

University of Texas
**MOOC on Information & Elections
in Digital Era**

Module 1: New Information Paradigm and
Elections

**Electoral Commission of
South Africa**

August 2022



SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOME

- Thank you to Tatiana Monney and the leadership of the UNDP for inviting the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) to share its experiences on the critical subject of the impact of the new information paradigm on elections.
- Welcome and best wishes to the participants of the online course on Information and Elections in the Digital Era, which has been organised with UNESCO and the University of Texas's Knight Center for Journalism.
- Ladies and gentlemen...



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

In this session we will discuss:

- The digital revolution as is one of the biggest innovations in our lifetime.
- The evolution of communications
- The media continuum



- The role of election management bodies (EMBs)
- The impact of new media on elections (The Digital Era)
- The South African experience (LGE2021)

MEDIA & COMMS SHIFT: TRADITIONAL TO DIGITAL

- The new information paradigm and elections:
- Traditional media: TV, print and websites
- Digital-era revolution: Digital publications, online, e-mail, search engine optimization, e-commerce, e-platforms and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat etc)
- This evolution has led to new multimedia communications strategies in communication, campaigns, education, training, marketing, media relations, advertising, promotions and outreach.



SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- CAMPAIGN MIX: Animation videos, social media toolkits, loud hailer audio, storytelling content, characters (Vota)
- Multilingual application
- Crossover media platform
- Flexibility to include TV
- Pandemic proof
- Ability to share info
- Growing following
- Social change force
- Wide and easy accessibility

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- Susceptibility to:
 - Cyber attacks, malware or ransomware
 - Technical attack of networks/website
 - Data manipulation: Hackers using malicious software
 - Susceptible to misinformation through bots, phishing/spoofed websites
 - Global attack to manipulate elections outcome
 - Susceptible to manipulation by political stakeholders

WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

- High digital access (68%)
- Social media users (46.4%)
- Falling barriers of entry
- Cost of data
- Hardware
- Proliferation of platforms:
 - Facebook (22-million),
 - TikTok (6.44%),
 - Google video-share (24-million),
 - LinkedIn (9.9-million),
 - Twitter (2.35-million),
 - Snapchat,
 - Instagram

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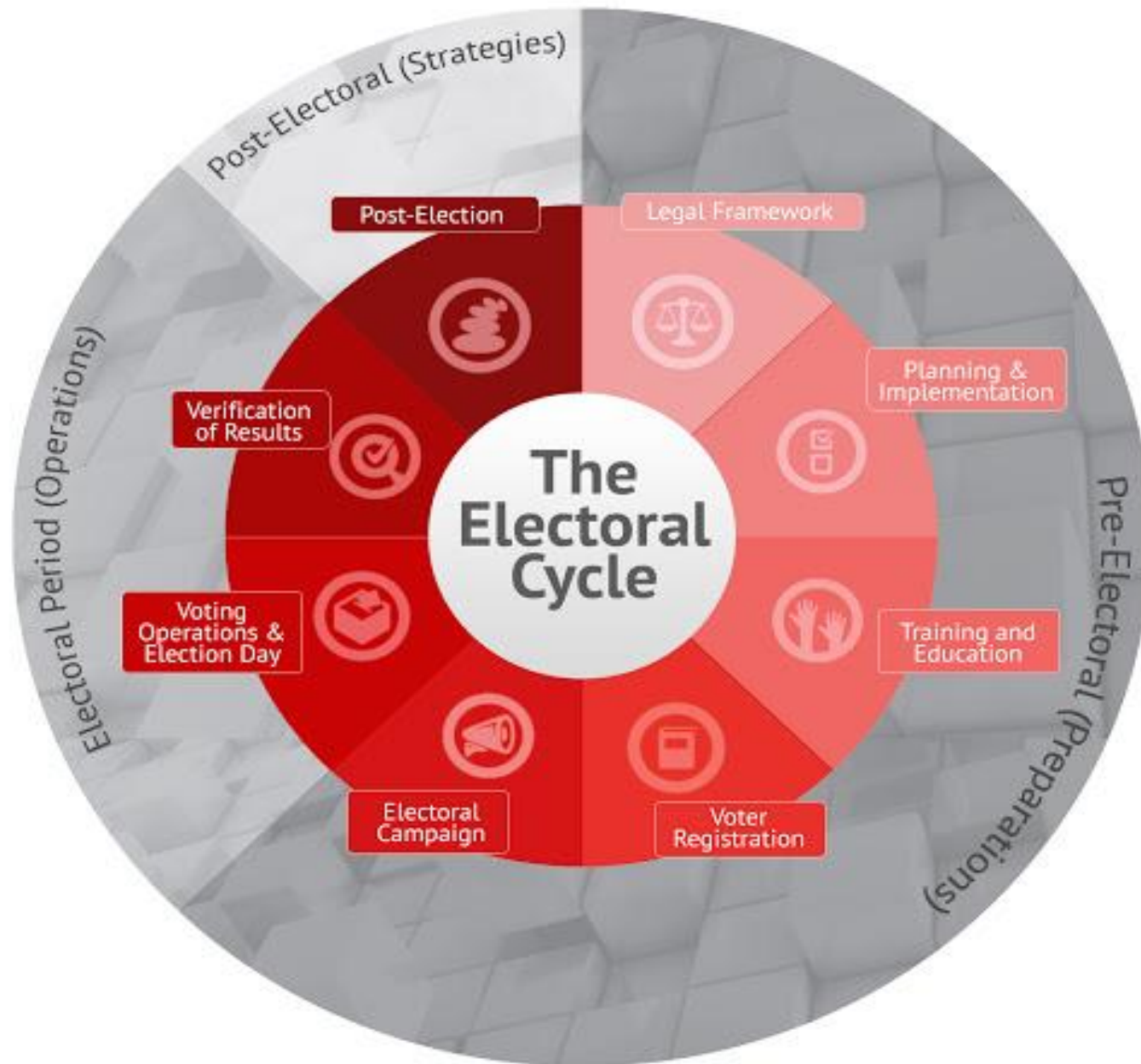
- Disinformation: False, inaccurate and misleading information intended to harm
- Pliable to faceless forces of harm or hijacking of election results
- Intent potential to violate constitutional rights of citizens: Freedom of expression, Access of credible information, freedom to make informed choices, violation of electoral code of conduct and other laws.

THREATS

THE ROLE OF EMBs

- They are creatures of the Constitution and the laws of each country
- The elections must be conducted within the legal prescript
- The elections must also be under conditions conducive to free and fairness
- Governed by domestic, regional, continental and international regulations, protocols, guidelines and best practices
- They are also circumscribed by principles, norms, standards and values namely; access to information, empowerment with information, transparency and inclusivity
- The ultimate litmus test is that they must deliver free, fair, credible elections, conducted with impeccable integrity, whose outcomes are accepted by all stakeholders

ELECTORAL CYCLE IN SOUTH AFRICA



SOUTH AFRICA ELECTORAL CYCLE 2

Planning and Implementation

- Roll back
- Post-mortem

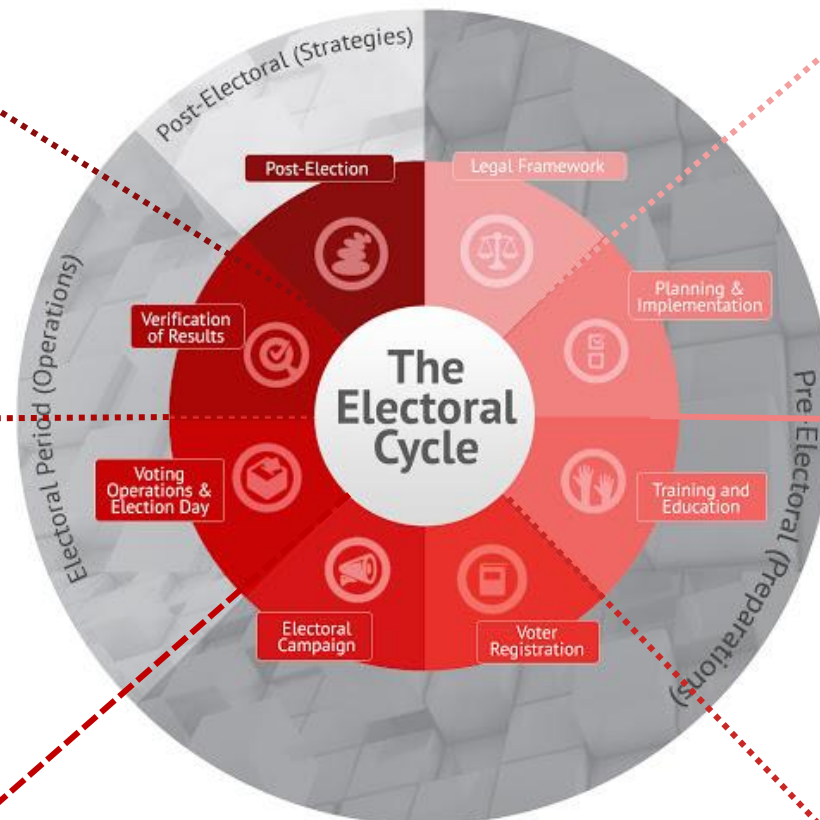
Results

- Tallying
- Consolidation
- Verification
- Transmission
- Announcement

Election Day

- Observation
- Voting operations
- Counting

- Voting district Delimitation
- Reg of Political Parties
- Candidate Nomination
- Logistics and supplies
- Election campaigns



- **Stakeholder MGT**
- Political liaison
- Thought Leadership
- Webinars
- Public campaigns
- **Marketing**
- Publicity
- Promotions
- Advertising
- **Communications**
- Media Relations
- **Education**
- Voter & Civic educ
- Outreach
- **Training**

THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

THE 2021 DIGITAL CAMPAIGN

- Digital and social media were key channels for communicating the IEC SA's 2021 Municipal Elections campaign.
- The campaign was rolled out as follows:
 - An **initial awareness launch** in mid 2021 recorded over 16.6 million impressions across key local content, news and lifestyle websites, 'Please Call Me' alerts and SMSes.
 - A **registration campaign** in September 2021 recorded over 26.7 million impressions across key social media and news and lifestyle websites, Please Call Me's and SMSes.
 - An **election campaign** in October 2021 recorded a significant level of exposure and engagement in a short timeframe, with over 60 million impressions and over 1 million engagements, largely across key news and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Vodacom and Wi-Fi banner adverts.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

MEDIA OUTREACH DURING LGE 2021

- In South Africa, a total of 14 million people were reached during the television broadcasts, with viewers exposed to the voter education messages an average of four times.
- Significantly, the percentage reach achieved against the youth or young adult target market was at a level similar to that achieved with the broader population.
- During the social media campaign, Facebook evidenced the greatest reach at 8.3 million, followed by Twitter with a reach of 4.4 million. In third place was Instagram with a reach of 1.2 million.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

SOCIAL SUCCESSES

- The impact of the social media strategy was significant. Between June and November 2021, the IEC enjoyed the following engagement on key social media platforms:
 - A young, highly engaged Twitter following of nearly 240 000.
 - A highly engaged Facebook following of some 370 000 followers.
 - The Electoral Commission's introductory presence on the Instagram photo-sharing platform achieved the 5 000 mark, while its presence on LinkedIn grew by over 70% to over 1 900 followers.
 - A fun collaboration with TikTok, which has about 9 million users (mostly youth), saw the platform featuring an information page for its South African users with a redirect to the Electoral Commission's website.

OBSERVATION

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

- IEC strives to be at the forefront of digital communication and employ social media for its immediacy, cost-effectiveness and responsiveness.
- According to the South African Human Sciences Research Counsel's 2021 Election Satisfaction Survey, 48% of voters who were interviewed in these elections perceived social media as a useful source of information, while 50% perceived the traditional communication campaign as a useful source of information. Accordingly we continue to invest in campaigns on traditional media such as television, radio – especially community radio, print and outdoor media, and even older messaging technologies like SMS, to reach those voters who simply don't have access to technology and data.
- This illustrates the fact that there is no homogenous approach to communicating with our key stakeholder – the citizens of South Africa.

OBSERVATIONS

THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Social media has become pervasive in all human information endeavors and has drastically changed the media landscape.
- It has become one of the official channels through which the governments communicate with citizens.
- It is at the heart of all political party campaigns before, during and after elections.
- It has become a new terrain where political parties, who have taken to it like fish to water, battle for the hearts and minds of voters.
- It has also changed how election management bodies, such as the IEC, communicate with voters.

MANAGING THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

DISINFORMATION AND MITIGATION MEASURES

- Disinformation through digital platforms manifests as one of the greatest threats to the freeness, fairness and credibility of elections the world over.
- Disinformation is defined as false, inaccurate or misleading information designed to intentionally cause harm.
- Within an election context, this includes false information intended to unduly affect participation in, and the outcome of, elections.
- In mitigation of this threat during the 2019 and 2021 general elections, the Electoral Commission partnered with non-governmental organisation Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and the major social media platforms of Facebook, Google, Twitter and TikTok.
- Moreover, disinformation goes against the Electoral Code of Conduct and electoral laws.

MANAGING THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

SAFEGUARDING ICT SYSTEMS

- The Electoral Commission has not experienced any significant attacks, but it is hyper aware and invests heavily in cyber-security measures to protect its data, notably the voters' roll - our most prized national asset, as well as the integrity of the electoral process, including the results system.
- The IEC regularly invites experts to conduct independent security audits of its ICT infrastructure this includes the safeguarding of the voters roll.
- Political parties also independently audit the elections results capturing system.

MANAGING THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS

- Countries across the world have reacted differently to this new and ever-growing phenomenon.
- Those that cannot deal with the overwhelming impact of social media have resorted to the draconian and totalitarian measures such as banning, switching off social media and closing down news during elections.



CONCLUSION

- We need to manage the threat and weaknesses by among others, mitigating them.
- It is a crucial imperative of EMBs to be vigilant about the security of the voters' roll – to take steps to protect the data and electoral processes, in addition to their own reputations.
- Trustworthy information is crucial in the process that enables citizens to make informed choices.
- The war on disinformation and adaption of the EMBs to the digital revolution, is a critical strategic imperative that all EMBs should endeavour to succeed in.
- We wish participants in the course well and look forward to their positive and constructive contributions as active citizens in their respective countries.
- I thank you.