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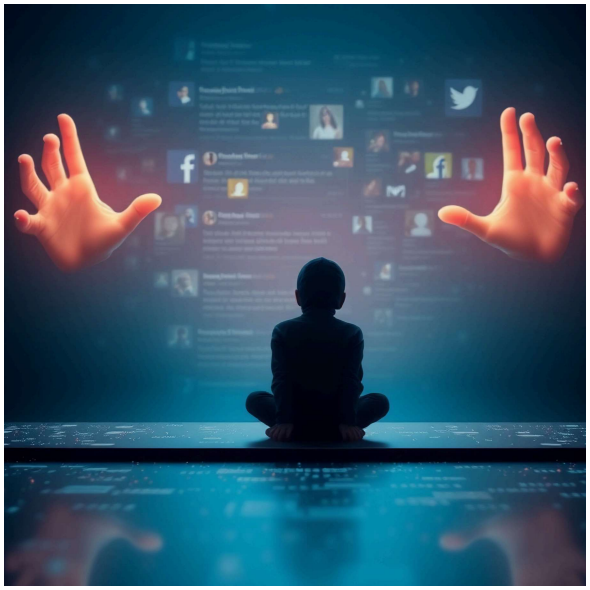
Centre for Media Transition

Hi there

Foreign influence



Since his inauguration as US president in January, Donald Trump's influence has been felt in the domestic politics of nations around the world. In Australia, the Albanese government embarks on its second term in the wake of an election where the influence of Trump's political populism was evident, despite being resoundingly rejected by Australian voters. But beyond its influence over political discourse, Trump's aggressive support for the US technology industry is clearly shaping how other governments approach the regulation of this dynamic sector. Many are now second-guessing schemes – often years in the making – aimed at addressing the harms digital platforms and AI technologies pose to consumers, other businesses and civic processes.

In this edition, Monica looks at what is in store for new communications minister Anika Wells, who has been left with an active policy program by former minister and new attorney general Michelle Rowland. Key elements of that program are unresolved, including the proposed News Bargaining Incentive and the reforms to the Online Safety Act. Trump's threats to impose tariffs in retaliation for tech regulation leave the Albanese government in a difficult position.

Alena focuses on Trump's influence on Australian political discourse, reporting on a new CMT study she has led on how the Australian media responded to Trump-style populist

narratives that emerged during the campaign, including Dutton's invocation of 'hate media'. Then, I examine how Trump's tech clientelism is influencing AI regulation – particularly over copyright – and how this is enabled, at least in part, by a felt need to foster domestic innovation.

While Australia's policy direction remains somewhat uncertain, Europe is largely forging ahead with its regulatory program. In our latest podcast, Kieran talks to EU digital policy expert Ruairi Harrison about how new dispute-resolution processes under the EU's Digital Services Act seek to balance freedom of expression and other fundamental rights.

Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

In with the new ...

We have a new communications minister – or more accurately, we have a sports minister who will take on communications as well, whilst former minister Michelle Rowland moves onward and upwards to become the new Attorney General.

Anika Wells is the new minister – and we look forward to seeing how fast she deals with the many pieces of unfinished business in the portfolio.

The one piece of leftover business that CMT is particularly curious about is the fate of the News Bargaining Incentive scheme which builds on the News Media Bargaining Code introduced in 2023 to give digital platforms an incentive to enter commercial deals with news media organisations. The NMBC has foundered in the wake of Meta's decision not to renew the deals it had made with Australian media companies because, it said, its users weren't coming to Facebook for news. And whilst Google is continuing to sign new deals, they are smaller and shorter. The NMBC, which delivered an estimated $200m a year into news media for three years, seems to be sputtering to an ignominious end – unless the government can find a way, beyond designating the platforms, to pay for the journalism that appears on their sites.

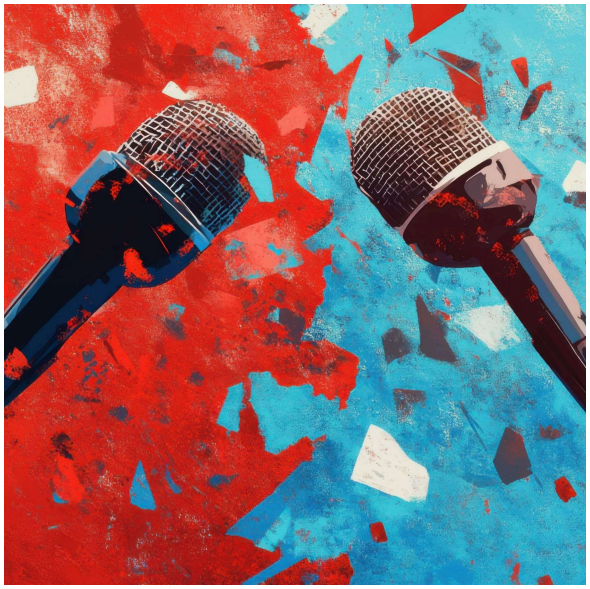
The proposed incentives scheme uses a charge and offset mechanism under which large digital platforms which don't do deals with news media companies will pay a non-

refundable levy. But if they do enter commercial arrangements with news media companies, the platforms can fully offset their liability. The government measure is not designed to raise revenue, but to encourage digital platforms to enter commercial deals with news media and support public interest journalism. But this scheme, much like its parent, the NMBC, has stagnated. It's embroiled in the Trump administration's 'liberation day' tariff arguments, with the US President insisting that there'll be penalties for countries which try to penalise American tech giants – like Meta – with taxes and regulations. It's a sticky problem. Over to you Minister Wells.

Also on the minister's to-do list is a statutory review of the Online Safety Act, which was delivered to Minister Wells' predecessor back in October of last year. The Act came into effect in 2022 and regulates some online harms, including online bullying and abuse, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and illegal and restricted content. The Albanese government indicated in late 2024 that it would accept one of the key recommendations issuing from the review, namely, to impose a statutory duty of care on digital platforms. This would play an important role in moving Australia's online regulation towards a genuine focus on platform systems, and was a strong focus of our own submission to the review. But the government has yet to respond to the rest of the 67 recommendations despite tabling the report in parliament in February. Other key recommendations include increased penalties, the implementation of an ombuds scheme, and restructuring the regulator as a genuine commission. Again, over to you Minister Wells.

Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Did Australian media weaken Dutton's appeal?



Throughout the election campaign, the Liberal Party and its leader oscillated between alignment with and distance from Donald Trump, which became a key narrative reinforcing voter distrust. But when Australian voters turned against the Liberal Party in the recent federal election, what role did media play in challenging Peter Dutton's flirtation with right-wing Trumpian populism?

During the election campaign, our CMT team was actively discussing how the

media responded to the influence of Trump-style tactics on Australian political electioneering. But we wanted to go beyond the headlines. So, we took a closer look and carried out a systematic analysis of media framing—focusing on coverage from the ABC, The Australian, and Sydney Morning Herald.

What we found was interesting: the media portrayed Dutton's version of right-wing populism in a few key ways—as a political miscalculation or opportunistic move, as a threat, as a tool to stoke division, or simply as the product of incompetence.

Whilst the ABC News engaged in subtle criticism of the Trumpian tones in the Coalition's election campaign, the Sydney Morning Herald outwardly rejected them, and The Australian downplayed Peter Dutton's 'risky' manoeuvres taken from Trump's populist playbook.

Four themes stood out in the media's portrayal of Dutton in relation to Trump—a victim of an enemy media; a defender of the people against an elitist government; a figure engaged in a battle over national identity; and a champion of nationalism.

Dutton's targeting of ABC's funding and labelling of the ABC and The Guardian as 'hate media' prompted differing media viewpoints. The Australian supported Dutton's claims against left-leaning media, describing the ABC as 'boring', 'irrelevant', and ideologically narrow. In contrast, the ABC and Sydney Morning Herald portrayed Dutton's media attacks as strategically dangerous political miscalculations, quoting voices which drew parallels between Dutton, Trump, and Canada's Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre.

In response to the Coalition's threats to slash public-sector jobs, all three media outlets exposed the consequences of populist simplification through anti-elitist rhetoric. They also scrutinised Dutton's culture wars on school 'indoctrination' and the so-called 'excessive' Welcome to Country ceremonies. The Australian legitimised the Coalition's policy as a justified correction to progressive overreach, the ABC interpreted Dutton's campaign shift from cost of living to culture wars as a strategic move to generate political traction, whilst the Sydney Morning Herald strongly opposed the culture wars as rooted in a fear-mongering anachronism.

When the Coalition minister Jacinta Nampijinpa Price vowed to 'make Australia great again' and accused media of being 'Trump-obsessed', all three news outlets avoided an overt interrogation of Trumpian populism while letting the associations speak for themselves, presenting Price's rhetoric as a strategic asset as well as a liability for the Liberals.

As Trump's tariffs shifted Australian attitudes towards the US, the reception of Trump-style tactics evolved in real-time, forcing politicians to adapt their messaging accordingly.

While Dutton's version of right-wing populism was more controlled than anger-based,

Australian media, though varied in tone, largely framed it as a divisive political miscalculation, a threat, and a crisis of competence.

Openly criticising Trump's danger to Australia, the Sydney Morning Herald cast Dutton as an architect of his own failure both during and after the election. The Australian mainly supported Dutton's anti-elite sentiments and culture wars. Initially measured in drawing parallels between Dutton and Trump, the news outlet became more direct closer to election day, framing Dutton as a leader losing grip on his narrative and alienating both staunch ideologues and those in the political centre. The ABC, though critical, neutralised Trumpian narratives; without directly condemning right-wing populism or casting Trump as a threat to Australia, the news outlet demonstrated how Dutton's mimicry and ambivalence undermined his credibility.

Some populist themes—like cost-of-living or anti-elitism—can work if localised carefully, but fully fledged and overt Trumpian associations proved unpopular in the Australian context. While Dutton's loss resulted from a self-sabotaging campaign lacking policy depth and coherence, by delegitimising Trumpian tactics as culturally misaligned, Australian media helped stall Dutton's political momentum.

Alena Radina
CMT Postdoctoral Fellow

Regulating under the influence

Donald Trump's efforts to influence international tech regulation are heating up. Wielding threats of retaliatory tariffs on foreign imports, he is seeking to shut down any regulation which imposes taxes, penalties or other burdens on tech companies. In a mirror image of his much-ridiculed contention that tariffs bring foreign money into the US, his campaign against foreign tech regulation is designed to curb the transfer of American money – in the form of tech company profits – 'to the foreign government' or their 'favoured domestic entities'. At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Trump called the potential use of fines under the EU Digital Services Act a 'form of taxation'. As former US defence bureaucrat Andrew Exum recently wrote in The Atlantic, Trump 'unabashedly

uses the American private sector as an instrument of national power'. But the power runs the other way as well: tech companies are using the US government to achieve their own ends. As Meta's Mark Zuckerberg said, 'The U.S. government should be defending its companies.' We knew this was coming, of course, with the image of Trump flanked by major tech CEOs at his inauguration in January adumbrating his clientelist approach to government.

Prime US targets include AI regulation. In April, the US government sought to curb development of the EU's General-Purpose AI Code of Practice. This was followed by claims from advocacy groups that tech-company lobbying had succeeded in weakening protections for copyright and fundamental human rights, after they had already managed to push these rules out of the AI Act itself and into the voluntary code. The lobbying seems to have succeeded in part because of a view that more-stringent regulation will disadvantage European tech development.

This desire to share in the still-unrealised economic spoils of AI also appears to be driving a UK government proposal to exempt AI companies from the need to seek permission from copyright holders when they scrape data. Instead, in a reversal of how copyright normally functions, copyright holders would have to opt out. But the proposal has met strong opposition in the House of Lords, with filmmaker Baroness Kidron arguing, 'There's no industrial sector in the UK that government policy requires to give its property or labour to another sector – which is in direct competition with it – on a compulsory basis, in the name of balance.' The Lords has now overturned the government's proposal for a third time. Meanwhile, long-awaited AI-safety requirements have reportedly been delayed after Trump's election.

In the US, Trump is going hell for leather to undercut AI protections introduced under Biden. Early this month, Congress introduced broad amendments to the Budget Reconciliation Bill that would prevent US states from enforcing any law or regulation of artificial intelligence or 'automated decision systems' for 10 years. But this libertarian approach is under opposition not only from digital and civil rights groups, but elements of Congress and even Trump's own administration. Mike Davis – that's not me but a Trump antitrust advisor – said 'It's not fair use under the copyright laws to take everyone's content and have the big tech platforms monetize it. That's the opposite of fair use. That's a copyright infringement.' Hollywood, of course, is also not enamoured by a failure to protect copyright from AI depredations. This conflict over the limits of corporate freedom can also be seen in the ongoing anti-trust cases against Meta and Google, which Trump has not sought to curtail. Whether it has any effect on Trump's strong-arm trade tactics is another matter.

Back at home, Australia's consultations over AI policy and regulations are ongoing, with copyright and safety concerns also contending with a drive to promote AI innovation. If the Albanese government seeks to progress them this term, they will no doubt do so with an eye on Trump's likely response.

Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

Content moderation à la EU

In case you missed it, listen to Kieran Lindsay on Double Take with Ruairi Harrison, who is an expert in the European Union's out-of-court dispute resolution process under its Digital Services Act. Ruairi runs his own digital policy consultancy and previously worked with the Internet Commission, a non-profit that works to advance trust in digital services.

Kieran and Ruairi look at how Europe deals with content moderation – specifically when a digital platform makes a decision about content that someone wants to dispute. They examine the operation of Article 21 of the Digital Services Act, which allows for the creation of external dispute resolution bodies, which can hear disputes between individuals and the digital platforms regarding content-moderation decisions made by those platforms.

It's a contentious issue, given the EU's strong focus on maintaining fundamental rights and the subjective nature of determining content disputes. On top of that, decisions by these external bodies are non-binding.

Kieran ultimately asks, what can Australia learn from the EU model?

In the realm of research, the CMT team is working on the second stage of the generative AI and journalism research project with a report coming later this year. We began this journey in 2023, when we conducted a widescale investigation of the attitudes towards generative AI in news production and steps being undertaken by Australian newsrooms to prepare for its possible deployment. You can take a look at the initial report here in preparation for the next.

Alexia Giacomazzi
Events and Communications Officer

We hope you have enjoyed reading this edition of the *Centre for Media Transition newsletter* | *under the influence - Issue 8/2025* | **ISSN 2981-989X**

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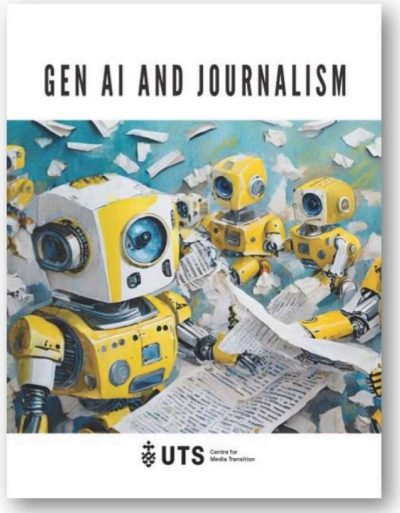

The Centre for Media Transition and UTS acknowledges the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our university now stands. We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for this land.