

Three Vectors of Invisible Influence: A Unified Electoral Transparency Framework

Executive Summary

Australian democracy faces three structural asymmetries, each shaping elections in ways largely invisible to voters:

Algorithmic influence – digital content targeting, amplification, and suppression

Funding flows – fragmented donations and voter-directed funding outside party accounts

Third-party advocacy ecosystems – coordinated campaigning aligned with parties

This framework integrates three reforms into a cohesive Electoral Transparency System:

Digital Electoral Transparency—visibility into algorithmic influence

Voter-Directed Funding & Transparency—visibility into financial influence with opt-in consent

Invisible Influence (Alignment Disclosure) – visibility into third-party advocacy ecosystems

Together, these reforms create a shared transparency infrastructure, combining disclosure rules, public dashboards, and AEC administration to restore voter and candidate sovereignty over political influence.

1. Modern Electoral Influence: The Three Vectors

Modern campaigns extend far beyond party messaging:

Algorithms control what voters see online, amplifying or suppressing content.

Funding networks channel resources through multiple entities, obscuring true scale.

Advocacy ecosystems—think aligned NGOs, unions, or industry groups—support or oppose parties without appearing on official disclosures.

Individually, these vectors create opacity. Combined, they give entrenched parties systemic advantage over independents and fragment voter visibility.

2. The Three Reforms

2.1 Digital Electoral Transparency

Problem: Voters cannot see how algorithms shape political content reach.

Solution: Mandatory disclosure of political content targeting and amplification.

Delivery: Algorithmic Influence Dashboard (AEC-administered) displaying reach, targeting parameters, and spending per party/candidate.

2.2 Voter-Directed Funding & Transparency

Problem: Campaign funding is fragmented, hiding true influence.

Solution: Public funding via democracy vouchers and real-time reporting of donations/expenditures, preserving opt-in consent.

Delivery: Funding Transparency Dashboard showing all financial flows per party/candidate, including aligned third-party spending.

2.3 Invisible Influence (Alignment Disclosure)

Problem: Third-party campaigning aligned with parties is siloed and undisclosed.

Solution: Alignment Disclosure with bright-line triggers: naming candidates, using party branding, or targeting party platforms.

Delivery: Advocacy Ecosystem Dashboard showing aligned support or opposition per party/candidate, integrated with funding and algorithmic data while respecting privacy safeguards.

3. Shared Architecture: Transparency as Infrastructure

All three reforms share a common architecture:

- Public-facing dashboards as the voter interface
- Disclosure requirements rather than speech restrictions
- AEC administration with audit authority
- Real-time or near-real-time reporting
- Cross-referencing safeguards to protect privacy while showing ecosystem connections

This unified layer reduces compliance complexity and transforms fragmented visibility into coherent voter information.

4. Integrated Benefits

Voters: See the complete influence landscape—algorithms, money, and advocacy.

Candidates/Independents: Level playing field versus entrenched party machinery.

Democracy: Informed consent replaces obscured influence.

Integrity: Structural transparency without partisan advantage.

5. Implementation Pathway

Phase 1: Pilot Alignment Disclosure + Advocacy Dashboard in one state election.

Phase 2: Introduce Digital Electoral Transparency requirements for platforms.

Phase 3: Integrate funding disclosure into a unified Funding Dashboard.

Phase 4: Full integration of dashboards, cross-referencing algorithms, funding, and advocacy.

Safe-harbour rules and privacy protections ensure smaller actors are not unduly burdened.

6. Evidence & Context (2025 Example Highlights)

Third-party spending in marginal seats (~\$150M estimated 2025), including Climate 200, Advance Australia, and other advocacy groups.

Algorithmic targeting disparities observed across electorates—amplifying party messaging beyond traditional reach.

Fragmented disclosures obscure systemic influence from voters and regulators alike.

7. Why This Framework Works

Comprehensive: Covers all modern influence vectors

Coherent: Shared dashboards reduce complexity

Non-partisan: Applies equally to all parties and third-party actors

Freedom-preserving: Discloses influence rather than restricting activity

Technically feasible: Builds on existing AEC infrastructure

Sovereignty-aligned: Extends visibility to voter data usage, complementing data sovereignty principles

8. Conclusion

The Electoral Transparency Framework addresses systemic gaps without banning speech, choosing winners, or creating bureaucratic bloat.

Core principle: When influence is exercised, it must be visible.

Outcome: Visibility restores sovereignty—to voters over their political environment, to candidates over their competitive landscape, and to democracy itself over the systems that shape elections.