

Information and Elections in the Digital Era

Course Dates: September 19 to October 23, 2022

Instructor: Albertina Piterbarg

About the course

Welcome to the Knight Center's new MOOC, "**Information and Elections in the Digital Era**," organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, in partnership with UNESCO's Section for Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, with the support of the UNDP's BPPS Governance and Elections New York. During this five-week massive open online course, which will be held from **September 19 to October 23, 2022**, students will learn standards on freedom of expression and good practices to address disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and hate speech during the electoral processes.

Divided into five modules, **the MOOC will discuss how new technologies affect elections and provide tools and ideas** for electoral management bodies, audiovisual regulatory bodies, government officials, electoral observers, media professionals, and other key stakeholders to address these challenges.

Watch the video below and read on for more details, including instructions on how to register.

Goal

For the next five weeks, you will learn:

- How the new digital era positively and negatively impacts elections worldwide.
- Key tools that will allow you and your team to better address and tackle the negative effects of new technologies within the electoral cycles.
- Strategies to guarantee the freedom of citizens to form political opinions independently and have access to transparent and reliable electoral-related information to make more informed decisions.
- How to responsibly address the threats of online and offline violence or manipulative interference within democratic electoral processes.

Who can enroll? (Who is this course for?)

This course is for all electoral practitioners and electoral key stakeholders: Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), Audiovisual Regulatory Bodies (ARBs), Human Rights and Women Rights Civil Society Organization (CSOs), national and international electoral observers, political actors, academia and fact-checking organizations. It is also directed to media workers, media representatives and journalists, including community media and citizen journalists.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand how the new digital era, including Internet, social media, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, and machine learning affect electoral processes.
- Get familiarized with the electoral cycle approach.
- Identify the international standards involved in electoral processes (Human rights, freedom of expression, press freedom, right to privacy, right to political participation, etc.)
- Learn the definitions of disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and hate speech, particularly as they relate to elections.
- Recognize the main strategies and techniques to spread disinformation and the targets within the electoral cycle.
- Examine responses and best practices.

Tools/applications required

No special tools or applications are required for this course.

How the course works

First of all, note that this is an asynchronous course. That means there are no live events scheduled at specific times. You can log in to the course and complete activities throughout the week at your own pace, at the times and on the days that are most convenient for you.

Despite its asynchronous nature, there are still structures in place for the duration of the course.

The material is organized into five weekly modules. Each module will be taught by the electoral expert at UNESCO, **Albertina Piterberg**, and will cover a different topic through videos, presentations, readings and discussion forums. There will be a quiz each week to test the

knowledge you've gained through the course materials. The weekly quizzes, and weekly participation in the discussion forums, are the basic requirements for earning a certificate of participation at the end of the course.

This course is very flexible, and if you are behind with the materials, you have the entire length of the course to complete them. We do recommend you complete each of the following before the end of each week, so you don't fall behind:

- Video lectures and experts' presentations
- Readings and handouts
- Participation in the discussion forums
- Quizzes covering concepts from video lectures and/or readings

The course is divided into five weekly modules (Course outline)

Module 1 – The new information paradigm and elections (September 19 – 25, 2022)

Elections constitute a pivotal moment in democracies and provide citizens with an opportunity to choose their political representatives who will make critical decisions on the present and future of a given country. While the digital era has initially brought great opportunities for voters and candidates, social media poses new challenges for freedom of expression, safety of citizens, candidates and journalists as well as for the access to information. This module will provide you with a thorough overview of the New Information Paradigm and its impact on democratic elections.

This module will cover:

- Elections and the New Information Paradigm.
- How the main elements of the new digital era, including Internet, social media, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, Learning Machine affect electoral processes.
- Why the electoral cycle approach is a critical tool to understand electoral processes.
- Related International standards: Human Rights, freedom of expression, press freedom and elections.
- The human approach to Artificial Intelligence.

Module 2 - Disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and hate speech (September 26 – October 2, 2022)

In this Module you will learn the differences between disinformation, misinformation and malinformation and why we no longer use the term “fake News.” We will also analyze the human

drivers behind misleading content and how hate speech impacts the electoral processes. We will discuss electoral-related violence and electoral-related gender-based violence (GBV) as well as violence against journalists.

This module will cover:

- Why we shouldn't use the term "fake news."
- Disinformation, misinformation and malinformation - Human drivers behind misleading content
- Hate speech and its impact on electoral processes
- Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence
- Electoral-related violence and gender-based violence
- Violence against journalists

Module 3 - The impact of disinformation campaigns on the electoral cycle & the responses to tackle them (October 3 – 9, 2022)

In this Module we will review the diverse strategies and techniques used to spread dis-, mis- and malinformation. We will talk about the main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle, and we will start to see how to articulate solutions and responses to these challenges. For that, we will need to revisit the link between the electoral cycle, the electoral calendar and the operational plan. Finally, you will learn the different categories of responses to tackle disinformation – based on good practices and lessons learned.

This module will cover:

- Strategies and techniques most used to spread disinformation.
- The main targets of disinformation within the electoral cycle
- The electoral calendar
- Operational planning
- The four categories that group the responses to tackle disinformation, misinformation, malinformation and hate speech.

Module 4 – Preventive measures to tackle disinformation, misinformation and malinformation and hate speech (October 10 – 16, 2022)

In this module we will start examining in detail some of the preventive measures available to tackle disinformation, misinformation and malinformation during electoral processes — always in relation to the electoral calendar and within the framework of the electoral cycle approach: capacity building; promotion of dialogue and social cohesion; public information campaigns; and media information literacy, among others.

This module will cover:

- Preventive measures to tackle disinformation, misinformation and malinformation during elections
- Technological awareness and adaptability
- Strategic human resources policies and capacity building
- Promotion of dialogue and social cohesion
- Civic education, voter education and media and information literacy
- Public information campaigns and communication for development
- Working with the media and the journalists

Module 5 – Fact-checking, monitoring measures, corrective measures and regulatory approaches (October 17 – 23, 2022)

In this module we will continue addressing the different ways to tackle disinformation, misinformation and malinformation during elections through identification, fact-checking and monitoring measures; corrective measures; or containing corrective measures and regulatory and non-regulatory measures.

This module will cover:

- Identification, fact-checking and monitoring measures
- Electoral-related media monitoring and fact checking
- Flagging, labelling, and blacklisting
- Technical / algorithmic responses
- Regulatory and non-regulatory measures
- Content moderation
- The hybrid co-regulatory approach for electoral processes