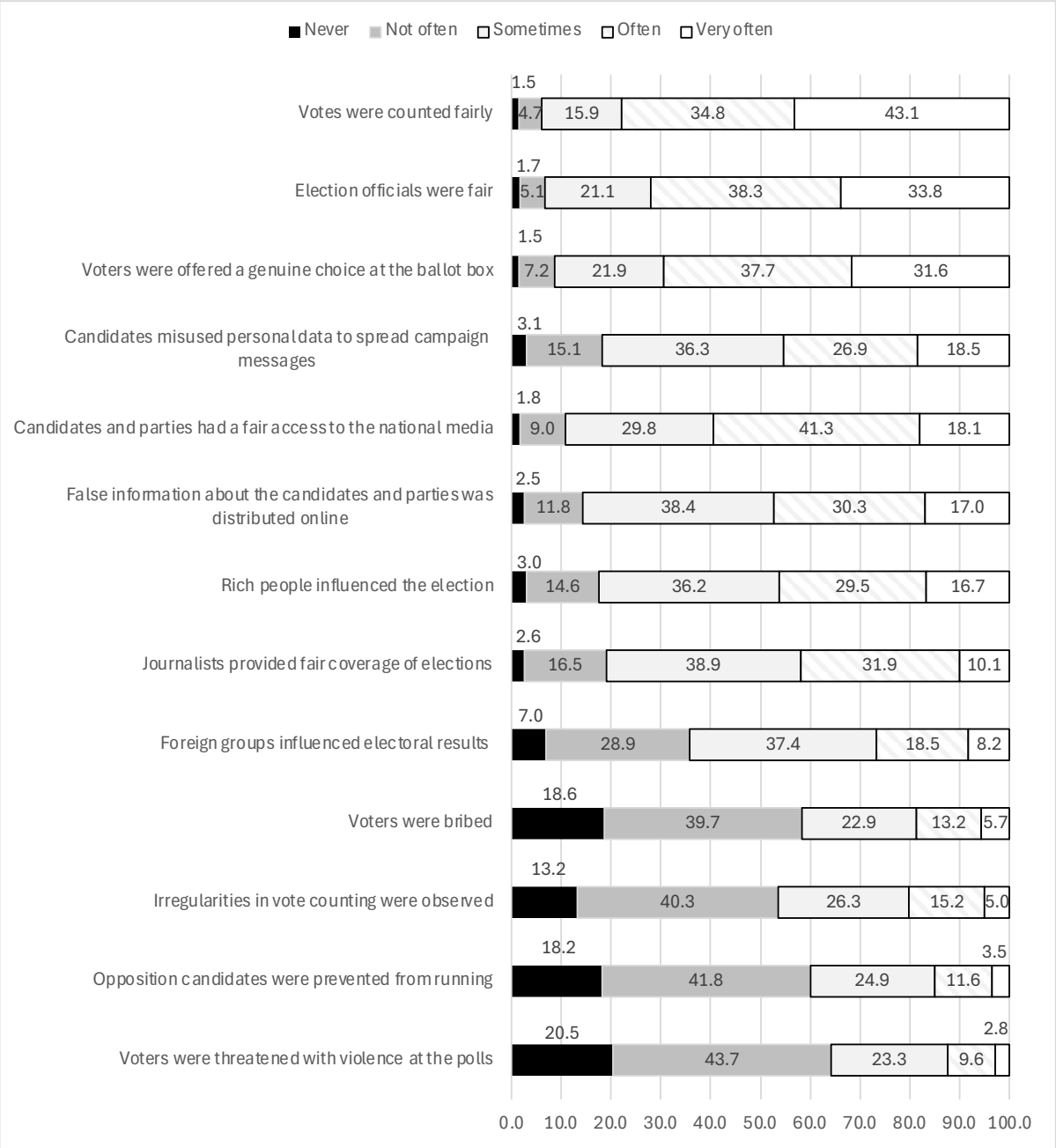
Almost four-in-five Australians (77.9 per cent) thought that votes were counted fairly often, or very often. Furthermore, 72.1 per cent thought that election officials were fair often or very often, with 69.4 per cent thinking that voters were offered a genuine choice at the ballot box. At the other end of the distribution, only 12.5 per cent of Australians that that voters were threatened with violence at the polls often or very often, with 15.1 per cent thinking that Opposition candidates were prevented from running.

On balance the responses are positive in what they say about the perceived conduct of the election. There are a couple of exceptions though that are worth noting. The positive outcome that has the lowest perceived frequency was that 'Journalists provided fair coverage of elections.' Only 10.1 per cent of Australians thought that occurred very often, with a further 31.9 per cent saying it occurred often. The negative outcome that had the highest perceived frequency was that 'Candidates misused personal data to spread campaign messages.' 18.5 per cent of Australians thought that occurred very often, with a further 26.9 per cent saying it occurred often.

Perceptions of false information fall somewhere in between the extremes of the distribution. A little under half (47.3 per cent) thought that in the most recent election false information about candidates and parties was distributed online. Only a very small per cent (14.4 per cent) thought the spreading of false information never happened or didn't happen often.

These findings reveal a nuanced public understanding of electoral integrity challenges. While Australians maintain strong confidence in traditional electoral safeguards—vote counting, official conduct, and candidate access—they recognize emerging threats from data misuse, economic influence, and information.

Figure 5 Perceptions of election conduct during the May 2025 election.



Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 4, May 2025.

To analyse the factors associated with belief in false information, we estimate differences using the ordered probit model. The dependent variable is the category given for perceptions about false information, with the lowest value 'Never' and the highest value 'Very often.' Results are presented as coefficients in Table 4.

Older Australians are slightly more likely to think that false information was distributed online, whereas females are substantially less likely than males. Specifically, without conditioning on other characteristics, 45.0 per cent of females thought false information was distributed often or very often, compared to 49.2 per cent of males. Those with relatively low levels of education thought false information was distributed less frequently, whereas those that live in rural areas thought it happened less frequently.

In the second model, we expand the analysis to include a set of explanatory variables that capture political attitudes and behaviour. The causal direction for these variables is less clear than with model 1. For the latter, it is far more likely that age, sex, education, country of birth, language, and location impact on beliefs in the spread of false information, rather than in the opposite direction (though a third factor influencing both is equally plausible). With Model 2, however, it is equally likely that political attitudes and behaviour cause, rather than are caused by, belief in the distribution of false information. Nonetheless, understanding the size and direction of the associations is important for understanding the complexity of views towards false information.

The results presented in Model 2 show the very strong relationship between political attitudes/behaviour and belief in the distribution of false information. Those who voted for a party other than Labor in the May 2025 election were more likely to think that false information was spread, as were those that said that they were interested in politics, thought that voting would make a difference, and agreed that politicians in the government were corrupt. On the other hand, those that thought that the newly elected members of Parliament and the winning party would represent voters like them well or very well were less likely to think that false information was disseminated during the most recent election. The direction of all these associations were as expected based on the existing electoral integrity literature.

Table 4 Demographic, socioeconomic and political characteristics that are associated with perceptions about false information

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.
Voted for the Coalition			0.258	***
Voted Greens			0.215	***
Voted for another party			0.182	**
Interested in politics			0.293	***
Thinks that voting makes a differences			0.119	**
Thinks that Parliament will represent people like them			-0.159	***
Thinks politicians in the government are corrupt			0.394	***
Aged 18 to 24	0.022		0.023	
Aged 25 to 34	-0.013		-0.073	
Aged 45 to 54	-0.138	*	-0.186	**
Aged 55 to 64	-0.097		-0.142	
Aged 65 to 74	-0.111		-0.177	*
Aged 75 plus	0.177	*	0.122	
Female	-0.113	***	-0.091	**
Has not completed Year 12 or a post-school qual.	-0.193	**	-0.141	*
Has a degree	0.038		0.054	
Born overseas in an English-speaking country	-0.041		-0.025	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.089		-0.056	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.026		-0.028	
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	0.072		0.076	
Lives in a provincial electorate	0.105		0.087	
Lives in a rural electorate	0.219	***	0.217	***
Cut-point 1	-2.033		-1.720	
Cut-point 2	-1.128		-0.752	
Cut-point 3	0.017		0.430	
Cut-point 4	0.907		1.347	
Sample size	3,310		2,930	

Notes: Binary probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 4, May 2025.

4.2 The impact of perceptions of false information on views of electoral integrity

To what extent did perceptions of false information online shape voters' evaluations of other aspects of electoral integrity? To address this question, we examine Australian voters' assessments across four critical electoral phases: pre-election, campaign period, election-day, and post-election processes. In Table 5, we present summary results from regression analyses where perceptions of false information dissemination about candidates and parties online serves as the primary independent or explanatory variable, and the remaining 12 electoral integrity measures are the dependent variables.

These models test the association between misinformation perceptions on various dimensions of electoral integrity. We include a limited set of control variables – age, sex, education, country of birth, language spoken at home, and geography – and estimate the relationship using the ordered probit models. For 'positive' measures of electoral integrity, higher values indicate lower frequency. For 'negative' measures of electoral integrity, higher values indicate a greater frequency, with these variables marked in the table with a ^ for reverse coding. For simplicity of interpretation, the measure

of false information is included as a linear explanatory variable ranging from a value of 1 (none) to 5 (very often).

Two models are estimated for each dependent variable, similar to those in Table 4. For Model 1, we control for demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic factors only. For Model 2, on the other hand, we control for the full set of political preferences (vote choice) and political attitudes (interest in politics, political efficacy measured by whether voting makes a difference, perceived representation, and views on government corruption). This second specification allows us to isolate the specific relationship between misinformation perceptions and electoral integrity evaluations while accounting for other factors that might influence these assessments.

Results are summarised in Table 5, which includes the coefficient estimates, standard error, and p-values for the false information independent variable, from Model 2. The final column colour-codes the 'effect size' though we should note that we are not claiming causal effects, but rather focusing on the magnitude and statistical significance of the coefficient from the ordered probit model.

- Pre-election Period: False information perceptions about parties and candidates have no or moderate associations with perceptions of pre-election processes. The prevention of opposition candidates from running regression has a moderate positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that citizens who are more concerned about false information are also more likely to perceive restrictions on candidate participation.
- Campaign Period: The empirical analyses reveal that false information perceptions about parties and candidates is a strong predictor of campaign-related electoral integrity concerns among Australian voters. Particularly, in relation to digital-era threats, with data misuse by candidates showing the largest coefficient ($\beta = 0.490$, $p < 0.001$), followed by perceptions of foreign groups' influence ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, false information perceptions are strongly and significantly associated with perceptions of rich people's influence on the election ($\beta = 0.304$, $p < 0.001$). These strong positive coefficients indicate that citizens who perceive the distribution of false information as less frequent are also less likely to perceive these campaign irregularities as less frequent. Notably, we observe that media-related variables show a much weaker association, with fair journalism ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.001$) and fair media access ($\beta = 0.083$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrating a significant relationship, but with much smaller coefficients.
- Election Day: Perceptions of election day processes show mixed but significant relationships with false information perceptions, though with varying effect sizes. Effects of false information perception on voter bribery perceptions emerges as a strong relationship ($\beta = 0.305$, $p < 0.001$), while moderate effects on voter threats are observed ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.001$), both suggesting that perceptions of false information concerns are closely linked to perceptions of electoral coercion. Interestingly, perceptions of false information show no significant relationship with evaluations of whether voters had a genuine choice at the ballot box ($\beta = -0.020$, ns).
- Post-election Period: False information perceptions show weaker relationships with perceptions of post-elections processes and institutional trust. Observed counting irregularities demonstrate a moderate relationship ($\beta = 0.170$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that concerns about the technical aspects of vote counting are associated with broader information integrity worries. There is no association with the perceptions of whether votes were counted fairly.

Table 5 Relationship between perceptions of false information about candidates and parties and election integrity perceptions

Period	Dimension	Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Sig	Effect Size
PRE-ELECTION	Electoral Procedures	Fair officials	-0.024	0.030	ns	None
	Party Registration	Opposition prevented^	0.193	0.030	***	Moderate
CAMPAIGN	Campaign Media	Fair media access	0.083	0.030	***	Weak
		Fair journalism	0.166	0.031	***	Moderate
	Campaign Finance	Rich influence^	0.304	0.027	***	Strong
	Campaigning	Data misuse^	0.490	0.031	***	Strong
		Foreign influence^	0.310	0.030	***	Strong
ELECTION DAY	Voting Process	Voter bribery^	0.305	0.028	***	Strong
		Voter threats^	0.204	0.027	***	Moderate
		Genuine choice	-0.020	0.030	ns	None
POST-ELECTION	Vote Count	Votes counted fairly	-0.008	0.029	ns	None
		Counting irregularities^	0.170	0.028	***	Moderate

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 4, May 2025.

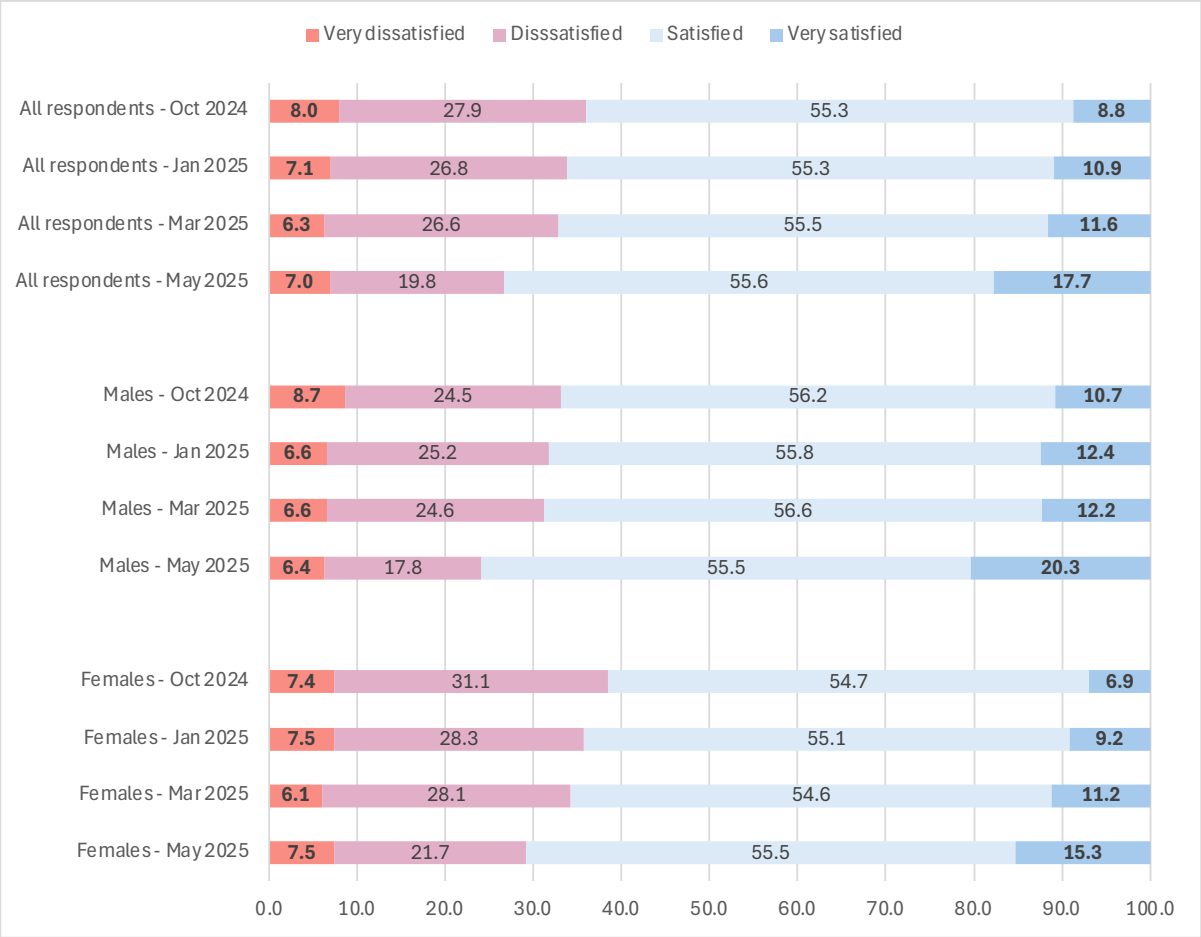
Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

5 Linking AI, False Information, and Satisfaction/Confidence

In this final section of the paper, we bring together these two strands of data collection – views on AI and views on False Information – and link them to two measures of democratic resilience. In previous Discussion Papers (Biddle 2025), we have introduced these two measures and shown their trends through time. The first is a person's satisfaction with democracy, the second is a person's confidence in the Federal Government.

Each wave we have asked 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?' Figure 6 gives the per cent of Australians that gave each of the four possible response options, first for all Australians, and then separately for males and females. Satisfaction improved across each of the three intervals between our waves of collection, but the largest increase was the period around the election itself. Almost three-quarters of Australians (73.3 per cent) were satisfied with democracy in May 2025 after the election, compared to just over two-thirds (67.1 per cent) in March/April of the same year in the pre-election period. The increase was slightly greater for males compared to females, with the former remaining more satisfied than the latter.

Figure 6 Satisfaction with Democracy – October 2024 to May 2025

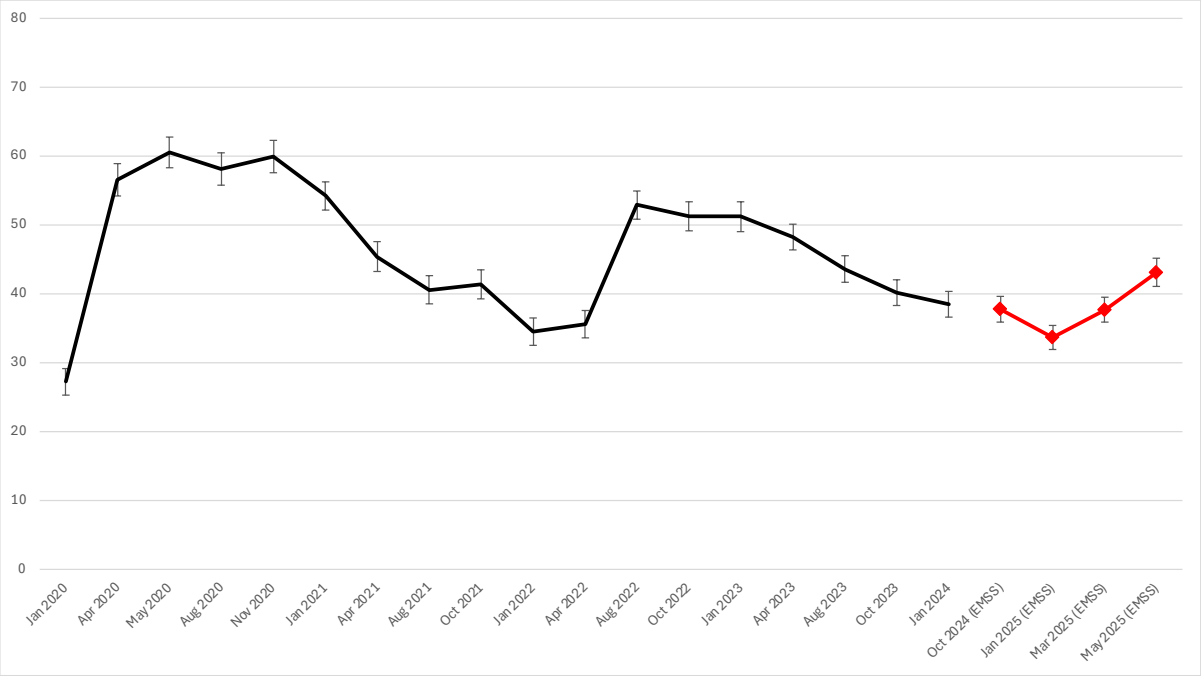


Source: Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

One of the first questions we have asked in each of the EMSSs was confidence in the Federal Government in Canberra. Although there continues to be lower levels of confidence in the Federal

Government relative to State/Territory governments and the public service, there was a significant increase in the per cent of Australians with quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the Federal government over the election period (Figure 7). We have this data over a much longer time series, and there are now more people confident in the Federal Government (43.1 per cent) than any time since after the 2023 Voice Referendum. Over the longer term, the current levels of confidence in the Australian government are still lower than they were during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (when the Coalition was in power) and just after the May 2022 election (when the Labor Party took over government).

Figure 7 Confidence in the Federal Government, January 2020 to May 2025



Note: The "whiskers" indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Source: ANUpoll (January 2020 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

In our final table of results, we look at views on AI with regards to the fairness of elections, perceptions of false information being distributed online about the candidates and parties, and these two measures of satisfaction and confidence. We analyse using a regression framework, with results presented in Table 6. Because we are linking data across two waves, samples sizes are much smaller and restricted to those that completed Waves 3 and 4 of the survey. Nonetheless, all relevant coefficients are statistically significant.

The first model is an ordered probit model where the dependent variable is perceptions of the frequency of false information about candidates and parties, with higher values indicating a greater perceived frequency. We control for the standard demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic factors that have been used in all our regression models but also include a binary variable for whether or not a person thinks AI will make things worse for the fairness of elections. There is a strong, positive association. Leaving aside the modelling framework briefly, 52.2 per cent of those that thought AI would make things worse (when asked in March/April) thought that false information was spread often/very often when asked in May, compared to 43.4 per cent of those that thought AI would make things better or about the same.

In the second model, we switch dependent variable to satisfaction with democracy. Again, we estimate via the ordered probit model, with higher values indicating a greater level of satisfaction. We include the same independent variables as we included in Model 1, but also include whether or not the person

thought false information was spread often or very often. Both our key independent variables had a negative association. However, the association was much stronger for the false information independent variable, compared to the AI variable.

Outside the modelling framework, the differences are quite similar for our two independent variables. Specifically, 68.4 per cent of those that thought AI would make things worse (when asked in March/April) were satisfied or very satisfied with democracy, compared to 78.1 per cent of those that thought AI would make things better or about the same. There is a slightly smaller difference by belief in false information, with 69.2 per cent of those that thought spreading of false information happened often or very often satisfied or very satisfied, compared to 77.0 per cent of those that didn't think spreading of false information occurred often.

In our final model, the dependent variable is confidence in the Federal government in Canberra (measured in May 2025). The variable ranges from none at all (the lowest value), through to not very much confidence, quite a lot of confidence, and a great deal of confidence (the highest value). Both of our independent variables are associated with this measure, even after controlling for other characteristics. The difference by views on AI (38.6 per cent with quite a lot or a great deal of confidence for those that thought AI would make things worse, 47.1 per cent for those that didn't) was similar to the difference by views on false information (38.8 per cent confidence for those that false information was distributed often or very often, 48.6 per cent for those that didn't).

Table 6 Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as well as views towards AI that are associated with democratic resilience measures

Explanatory variables	False info		Satisf with Democracy		Confidence in Fed. Gov't	
	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.	Coeff.	Sig.
Thinks false information spread often			-0.304	***	-0.334	***
Thinks AI will make things worse for elections	0.315	***	-0.111	*	-0.199	***
Aged 18 to 24	-0.001		0.362	**	0.037	
Aged 25 to 34	0.012		0.023		0.076	
Aged 45 to 54	-0.111		0.160		-0.009	
Aged 55 to 64	-0.183	*	0.001		-0.101	
Aged 65 to 74	-0.186	*	0.155		-0.022	
Aged 75 plus	0.168		0.219	*	-0.117	
Female	-0.157	***	-0.113	**	-0.019	
Has not completed Year 12 or a post-school qual.	-0.166	*	-0.296	***	-0.278	***
Has a degree	-0.023		0.129	**	0.064	
Born overseas in an English-speaking country	-0.095		0.121		0.122	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.018		-0.029		0.121	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.011		-0.262	**	-0.043	
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	0.016		-0.107		-0.083	
Lives in a provincial electorate	0.094		-0.132		-0.163	
Lives in a rural electorate	0.237	***	-0.254	***	-0.129	
Cut-point 1	-2.003		-1.797		-1.249	
Cut-point 2	-1.088		-0.943		-0.183	
Cut-point 3	0.090		0.571		1.006	
Cut-point 4	0.946					
Sample size	1,975		1,963		1,947	

Notes: Binary probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), Wave 3 and 4, March and May 2025.

6 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

6.1 Summary

The findings of this paper provide new insights into how Australians understand and respond to the impact of AI on Australian electoral integrity. The relevant technology is evolving fast, tools are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and we know little about the future impact of these technologies on future electoral integrity. What may have been emerging problems during the previous election may end up being much bigger problems at the next election.

The analysis reveals that while Australians continue to hold strong levels of trust in the administration of elections—particularly in the areas overseen directly by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), such as vote counting and the fairness of officials—there is substantial concern about the influence of new technologies on the information environment surrounding elections. These concerns are most pronounced in relation to the role of generative AI in spreading misinformation, and the broader effects of false information on voters' perceptions of the integrity of electoral processes affecting, in particular, election campaigns.

Australians' familiarity with AI remains limited, yet concern is widespread. Only around one in six Australians are more excited than concerned about the increased use of AI, with a much larger share expressing skepticism or apprehension. Crucially, those who know more about AI tend to be more worried about its effects, particularly on democratic institutions. Nearly half of Australians believe that AI will make elections less fair, and a majority are concerned about its potential to spread false or misleading content. This suggests that rather than alleviating uncertainty, increased knowledge of AI heightens perceptions of risk.

These concerns about AI are mirrored in assessments of the 2025 federal election itself. While most Australians were reassured by the integrity of core election-day procedures, almost half reported that false information about candidates and parties was distributed online, and significant proportions believed that data misuse, the influence of wealthy donors, and foreign interference were common features of the campaign environment. Perceptions on false information are strongly correlated with negative evaluations of electoral integrity during the campaign period, particularly around data misuse and undue influence, and to a lesser extent with concerns about election-day practices such as bribery and voter threats. These findings point to a clear distinction: institutional safeguards around voting are seen as resilient, but the campaign environment—shaped increasingly by digital technologies—is regarded as vulnerable.

Finally, these dynamics have implications for broader measures of democratic resilience. Both concern about AI and perceptions of false information are associated with lower satisfaction with democracy and reduced confidence in the federal government. The size of these associations is substantial, indicating that information integrity is not a peripheral issue but one that directly shapes democratic legitimacy. The evidence presented here highlights a dual challenge: sustaining trust in electoral administration while addressing the rapidly evolving risks of digital misinformation, particularly those amplified by AI. Together, these findings underline the urgency of policy innovation, public education, and institutional adaptation to strengthen electoral resilience in the digital age.

6.2 Recommendations

The evidence presented in this paper underscores both the strengths and vulnerabilities of Australia's electoral environment. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that combines regulatory reform, institutional adaptation, and public education. There is a need for a cohesive, national strategy to address the challenges posed by AI in general, as the current approach (in Australia

or elsewhere) will neither safeguard from harms nor ensure we get the societal and economic benefit that AI potentially may bring. In addition to broader AI-related policy, building on existing initiatives we recommend five key areas of policy action:

1. Strengthen institutional capacity to detect and respond to AI-driven disinformation and misinformation.

The AEC's Disinformation Register has proven valuable but is currently limited to issues under the Commission's direct control. With AI tools able to rapidly generate convincing false content, electoral bodies require dedicated resources and specialist expertise in AI detection and monitoring. This should include investment in real-time content analysis tools, partnerships with universities and civil society for independent verification, and enhanced training for officials in recognising AI-generated material. Extending coverage to campaign-related disinformation—not only administrative errors—would improve public confidence that emerging risks are being actively addressed.

2. Regulate AI use in political campaigning.

Survey results show that Australians are most concerned about data misuse, wealthy influence, and foreign interference, with AI potentially exacerbating all three. To mitigate these risks, clear rules should be developed around the use of AI in political advertising and campaign communications. Australians are very supportive of requiring AI companies to take responsibility, but government also has a role to play. Some potential enhanced safeguards could include mandatory disclosure of AI-generated content, transparency registers for political advertisements, and enforceable bans on deceptive deepfakes during election periods. Coordination with platforms is essential to ensure consistent standards and rapid takedown procedures for harmful AI-generated material, but there also needs to be robust regulatory powers to enforce takedowns. This is not going to be straightforward though, particularly with regards to overseas platforms that the Australian government will always find difficult to regulate against.

3. Enhance public resilience through AI and digital literacy.

Public awareness campaigns such as "Stop and Consider" should be expanded to specifically address AI-generated content. Education initiatives in schools, universities, and community organisations should include practical guidance on identifying AI-driven misinformation, encouraging critical thinking, and building trust in reliable sources. Importantly, these efforts should target demographic groups shown to be both less familiar with AI and more concerned about its risks—particularly older Australians and those with lower educational attainment. Importantly, this needs to happen well before an election takes place.

4. Foster shared responsibility across sectors.

The responsibility for combating AI-enabled disinformation cannot rest with the AEC alone. Technology companies, political parties, and media outlets should all be required to play a role in maintaining electoral integrity. Legislative frameworks should hold AI developers and platforms accountable for the misuse of their tools, while incentives can be created for voluntary compliance and best practice. Multi-stakeholder forums bringing together regulators, industry, and civil society would ensure transparency and foster collective responsibility.

5. Anticipate future risks through continuous evaluation and innovation.

The pace of AI development means that current safeguards may quickly become outdated. Independent evaluation of counter-disinformation measures should be built into the policy cycle, with findings used to adapt strategies for emerging threats. Establishing a permanent advisory body on AI and democracy could help policymakers anticipate challenges, share international best practices, and ensure that Australia remains proactive in protecting democratic resilience.

Taken together, these recommendations acknowledge the resilience of Australia's electoral institutions while recognising the pressing need to adapt to digital-era threats. By coupling institutional reforms

with public education and clear regulatory frameworks, Australia can build the democratic capacity needed to withstand the challenges posed by AI-driven disinformation and preserve electoral integrity in the years ahead.

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