

**University of Southern California and University of Strathclyde**

**Workshop on**

**Cyber-securing Democratic Elections**

**27 June 2023  
Technology and Innovation Centre Building**

**University of Strathclyde**

**Draft Specification for the Event**

Professor Max Nikias, President Emeritus, University of Southern California, has proposed a joint event organised by the USC Election Cybersecurity Initiative and the University of Strathclyde. We lay out details for a such an event hosted at the University of Strathclyde.

**Goals of the event**

The USC Election Cybersecurity Initiative aims to protect elections and campaigns from digital and cyber threats. To this end, it has organised events in all 50 US states, as well as in Greece. These events bring together academics and practitioners to share expertise on identifying and countering such threats. An event at Strathclyde offers an opportunity to extend this approach, providing an opportunity for mutual learning between academics and practitioners in the UK, the USA and the EU.

The event’s primary objective would be raising awareness of the global and national cyber-security challenges, including in the UK and Scotland, and the technological contribution to meeting these challenges. We aim to integrate a range of disciplines in deep and meaningful ways, including the technological and science fields, social media, social science, and public policy.

It could form a platform for further discussion between our Strathclyde and USC colleagues who are interested in research and educational opportunities in two areas:

• the technological dimensions of cyber security; and

• the social, political, and (mis)informational sciences.

Importantly, the Initiative seeks to promote research at the intersection of technology and public policy, providing an opportunity to bring the academics more closely together to explore future engagement.

The event will bring together academics from a variety of disciplines. Computer Science and Engineering are needed to understand that technological potential of threats and how they can be addressed. It is also necessary to consider how these technological threats manifest themselves through electoral institutions, procedures and campaigns, which requires the input of specialists in elections and political behaviour. Understanding the strategic intentions of potentially malign actors is also important, which requires engaging people in international relations and security studies. Below we include lists of potential academic panellists, potential speakers (mostly practitioners) and organisations to invite.

It is also important to bring together academics and practitioners, both within government and beyond. For this reason, we will reach out to those responsible for cyber security in the Scottish and UK government, as well as in the EU. We will also contact those responsible for election administration at the UK, Scotland and local level. Given that campaigns can be a significant target for attacks on the electoral process, we will also invite the major Scottish and UK political parties. We will also invite relevant pressure groups and think tanks. This will include groups concerned with the functioning of elections and democracy, groups concerned with the functioning of government (e.g. Institute of Government) and groups concerned with issues of national security (notable groups such as Chatham House are already very engaged in cyber-security issues).

Given the objectives of the USC Cybersecurity Initiative to address cyber threats to the democratic process, the event will consider what threats we are faced with in the Scottish and UK perspective, and how these can be mitigated. To assess the threats we face, we have to consider what vulnerabilities exist, both in technological terms and in terms of institutions that open the door to manipulation. We also have to consider what are the strategic objectives of potentially malign actors, both foreign and domestic. In terms of potential mitigations, again it is necessary to consider both how technological systems and institutions can be made more robust to cyber-attack. There may be much to be gained by sharing best practice.

**Location and Timing**

We propose that the event will take place in the University of Strathclyde Technology and Innovation Centre on June 27, 2023. It will be an all-day event.

This places the event just after the meeting of the European Political Science Association (also at the Technology and Innovation Centre) on July 23-25. This will allow the event to be advertised to conference attendees who are planning to visit Glasgow at this time.

**Tentative Schedule**

9.00-9.30 Registration.

9.30-10.30 *Building Trust in Uncertain Times: Conversations with Sir Jim McDonald, Karen Renaud, and Max Nikias; Moderator: Adam Powell III.*

10.30-11.00 *Public Engagement and Digital Literacy Interventions: Lessons from USC’s Election Cybersecurity Initiative; Speaker: Adam Powell III.*

11.00-12.00 Panel 1 – *Converging Engineering and Social Science: Interdisciplinary strategies towards combatting misinformation and electoral mischief. Speakers include:* Professor Cliff Neuman (USC); Professor Scott Cunningham (Strathclyde)

12.00-1.00 Panel 2 – *Securing Election Systems and National Security: Lessons from recent elections. Speakers include: Brandon Valeriano. Marine Corps University.*

1.00-2.30 Lunch (including poster session).

2.30-3.30 Panel 3 – *Social Media, Emerging Technologies and Public Policy: Benefits and challenges. Speakers include:* Professor Sarah Mojarad (USC); Dr Narisong Huhe (Strathclyde).

3.30-4.30 Panel 4 – *The Future of Democracy: Finding the public purpose in a digital age. Speakers include: Professor Dr W. Paul Cockshott (University of Glasgow); Professor Anthony McGann (Strathclyde).*

4.30-5.00 Concluding remarks.

We will serve a buffet lunch. There will also be a poster session during the lunch break, with posters presenting work on democracy and cyber-security, as well as a visual exhibition of “images of democracy”.