P148 / Governing mis- and disinformation: Responses to emerging challenges

Topic : Policy Design, Formulation & Instruments

Chair : Maria Gintova (McMaster University)

Second Chair : Timea Nochta (University of Birmingham)

Third Chair : Andrea Lawlor (King's UC, Western)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Mis- and disinformation have become a recurring concern for governments and public institutions across elections, public health, climate change, migration, security and emergency management. International bodies have warned that false and misleading content can fuel social unrest, undermine electoral integrity and deepen societal polarization (UN 2022). Part of the difficulty is structural: mis- and disinformation circulate through complex online and offline networks involving actors and infrastructures that often sit beyond any single jurisdiction (Stepney and Lally 2024). Public authorities are nonetheless expected to identify emerging information threats, assess their consequences, coordinate a response and communicate credibly with diverse publics. This raises a question central to public policy and administration: how do governments respond to mis- and disinformation effectively and legitimately?

A substantial body of research has examined how mis- and disinformation are produced, spread and exert effects, along with the potential contribution of regulation, fact-checking, strategic communication, media literacy and collaboration with digital platforms and civil society. Governments have adopted markedly different approaches: the European Union has built an extensive regulatory framework for digital platforms (Peukert 2024; Schlag 2023), while Canada has emphasised detecting foreign interference, securing elections and building citizen resilience through media literacy (Government of Canada 2026a, 2026b). Yet no single policy instrument functions as a “silver bullet” (Bateman and Jackson 2024), and the effectiveness of any given intervention remains uncertain and highly dependent on context (Mendy et al. 2024).

This panel aims to foster a comprehensive dialogue on several critical dimensions of government responses to mis-and disinformation. For instance, existing literatures pay limited attention to, first, the inclusion of diverse perspectives in developing policies and responses, especially those of youth as digital natives (Bendo et al. 2026). Second, to the institutional and organizational conditions that allow governments to develop, implement and sustain these responses. Existing work points to recurring difficulties with expertise, access to information, coordination, implementation, public trust and accountability (Matasick et al. 2020), but these findings have rarely been connected to the broader literature on capacity in public policy and administration. Third, analytically and politically, there is little agreement on when government should intervene, and what remains "awful but lawful" (Hrynyshyn 2024). Fourth, to the contested nature of responsibility between platforms and governments in the context of social media's role in spreading disinformation (Bateman and Jackson 2024). Fifth, artificial intelligence, while promising for detection, also raises questions about trust, judgment and the safeguards needed to govern its use (WEF 2024).

References

Bateman, J. and D. Jackson (2024) https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/01/countering-disinformation-effectively-an-evidence-based-policy-g

Bendo, D. et al. (2026) https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2026.2673856

Government of Canada (2026a) https://www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/news/2026/03/government-of-canada-introduces-measures-to-fu

Government of Canada (2026b) https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/online-disinformation/digital-citizen-contribution-program.htm

Hrynyshyn, D. (2024) https://theconversation.com/the-online-harms-act-doesnt-go-far-enough-to-protect-democracy-in-canada-224929

Matasick, C. et al. (2020) https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2020/08/governance-responses-to-disinformation_6285c78a.html

Mendy, L. et al. (2024) https://doi.org/10.1177/09636625231223425

Peukert, A. (2024) https://doi.org/10.1080/17577632.2024.2362485

Schlag, G. (2023) https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i3.6735

Stepney, E.S. and C. Lally (2024) https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0719/

UN (2022) https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/459/24/pdf/n2245924.pdf

WEF (2024) https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/ai-combat-online-misinformation-disinformation/

CALL FOR PAPERS

Mis- and disinformation pose significant challenges to governance and democratic processes, promoting social unrest, undermining electoral systems and reinforcing polarization. Despite ongoing efforts by governments and international organizations, there is no consensus on how best to respond while balancing societal harms against freedom of expression. Thus, public authorities are expected to identify emerging information threats, assess their consequences, coordinate a response and communicate credibly with diverse publics. This raises a question central to public policy and administration: how do governments respond to mis- and disinformation effectively and legitimately?

We invite papers examining how governments, public services and wider governance systems develop, mobilize and address mis- and disinformation. The panel welcomes contributions from public policy, public administration, public management, political science, governance studies, communications and related fields.

Relevant topics may include, but are not limited to:

balancing government responses to mis- and disinformation with democratic rights and civil liberties;
comparative approaches to mis- and disinformation governance across jurisdictions and levels of government;
determinants of regulatory and non-regulatory responses to mis- and disinformation;
government capacity and the implementation of initiatives aimed at countering mis- and disinformation;
trust in government and the effectiveness of mis- and disinformation responses;
cross-sector partnerships between governments, civil society organizations, researchers, and technology platforms and implications for mis- and disinformation responses;
Indigenous knowledge systems and community input into government responses to mis- and disinformation;
risks, ethical considerations, and governance challenges of using artificial intelligence to identify or respond to mis- and disinformation;
youth and marginalized communities engagement in design and implementation of mis- and disinformation initiatives; and
capacity building, including through institutional learning and the recruitment and retention of public servants with relevant expertise.

The panel welcomes theoretical, conceptual and empirical papers using qualitative, quantitative, comparative or mixed-methods approaches, examining national or subnational governments, specific organizations, international arrangements, or multi-actor governance systems. Case studies are encouraged.