Information and Elections in the Digital Era

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

Organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas

with the support of UNESCO and UNDP

MODULE 1

The new information paradigm and elections

In this module…

- Elections and the new information paradigm.
- How the new digital era, including Internet, social media, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and Learning Machine affect electoral processes.
- The electoral cycle approach.
- International standards: Human rights, freedom of expression, press freedom and elections.
- The human approach to Artificial Intelligence.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE NEW INFORMATION PARADIGM

Democracy requires…

- Free, periodic, transparent, and inclusive elections.

- Freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the right to political participation are also critical to societies ruled by the respect for human rights.
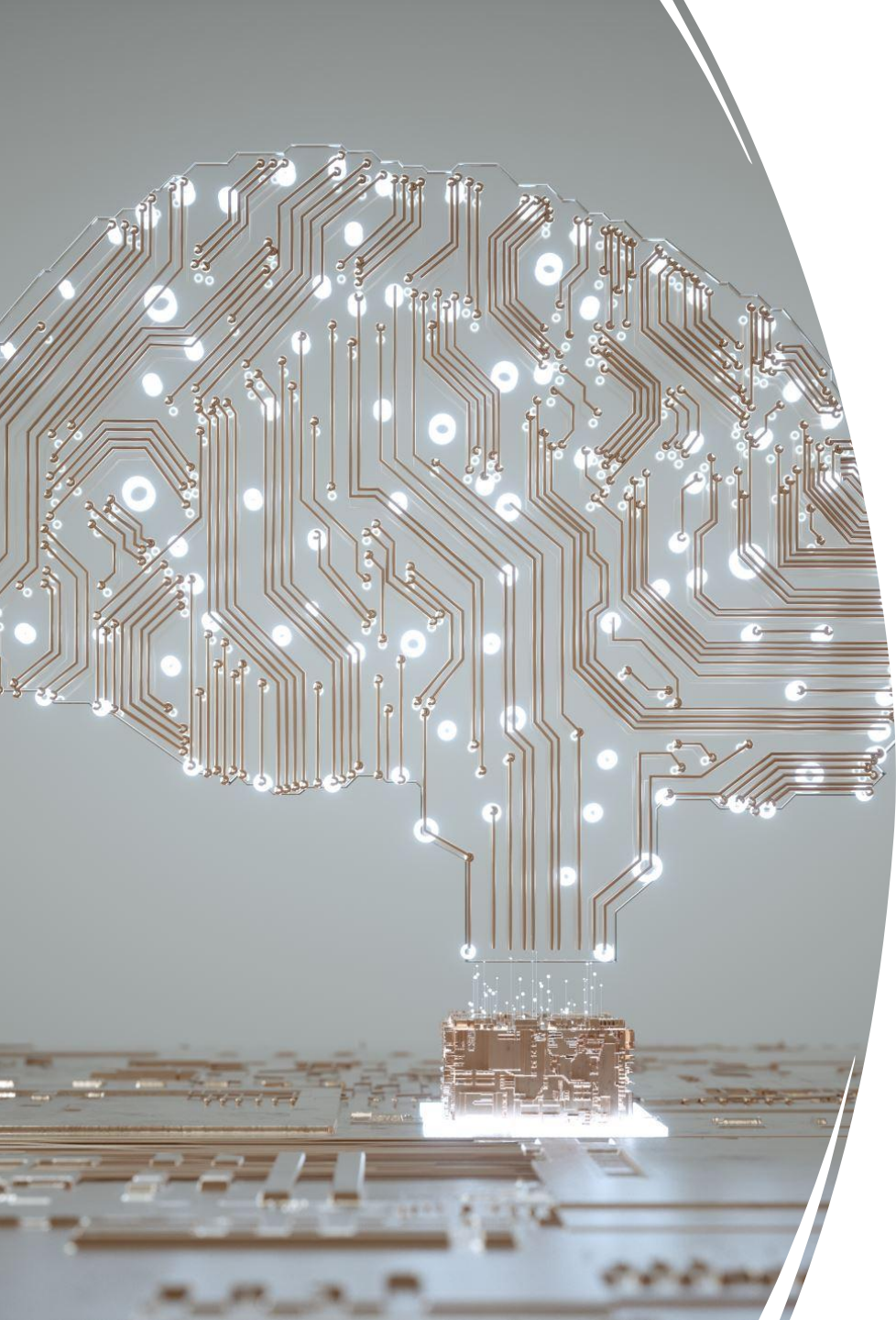
4.2
billon estimated elegible voters worldwide

However, with billions of human beings connected, billions of potential voters, and many different interests and colliding agendas involved…

there is also higher possibilities for **hateful content**, **disinformation** and **misinformation** to circulate widely, putting at **risk** democratic processes and institutions.

What is Artificial Intelligence?

"Machines capable of imitating certain functionalities of human intelligence, including such features as perception, learning, reasoning, problem-solving, language interaction, and even producing creative work".
UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)

In current Artificial Intelligence research, it is the aspect of **RATIONALITY** that is considered for a machine to be classified as "intelligent"

Machine learning, Algorithms and Big Data

- **Machine learning**: when algorithms can imitate the way that humans learn, gradually improving its accuracy without human intervention

- **Algorithms**: a set of rules specifying how to solve some problem; a set of procedures guaranteed to find the solution to a problem.

- **Big Data**: voluminous data sets gathered thanks to Artificial Intelligence that traditional data processing software can't manage.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Elections

- Artificial Intelligence and machine learning can also benefit the democratic institutions by engaging voters and helping them to be better informed.

- AI has great potential for enhancing independent journalism.

- Algorithms can help to a positive impact on elections when used to reduce the visibility or remove content that discriminates or incites hatred and violence or advocate for women's right to political participation.

- Voters targeted advertising campaigns could be used to deliver personalized information related to the interest areas of each voter.

- AI can empower civic education and voter education initiatives

Artificial Intelligence, algorithms and elections

- AI algorithms can reproduce and reinforce existing biases, exacerbating already existing forms of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping

- It can also increase tensions between freedom of expression, the role of journalism, social media, and electoral processes.

- The use of algorithms is inaccessible to most governments, as it is unregulated and remains in the hands of private parties.

Issues to be address to safeguard the integrity of electoral processes

Online disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation.

The digital dimension of the safety of all actors involved, including candidates, voters, political party leaders, journalists and other relevant actors.

The disruptive practices in election campaigning and communications.

New developments highlight the need to safeguard the integrity of electoral processes, as well as the role of media during election periods:
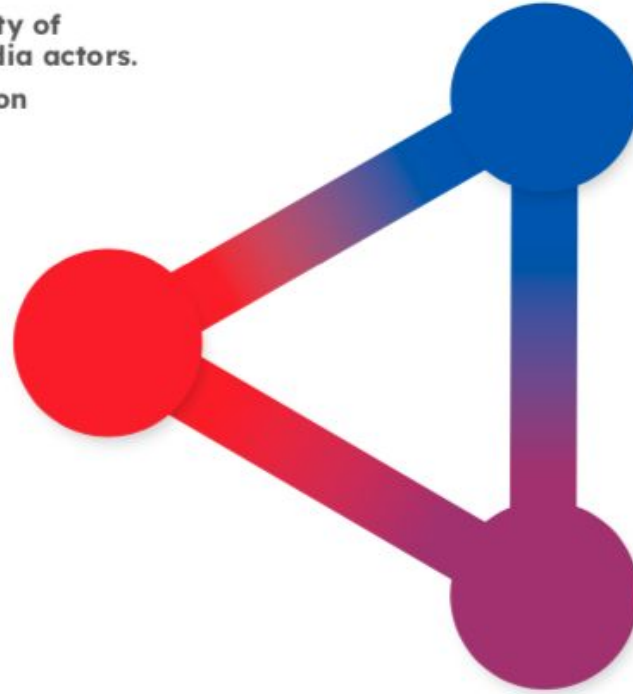
- Disinformation and misinformation.

- Attacks on the safety of journalists and media actors.

- Disruption in election campaigning and communications.

INFORMATION UNDER ATTACK

So called "fake news" has become a dominant term, but is also now experiencing push back.

Disinformation and **misinformation** have emerged as preferred ways to describe content that undermines accuracy and reliablity of information that underpins public opinion.

JOURNALISTS UNDER FIRE

Threats and violence against journalists have continued and expanded in recent years.

Killings of journalists and impunity for the killings remain at shocking levels.

Hostile rhetoric and online threats to media actors are a growing trend.
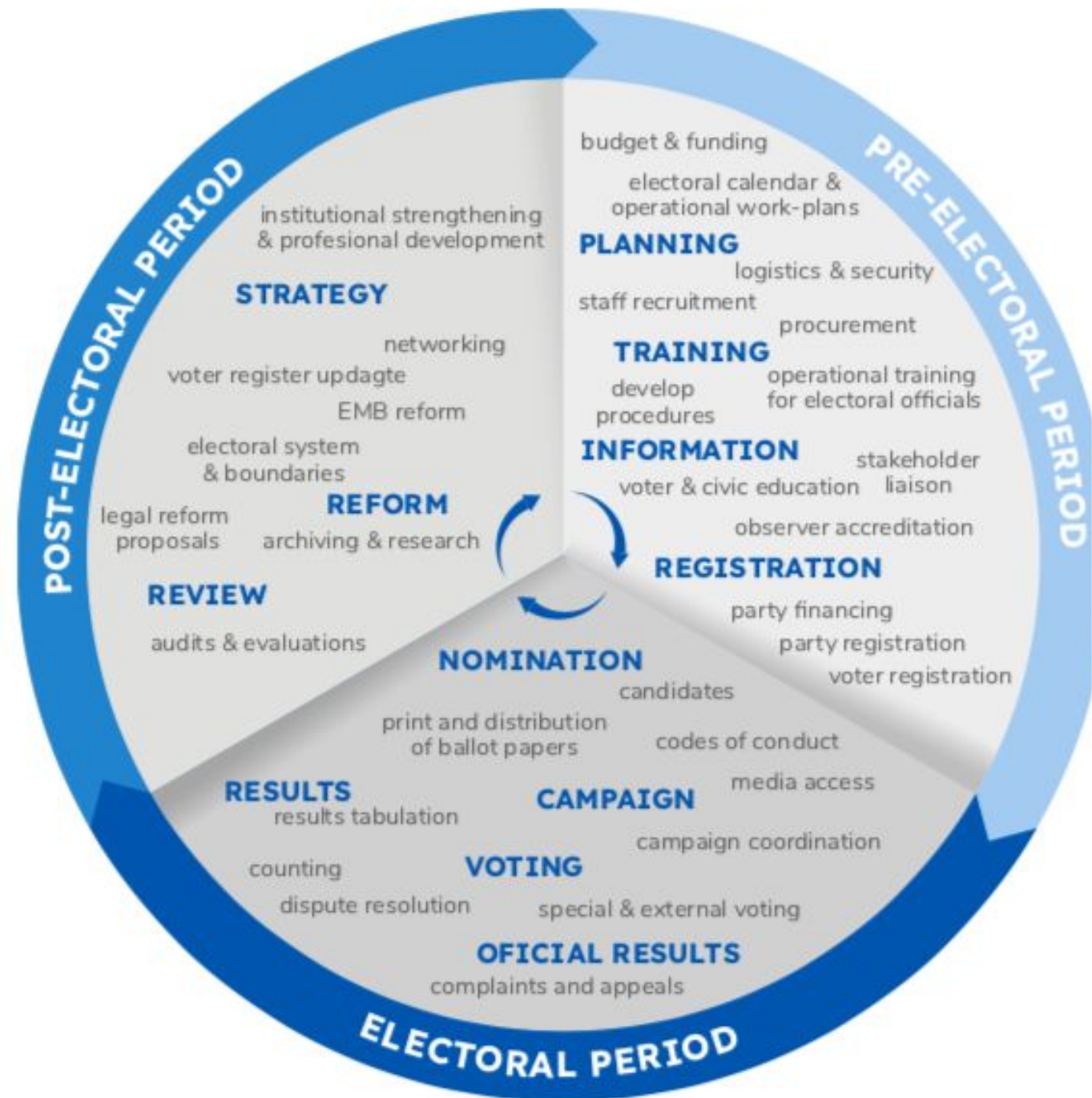
ELECTION INTEGRITY AT RISK

Disruption of democratic processes today includes:

- circumvention of campaign financing rules

- lack of transparency in political advertising and political micro-targeting

- crackdowns on legitimate political content

- shutdowns of internet access and applications.

THE ELECTORAL CYCLE APPROACH

- The electoral cycle is organized in three periods that follow each other: a pre-electoral, electoral period and a post-electoral one.
- Elections are composed of a number of integrated building blocks, with different stakeholders interacting and influencing each other.
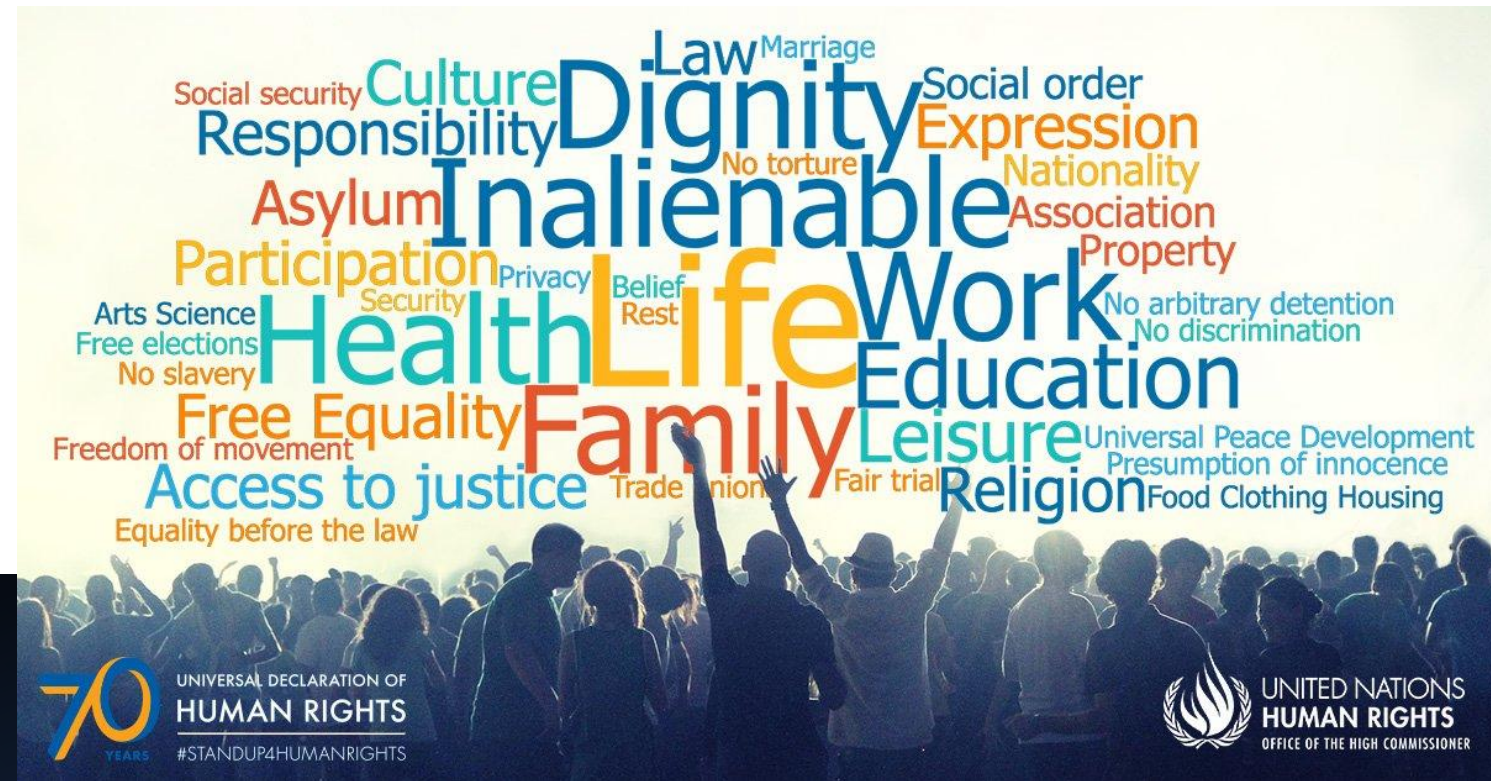
- There are crosscutting issues such as political participation of women, as well as the inclusion of minorities or vulnerable groups or issues related to the security of all actors involved, including members of the electoral commission, electoral staff, candidates and journalists that affect the whole electoral cycle.

- The cyclical approach is a key instrument to facilitate the understanding of the interdependence of different electoral activities, helping Election Management Bodies (EMB) officials, electoral practitioners to think and planning ahead, rather than reacting to each electoral event as it happens.

Coffee-break

HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PRESS FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives"

- Equal rights for women, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, youth and persons with disabilities.

- The right to participate in genuine and periodic elections implies other rights, including: the right to freedom of opinion, the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of association, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to privacy.

Article 21 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

The most relevant rights pertaining to electoral processes are as follows:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Article 25

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2[29] and without unreasonable restrictions:

(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in [their] country.

General Comment 25 of the UN Committee on Human Rights on "The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the rights to equal access to public service" provide further guidance on the interpretation of article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Right to Freedom of Expression

Enshrined in **Article 19** of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers"

Right to privacy

The right to privacy is enshrined in **Article 12** of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with [their] privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon [their] honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks."

CHALLENGES POSED BY THE NEW INFORMATION PARADIGM

Artificial Intelligence, Big data and Machine Learning pose challenges to the electoral processes and Human Rights

- They affect those human rights related to freedom of expression and opinion, the right of peaceful assembly, the safety of candidates, the right to political participation, the situation and rights of women in politics, activists, journalists, and bloggers, the right to privacy and the access to information.

- Harassment, trolling campaigns and intimidation have polluted parts of the Internet and pose very real off-line threats.

- Artificial Intelligence forms of hate speech like threats, insults, intimidation, cyber-bullying online can lead to real world targeting, harassment, violence, and murder, even to alleged genocide and ethnic cleansing.

- On 24 November 2021, the ***Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*** was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference at its 41st session BY ALL MEMBER STATES.

- This is the FIRST global standard-setting instrument on the ethics of Artificial Intelligence resulting from an extended multi-stakeholder consultation process to agree on a concrete policy and action set of recommendations.

The objectives of the 141 Recommendations

(a) to provide a universal framework of values, principles and actions to guide States in the formulation of their legislation, policies or other instruments regarding AI, consistent with international law;

(b) to guide the actions of individuals, groups, communities, institutions and private sector companies to ensure the embedding of ethics in all stages of the AI system life cycle;

(c) to protect, promote and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, human dignity and equality, including gender equality; to safeguard the interests of present and future generations; to preserve the environment, biodiversity and ecosystems; and to respect cultural diversity in all stages of the AI system life cycle;

(d) to foster multi-stakeholder, multidisciplinary and pluralistic dialogue and consensus building about ethical issues relating to AI systems;

(e) to promote equitable access to developments and knowledge in the field of AI and the sharing of benefits.

Human Centered Artificial Intelligence

- Artificial Intelligence is already in our lives, directing our choices, often in ways which can be harmful.

- There are some legislative vacuums around the industry which needs to be filled fast.

- The first step is to agree on exactly which values need to be enshrined, and which rules need to be enforced.

- Many frameworks and guidelines exist, but they are implemented unevenly, and none are truly global.

- AI is global, which is why we needed a global instrument to regulate it.

- Artificial Intelligence must be committed to respect and promote universal human rights, including democratic institutions and electoral processes.

Recap Module 1

During this module we learned about…

- How the new digital era affects electoral processes.

- What is Artificial Intelligence, Algorithms and Big data.

- We also examine the electoral cycle approach, a key methodological tool to address problems and look for effective electoral-related solutions to the challenges of the new digital era.

- We talked about how and why human rights, freedom of expression and press freedom are key for democracies, and which are the main related international standards.

- And finally, we addressed the ***Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*** adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 2021.

ON MODULE 2 we will address…

- Why we shouldn't use the term "fake news"

- The definitions of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation.

- The different key elements of this dynamics.

- The human drivers behind misleading content.

- Hate speech and its impact on electoral processes.

- Electoral related violence and gender-based violence.

- Violence against journalists during elections.

See you next week!