PROGRAMME MODULES

Module 1: Electoral communication and media core concepts

Training material to be shared with trainers only

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Module objective

This opening module establishes the vocabulary and analytical map used throughout the Programme. It introduces the democratic functions of electoral communication without attempting to teach the detailed law, monitoring methodology, platform rules or response protocols developed in later modules. Use the separate participant workbook for activities and keep suggested outcomes in this trainer document.

Enables participants to explain how media and other communication actors shape electoral participation, distinguish the main forms and channels of electoral communication, and analyse a practical situation through the connected rights of voters, political contestants and the media.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, participants should be able to:

- describe an election as both a political process and an information event;
- identify the main actors, channels and functions in a hybrid media environment;
- explain the connected interests of voters, candidates and parties, and the media;
- distinguish political communication from electoral communication and editorial content from advertising or other sponsored content;
- distinguish public service, private commercial, community and online media while recognising that duties vary by function and legal context;
- identify how selection, prominence, framing, recommendation and amplification affect visibility;
- map a practical issue to the specialist module that develops the required standard or tool.

Session techniques and methods

One-word opening; information-journey mapping; rights-triangle exercise; actor and function sorting; scenario carousel; paired classification; mini case discussion; personal learning check. The same concepts remain constant, while roles and outputs change according to the audience.

Duration

Condensed route: 75 minutes. Standard route: 120 minutes. Extended route: 180 minutes. Timing includes instructions, group work, reporting and debriefs but excludes breaks, interpretation and preparation.

Relationship to other modules

Module 1 provides the common language for the package. Module 2 develops the legal and ethical framework. Module 3 addresses fairness, pluralism and equitable treatment. Module 4 supplies monitoring methods. Modules 5–7 address manipulation, platforms, advertising and inclusion. Modules 8 and 9 apply the framework to incidents, remedies and resilience.

Preparation and route selection

Trainer checklist

- Ask the commissioning team which audience groups will attend and what decisions they make in practice.
- Prepare a simple national information map: leading broadcasters, public service and community media, major online news providers, widely used platforms and messaging services, relevant institutions and important minority-language channels.

- Verify the national campaign period, silence period if any, official voter-information arrangements and the bodies responsible for media, elections, campaign finance and data protection.
- Select familiar examples from both traditional and online communication. Avoid making the digital environment an appendix to a broadcast-centred session.
- Prepare participant Sheets 1–8 without the suggested outcomes in this document.
- Decide which terms require translation or national explanation. Do not assume that “media”, “platform”, “political advertising” or “campaigning” has the same legal meaning in every country.
- Arrange mixed groups where multidisciplinary exchange is useful. For specialist groups, assign outputs that match their powers and professional role.
- Invite participants to contribute experience, but prevent discussion from becoming a contest over a current party or disputed result.

Route table

1 Elections as information events	10	15	20
2 Rights and responsibilities	15	20	30
3 Media functions and types	10	15	25
4 Hybrid environment	10	20	30
5 Communication across the cycle	10	15	20
6 Core distinctions	10	20	30
7 Risks and opportunities	5	10	15
8 Consolidation	5	5	10

Route guidance and facilitation approach

For 75 minutes, use Sheets 1, 2, 4 and 6, followed by the learning check. For 120 minutes, add Sheets 3, 5 and 7. For 180 minutes, complete all sheets, allow role-specific group reporting and require participants to design a short adaptation for their own audience.

Training of trainers' guidance

Begin with participants' experience. The one-word opening from the supplied ToT materials quickly reveals whether the room associates good electoral communication with accuracy, fairness, freedom, reach, trust or control. Return to these words at the end and ask what has changed.

Use short inputs followed by a task. A useful sequence is: experience, concept, application, reflection. Explain no more theory than participants need to complete the next activity. During debrief, ask for the evidence and perspective behind an answer before adding the relevant standard.

This module-specific guidance should be used together with the package-wide ToT methodology. The common methodology should set the overall approach to adult learning, inclusion, assessment and trainer preparation; each module should retain only the adaptations needed for its subject, audience and exercises.

Ground rules

- Analyse conduct and systems, not the presumed character of political actors.
- Separate a participant's policy preference from the applicable legal rule.
- Treat platform policy, voluntary practice and binding law as different layers.
- Allow disagreement where standards require contextual judgment.
- Do not reproduce harmful content unless it is necessary and safely presented.
- Make participation accessible and ensure that dominant institutions do not crowd out smaller organisations or professional groups.
- Discussion of a specific institution's internal practice in this room should not be attributed outside it without that institution's agreement.

Diagnostic questions

Before the first input, ask participants to answer individually: Who decides what voters see? Does fair coverage mean equal coverage? Is a platform a media outlet? When does political communication become electoral communication? Keep the answers and repeat the questions during the final learning check.

Core messages that should remain constant

- Elections depend on the ability of voters to receive information, compare alternatives and understand how to participate.
- Candidates and parties need a meaningful opportunity to communicate, but access does not create a right to control editorial decisions.
- Media freedom and editorial independence remain essential during elections. Election rules should protect democratic participation without turning public authorities into editors.
- Media perform several functions at once: they inform, explain procedures, provide space for debate, scrutinise power and enable citizens to hear different views.
- The information environment is hybrid. Broadcast, print, online news, search, social platforms, messaging services, creators and campaign channels interact and redistribute one another's content.

- Visibility is shaped by more than airtime. Placement, tone, framing, recommendation systems, paid promotion, engagement and cross-platform amplification also matter.
- Different actors require different rules. Public service media, private broadcasters, community media, online news services, platforms and individual users do not have identical functions or responsibilities.
- Council of Europe standards protect expression while addressing fairness, transparency, pluralism and accountability. CM/Rec(2022)12 updates the electoral framework for online communication and complements CM/Rec(2007)15.
- National context matters. Trainers should identify which standards bind, which guide, who has jurisdiction and what remedies exist.
- Monitoring supports assessment. It does not replace legal interpretation, editorial judgment or proof of electoral impact.

Elections as information events

SESSION METHOD One-word opening and journey map using Sheet 1 | TIME 10, 15 or 20 minutes

An election is a political contest, a legal process and an information event. Voters receive procedural information, competing programmes, records of those in power, journalism, advertising, commentary and interpersonal messages. They encounter these elements through channels whose selection and distribution systems differ.

Information journey

Ask participants to follow one claim from its origin to a voter. A campaign may publish a video. A platform may recommend it. A broadcaster may report the controversy. A messaging group may recirculate an edited clip. A fact-checker may add context. At each stage, the audience, meaning, prominence and evidence can change.

Four practical questions

1. Who produced or materially shaped the communication?
2. What function does it perform: inform, persuade, scrutinise, mobilise, administer or manipulate?
3. How did it reach the voter, including paid or algorithmic amplification?
4. What right, duty or public interest is affected?

Trainer debrief for Sheet 1

Do not accept “social media” as a complete answer to who decided visibility. Distinguish the original speaker, editor, advertiser, recommender system, users who shared the item and any authority that later intervened. Emphasise that the same content can move between private, editorial, campaign and platform-controlled spaces.

Interrelated rights and responsibilities

SESSION METHOD Rights triangle using Sheet 2 | TIME 15, 20 or 30 minutes

Voters

Voters need sufficient, diverse and accurate information to make an informed choice and practical information on how to participate. This includes access to competing views, scrutiny of those seeking office and reliable information about registration, voting, counting and results.

Candidates and political parties

Contestants need freedom to communicate their programmes and a fair opportunity to reach voters without discrimination. Their access can take different forms and does not necessarily require identical treatment in every programme or medium. Contestants should respect editorial independence and should not use political or economic pressure to control coverage.

Media and journalists

Media and journalists need freedom to report, investigate, criticise, select formats and express opinions. This freedom carries professional responsibilities, including accuracy, clear distinctions between editorial and paid content, correction of significant errors and respect for the rights and safety of others.

The organising question

The rights form a connected triangle. A rule that maximises one interest can damage another. Requiring every newsroom to give every candidate identical time may appear equal but can reduce useful journalism and voters' information. Unrestricted editorial discretion can also conceal systematic exclusion. The task is to identify a lawful and proportionate balance in context.

Applying the rights triangle

Scenario

A private broadcaster invites the four parties represented in parliament to a prime-time debate. Six registered parties are excluded but receive interviews in lower-audience programmes. One excluded party demands identical prime-time access. Online creators claim that the format proves election manipulation.

Questions for the trainer

- What information do voters need about the selection criteria and alternatives?
- Does the contestant claim concern equality, equitable opportunity, discrimination or editorial choice?
- Which decisions belong to the broadcaster and which may fall within a regulator's or court's jurisdiction?
- Does the online reaction add evidence or only an assertion?
- Would the analysis change for public service media, a private broadcaster or a platform-hosted debate?

Suggested debrief for Sheet 2

There is no automatic answer without the national framework, broadcaster type, criteria, reach and available alternatives. Transparent, objective and consistently applied criteria strengthen the format. Participants should avoid equating registration with an unconditional entitlement to every programme. They should also examine whether the combined offer provides meaningful opportunity and voter access to diverse choices.

Link forward

Module 2 develops legality and proportionality. Module 3 distinguishes equality from equitable treatment and examines internal and external pluralism. Module 8 applies these concepts to complaints and remedies.

Media functions and media types

SESSION METHOD Function and actor sorting using Sheet 3 | TIME 10, 15 or 25 minutes

Democratic functions

Function	Electoral contribution	Typical risk
Inform and explain	Procedures, choices, context and results	Error, omission or confusing official and campaign roles
Provide debate	Contestants and social groups exchange views	Exclusion, dominance or performative conflict
Scrutinise	Test claims, records, spending and exercise of power	Intimidation, capture or selective scrutiny
Represent society	Bring different communities and experiences into public debate	Stereotyping, token presence or absence of voice
Support accountability	Correct errors and expose violations or institutional failure	Premature legal conclusions or partisan enforcement

Media types

Public service media have a defined public remit and particular responsibilities for universality, pluralism and access. Private commercial media retain editorial freedom while national law may impose election-specific duties, especially on broadcasting. Community media complement public and commercial services and can reach local, minority-language or otherwise underserved communities. Online news services exercise editorial choices, while platforms organise and distribute third-party communication through rules, ranking, recommendation and advertising systems.

Trainer debrief for Sheet 3

Ask groups to classify by function, not only by label. A broadcaster also publishes online; a newspaper may host video; a creator may perform a journalistic function; a platform can influence reach without originating the content. Legal status still matters, but the practical analysis must follow the full communication chain.

Public, private, community and official communication

Public service media

Council of Europe standards treat public service media as a trusted forum for pluralistic debate across services and platforms. Independence, adequate conditions and universal accessibility are essential if the remit is to serve voters rather than government.

Private and community media

Private outlets contribute diversity and scrutiny but operate under different business models and may face ownership, advertising or political pressures. Community media can provide locally relevant and minority-language information that national services miss. Trainers should not treat audience size as the only measure of democratic value.

Official information is not journalism

EMBs and other authorities communicate authoritative procedural facts. They should provide timely, accurate and accessible voter information. Their institutional channels do not replace independent scrutiny, and official communication must distinguish neutral administration from promotion of incumbents.

Government activity and campaigning

During elections, ministers continue to govern and also campaign. Newsrooms and monitors should examine purpose, context, prominence and treatment rather than classifying every official appearance automatically. Detailed coding and assessment belong in Modules 3 and 4.

Optional discussion

Ask which actor the public trusts most for voting procedures, contested political facts and allegations against an institution. The answers often differ. Use this to explain why a resilient information environment needs both authoritative sources and independent verification.

The hybrid information environment

SESSION METHOD Ecosystem map and scenario carousel using Sheet 4 | TIME 10, 20 or 30 minutes

The democratic goals remain familiar, but distribution has changed. Electoral communication now moves between television, radio, print, online news, search engines, video-sharing and social platforms, messaging services, podcasts, creators, campaign databases and interpersonal networks.

From gatekeepers to layered selection

Editors still select and frame news. Platforms add ranking, recommendation, moderation and advertising systems. Campaigns can bypass newsrooms and address selected voters directly. Users redistribute and annotate content. Influencers may combine political advocacy, personal commentary and paid promotion. The resulting visibility comes from several decisions rather than one publisher.

Key concepts

- Reach: the number or range of people who could or did encounter content.
- Prominence: how visible or important the content appears in its setting.
- Engagement: observable interaction such as viewing, sharing, commenting or reacting.
- Recommendation: automated selection or ordering presented to a user.
- Amplification: increased distribution produced by paid, algorithmic, coordinated or user activity.
- Moderation: action under law or platform rules affecting content, accounts or visibility.

Caution

Reach and engagement do not show persuasion or electoral impact. A viral item may attract criticism. A small, closed group may still matter. Use claims about exposure, coordination, automation or effect only at the level supported by evidence.

Applying the hybrid map

One message, several rule systems

An interview broadcast on television may also appear on the broadcaster's website, be clipped by a campaign, promoted as an advertisement, recommended by a platform and shared in a closed messaging group. Different choices and responsibilities arise at each stage.

Questions for each stage

Stage	Ask
Origin	Who created the content, in what capacity and for what stated purpose?
Editorial selection	Who chose the format, participants, headline and context?
Paid distribution	Who paid, who benefited and what transparency applies?
Platform distribution	What ranking, targeting, moderation or archive function is relevant?
User redistribution	Was the item altered, coordinated or moved into a different audience?
Institutional response	Which body has authority and what safeguard protects expression?

Council of Europe orientation

CM/Rec(2011)7 encourages a differentiated understanding of media functions. CM/Rec(2018)2 addresses the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries. CM/Rec(2020)1 addresses human-rights risks throughout the lifecycle of algorithmic systems. CM/Rec(2022)12 brings these concerns into electoral communication. CM/Rec(2026)4 adds a current framework on online safety and user empowerment. The specialist modules explain how these standards apply.

Suggested debrief for Sheet 4

Reward maps that show interactions rather than two separate boxes labelled traditional and online. Ask where an intervention would work, who can lawfully take it and whether the message would continue to circulate elsewhere.

Electoral communication across the cycle

SESSION METHOD Timeline exercise using Sheet 5 | TIME 10, 15 or 20 minutes

Political and electoral communication

Political communication concerns political actors, issues and decisions throughout the year. CM/Rec(2022)12 uses electoral communication for political communication related to elections and intended, directly or indirectly, to influence voters' choices. National definitions and regulated periods may be narrower, so trainers should distinguish the analytical concept from the applicable legal definition.

Election-cycle perspective

Period	Communication priorities
Before the formal campaign	Voter registration, media environment, preparedness, early advertising and issue framing
Campaign	Contestant access, journalism, debates, advertising, targeting, manipulation and inclusion

Period	Communication priorities
Silence period where applicable	Scope of restrictions, cross-border and online enforceability, journalism and voter information
Voting and counting	Accurate procedures, safety, secrecy, turnout information and premature result claims
Results and post-election period	Verified results, complaints, peaceful scrutiny, correction, review and reform

Electoral silence

A silence period is a legal tool used in some systems, not a universal democratic requirement. Its scope, subjects and online application vary. Participants should test legality, legitimate aim, proportionality and practical enforceability rather than assume that silence means an information blackout.

Trainer debrief for Sheet 5

Ask which risks begin before the official campaign and continue after election day. This prevents institutions from designing monitoring, contacts or corrective communication too late.

Core distinctions for analysis

SESSION METHOD Paired classification using Sheet 6 | TIME 10, 20 or 30 minutes

Distinctions that prevent analytical errors

Distinction	Why it matters
Political and electoral communication	Not every political message falls within an election-specific legal regime.
Editorial and paid or sponsored content	Different transparency, financing and professional rules may apply.
Official and campaign activity	Incumbency should not create hidden electoral advantage, but government must continue to function.
Equality and equitable treatment	Identical quantities and fair opportunity are related but not interchangeable.
Internal and external pluralism	Diversity may exist within one outlet or across the media environment as a whole.
Observation and assessment	What occurred should remain distinct from its significance under a standard.

Distinction	Why it matters
Platform policy and law	A company rule can be stricter or looser than national legal requirements.
Harmful and unlawful content	Harm does not automatically establish a lawful basis for restriction.

Facilitation instruction

Give pairs short examples and require two answers: the best analytical classification and the additional fact needed before a legal conclusion. Avoid turning the exercise into a vocabulary test. The purpose is to slow down premature judgment.

Borderline examples and common traps

Examples

1. A ministry announces a new benefit during the campaign and the governing party reposts the broadcast clip.

2. A creator praises a candidate without disclosing that an agency paid for the post.

3. A platform reduces distribution under its civic-integrity policy although the content is lawful nationally.

4. A public broadcaster gives equal free airtime but its news overwhelmingly favours incumbents.

5. Several private outlets support the same party while other outlets provide competing views.

6. A false claim causes concern but available evidence does not establish coordination or impact.

Questions

What can be observed? Which classification is plausible? What remains unknown? Which specialist module supplies the next tool?

Suggested debrief for Sheet 6

The ministry example requires evidence about newsworthiness, timing, presentation and whether the official role served as campaign advantage. The creator example raises sponsorship and political-advertising questions. Platform policy and national law require separate analysis. Equal free airtime does not resolve news imbalance. External pluralism may exist despite partisan outlets, but concentration and audience reach matter. A false statement alone does not establish a coordinated manipulation operation or electoral effect.

Link forward

Use Modules 2–7 for the detailed tests. Module 8 teaches the progression from signal and suspected incident to verified fact, analytical finding and legal determination.

Risks, opportunities and first responses

SESSION METHOD Risk and opportunity matrix using Sheet 7 | TIME 5, 10 or 15 minutes

Opportunities

Digital communication can widen participation, help contestants reach voters, support accessible voter information, connect journalists with sources and allow rapid correction. Public service and

community media can use multiple platforms to serve audiences that scheduled broadcasting does not reach.

Risks

The same environment can fragment audiences, obscure sponsorship, reward sensational material, enable intrusive targeting, accelerate false procedural claims and expose journalists or candidates to harassment. Concentrated ownership, political capture and weak local media remain important offline and online.

First-response discipline

At introductory level, ask participants to identify the affected function, evidence, urgency, responsible actor and freedom-of-expression safeguard. Do not ask them to solve every problem in Module 1. The Programme progressively supplies the legal, monitoring, platform, inclusion and response tools.

Suggested debrief for Sheet 7

Reject solutions that rely on one institution controlling all communication. Encourage complementary action within mandates: authoritative information from the EMB, independent reporting and correction by media, lawful supervision by competent authorities, transparent platform processes, and monitoring or outreach by civil society.

Consolidation and Programme map

SESSION METHOD Case routing and learning check using Sheet 8 | TIME 5 or 10 minutes

Programme map

If the problem concerns	Continue with
Legal authority, ethics or proportionality	Module 2
Fairness, pluralism or contestant treatment	Module 3
Evidence, sampling, coding or imbalance	Module 4
Disinformation, narratives or coordinated manipulation	Module 5
Platforms, recommender systems or political advertising	Module 6

If the problem concerns	Continue with
Representation, discrimination, harassment or accessibility	Module 7
Incident classification, violations or remedies	Module 8
Preparedness, communication, reporting or resilience	Module 9

Final learning check

Repeat the four diagnostic questions from preparation. Ask each participant to revise one answer and explain the reason. Then require one sentence completing: “In my role, the most important communication decision I influence is…”

Assessment criteria

Participants meet the introductory objective when they can identify the actors and channels, apply the rights triangle, make the core distinctions without premature legal conclusions and select the correct specialist module for deeper analysis.

Trainer reflection

Record which concepts caused disagreement, which examples worked for the audience and which national terms require adaptation. This note feeds into the ToT methodology and later revision of the package.

Training of trainers guidance and assessment

Module-specific facilitation

Use this module to establish a shared language before testing specialist knowledge. Begin with participants' own understanding of who shapes electoral information, then introduce the rights triangle and hybrid information map. Common misunderstandings include treating all online services as media outlets, equating fairness with identical treatment, and assuming that reach proves influence. Ask participants to revise an opening answer rather than rewarding recall of definitions. In mixed groups, rotate the perspective of the voter, contestant, media actor and competent institution. Keep legal detail for Module 2 and detailed monitoring for Module 4.

Audience-specific application

For regulators and lawyers, use borderline classification and jurisdiction questions. For EMBs, follow the journey of authoritative voter information. For journalists, use editorial choices and official-versus-campaign activity. For civil society and observers, emphasise observable indicators and evidence limits. A successful debrief shows that one communication may involve several actors, functions and rule systems.

Assessment and evaluation

Use the four opening diagnostic questions as the baseline. During Sheets 1–7, check whether participants identify actors and channels, apply all three sides of the rights triangle, distinguish observation from assessment and avoid premature legal conclusions. The final routing task and revised diagnostic answers provide the exit assessment.

Evidence of learning and trainer reflection

Participants meet the objective when they can explain the rights triangle in their own words, map one message across traditional and online channels, correctly apply at least four core distinctions, and select the appropriate specialist module for further analysis. End with one feedback question: Which concept or exercise would need adaptation for your audience? The trainer should record recurring misunderstandings and one change for the next delivery.

Audience adaptation

Audience	Main emphasis	Effective technique	Expected output
Regulators and supervisory authorities	Jurisdiction, differentiated duties and editorial independence	Actor-chain mapping and threshold discussion	Preliminary jurisdiction map
Election management bodies	Authoritative voter information, institutional neutrality and coordination	Information-journey and timeline exercise	Communication responsibility map
Legal professionals and policymakers	Rights triangle, definitions, proportionality and regulatory gaps	Borderline-case classification	Issues list for legal analysis
Journalists and media practitioners	Editorial freedom, formats, verification and official versus campaign activity	Newsroom scenario and peer critique	Editorial decision checklist
Civil society and election observers	Observable indicators, evidence limits, inclusion and referral	Ecosystem mapping and evidence exercise	Monitoring questions and referral map

Mixed groups

Give every group the same case but assign a different role. Ask what the role can decide, what it needs from others and what it must not do. The plenary should reveal dependencies without erasing mandates.

Timing and level

For introductory groups, prioritise the rights triangle, media functions and hybrid map. For experienced professionals, shorten definitions and spend more time on borderline cases. Regulators and lawyers may need legal classifications; journalists benefit from editorial simulations; EMBs need communication timelines; observers need observable indicators and evidence limits.

Suggested allocation for a single-audience 120-minute session

Audience	Redistribution across Sessions 1–8
Regulators and supervisory authorities	10, 25, 15, 20, 10, 25, 10, 5 minutes

Audience	Redistribution across Sessions 1–8
Election management bodies	15, 20, 10, 20, 25, 10, 15, 5 minutes
Legal professionals and policymakers	10, 30, 10, 15, 15, 30, 5, 5 minutes
Journalists and media practitioners	15, 20, 20, 20, 10, 20, 10, 5 minutes
Civil society and election observers	15, 20, 15, 20, 10, 25, 10, 5 minutes

These are starting allocations rather than fixed agendas. In a mixed group, use the standard route table and differentiate the assigned role, evidence and expected output instead of separating participants by profession.

Recommended resources

1. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)12 on electoral communication and media coverage of election campaigns.

2. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns.

3. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 on a new notion of media.

4. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2 on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries.

5. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)1 on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems.

6. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)4 on online safety and empowerment of users and content creators.

7. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)3 on the remit of public service media in the information society.

8. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership.

9. Council of Europe, Declaration on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, 2009.

10. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors.

11. Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)5 on Internet freedom.

12. Role of Media During Elections, Electoral Silence Period and the Media, and related Kužel training presentations supplied for this module.

13. Kužel Training of Trainers materials, including the session-design and expectation exercises, 2026.

14. Council of Europe media-monitoring guidelines and toolkit, and the supplied Carver and Mracka methodology resources.

Final trainer note

Check official titles, national law, institutional names and platform functions before delivery. Use this module to establish a shared analytical language, not to compress the remaining Programme into one lecture. Keep examples balanced between traditional and online media and allow participants' professional experience to shape the discussion.

Module 1: Electoral communication and media core concepts

PARTICIPANT EXERCISES

Training material to be shared with participants

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These exercises establish the common concepts used across the Programme. They help you follow electoral communication from its source to voters, identify the rights and functions involved, and decide what further analysis a practical problem requires.

Instructions and diagnostic

Working approach

- Base your answer on the information provided and identify what remains unknown.
- Separate what you observe from what you assess.
- Distinguish binding law, institutional practice, professional standards and platform policy.
- Work within your assigned professional role.
- Consider traditional and online communication as one connected environment.

Opening questions

Answer individually before discussion.

1. Who decides what voters see?

2. Does fair coverage mean equal coverage?

3. Is a platform a media outlet?

4. When does political communication become electoral communication?

Keep your answers for Sheet 8.

Sheet 1 Election information journey

Starting message

A candidate posts a short video alleging that a new voting procedure will invalidate some ballots. A platform recommends it widely. A broadcaster reports the controversy using part of the video. A messaging group circulates an edited clip. The EMB publishes an explanation, and a community radio station translates it into a minority language.

Task

Map the message through the following stages:

- original producer and stated purpose;
- editorial selection or alteration;
- paid, algorithmic or user amplification;
- audience reached or missed;
- verification or correction;
- affected electoral right or function.

Questions

Who shaped visibility at each stage? Where did meaning change? Which actor can provide authoritative procedural information? Which actors provide independent scrutiny? What information would you preserve before assessing harm?

Sheet 2 Rights triangle

Scenario

A private broadcaster invites four parliamentary parties to a prime-time debate. Six other registered parties receive interviews in lower-audience programmes. One excluded party demands identical prime-time access. Online creators claim that the format proves election manipulation.

Three perspectives

Analyse the case from each perspective:

1. Voters: information, diversity, clarity and informed choice.

2. Candidates and parties: opportunity to communicate, non-discrimination and reply.

3. Media: editorial freedom, news value, format and professional responsibility.

Decision questions

What facts are missing? Which selection criteria would be defensible? Would your analysis differ for public service media? What belongs to editorial choice, regulatory assessment or judicial review? Propose an arrangement that protects all three perspectives.

Sheet 3 Media functions and actors

Actor cards

Public service broadcaster; private television channel; community radio; online newspaper; search engine; video-sharing platform; messaging service; political party; influencer; EMB; media regulator; civil society monitor.

Task

For each assigned actor identify:

- its main electoral communication function;
- whether it creates, selects, distributes, promotes, verifies or regulates content;
- the audience it can reach;
- one relevant right or responsibility;
- one risk if another actor misunderstands its role.

Sorting question

Which actors may perform more than one function? Which actors exercise editorial control? Which shape reach without creating the original message? Which provide authoritative information but should remain subject to independent scrutiny?

Sheet 4a Hybrid information map

Case

A minister gives a television interview in an official capacity. The broadcaster posts it online. The governing party clips a favourable answer and pays to promote it. Supporters add subtitles and circulate it through messaging groups. A platform attaches an information label. An opposition outlet publishes a critical fact-check.

Map the chain

For each stage record:

1. actor and capacity;

2. content or action;

3. editorial, paid, algorithmic or user distribution;

4. available transparency;

5. audience and accessibility;

6. rule system or professional standard that may apply.

Sheet 4b Analysis questions

1. At what point might official communication become campaign communication?

2. Which actor selected the original interview and its framing?

3. Who paid for distribution and who benefited?

4. Does the platform label establish that the content is unlawful?

5. What can engagement figures show, and what can they not show?

6. Which part of the chain could a media regulator, EMB, campaign-finance authority, platform or newsroom address?

7. What would a civil society monitor record without exceeding the evidence?

Visual instruction

Draw arrows between actors. Mark where meaning, prominence, audience or legal responsibility changes.

Sheet 5 Election-cycle timeline

Task

Place each issue where preparation or response should begin. Some belong in more than one period.

- voter registration information;
- early political advertising;
- debate-selection rules;
- platform and newsroom contacts;
- campaign-finance reporting;
- silence-period guidance where applicable;
- false polling-place information;
- premature result claims;
- accessible result communication;
- complaints and post-election review.

Timeline

Before formal campaign | Campaign | Silence period where applicable | Voting and counting | Results and review

Questions

Which activities begin too late if institutions wait for the formal campaign? Which restrictions require particular caution online? Which communication must remain possible during a silence period?

Sheet 6 Core distinctions

Classify and qualify

For each statement choose the most relevant distinction and identify one missing fact.

1. A ministry announces a benefit during the campaign and the governing party reposts the clip.
2. A creator endorses a candidate after receiving payment through an agency.
3. A platform reduces distribution under its own civic-integrity rule.
4. A public broadcaster gives equal free airtime but its news favours incumbents.
5. Several private outlets support one party, while other outlets provide competing views.
6. A false procedural claim spreads widely, but its origin and effect remain unknown.

Distinctions

Political or electoral communication; editorial or sponsored content; official or campaign activity; equality or equitable treatment; internal or external pluralism; platform policy or law; harmful or unlawful content; observation or assessment.

Output

Write one cautious analytical sentence for two examples. Do not make a legal determination without the necessary rule and facts.

Sheet 7 Risk and opportunity matrix

Scenario

The EMB plans to work with broadcasters, community media, online news services, platforms and creators to improve voter information. Civil society proposes independent monitoring. Journalists are concerned that informal coordination could influence editorial choices.

Matrix

For each proposed cooperation identify:

- democratic opportunity;
- possible risk;
- lead actor;
- safeguard for independence and expression;
- audience that may still be missed;
- indicator that the arrangement worked.

Challenge

Design one measure that improves the reach of reliable voter information without creating a common authority over political content.

Sheet 8 Programme map and learning check

Route each issue

Choose the module that should provide the next tool.

1. Whether an election restriction is lawful and proportionate.
2. Whether treatment of contestants is equitable.
3. How to sample broadcasts and code tone.

4. Whether a campaign shows coordinated manipulation.

5. Whether an advertisement was transparently labelled and targeted.

6. Whether coverage marginalises women, minorities or persons with disabilities.

7. Whether evidence supports a violation and which remedy fits.

8. How institutions prepare, communicate and learn after an incident.

Repeat the opening questions

Review your four answers from page 2. Revise at least one and explain what changed.

Learning check

In one sentence, explain why voters' rights, contestants' rights and media freedom must be analysed together.

Personal application card

My professional role

.....

The most important electoral communication decision I influence

.....

Another actor I depend on and what I need from them

.....

One safeguard that protects independence or rights

.....

One concept I will apply differently

.....

One question for the next specialist module

.....

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW



DROITS DE L'HOMME, DÉMOCRATIE ET ÉTAT DE DROIT

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

MODULE 1
ELECTORAL COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA
CORE CONCEPTS

Purpose and learning outcomes

- Explain elections as information events
- Identify actors, channels and media functions
- Apply the rights triangle to a practical situation
- Distinguish key forms of electoral communication
- Select the next module for deeper analysis

Opening diagnostic

Answer individually, then compare in pairs

- Who decides what voters see?
- Does fair coverage mean equal coverage?
- Is a platform a media outlet?
- When does political communication become electoral communication?

ACTIVITY | 6 MINUTES | PARTICIPANT PAGE 2

Elections as information events

POLITICAL CONTEST | **LEGAL PROCESS** | **INFORMATION EVENT**

Voters receive procedural information, competing programmes, journalism, advertising, commentary and interpersonal messages.

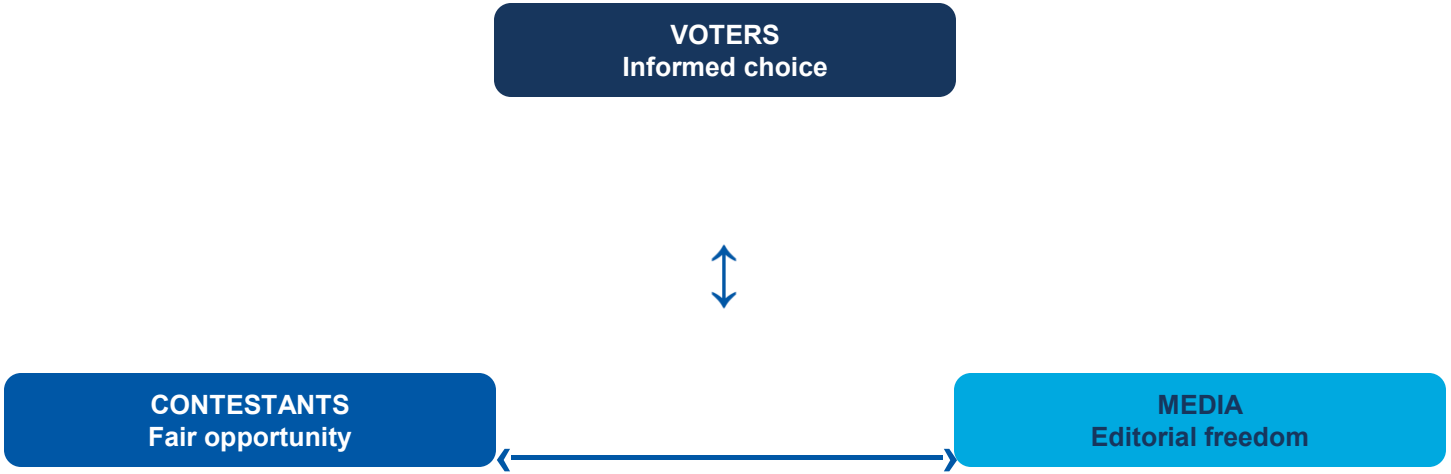
The source, channel, selection and distribution process all shape what reaches the voter.

Election information journey



At every stage, ask who changed the audience, meaning, prominence or evidence.

Three interrelated rights



A workable framework considers all three perspectives.

Rights triangle case

A private broadcaster invites four parliamentary parties to a prime-time debate. Six registered parties receive lower-audience interviews.

VOTERS	CONTESTANTS	MEDIA
What information and diversity matter?	What opportunity and criteria are fair?	What editorial choices remain protected?

Five media functions

INFORM	**Procedures, choices and results**
EXPLAIN	Context and how to participate
DEBATE	Competing views and social voices
SCRUTINISE	Claims, records and exercise of power
ACCOUNTABILITY	Correction and exposure of failures

Media types and differentiated duties

PUBLIC SERVICE	Public remit, universality, pluralism
PRIVATE COMMERCIAL	Editorial freedom and election duties under national law
COMMUNITY	Local and minority-language access
ONLINE NEWS	Editorial selection across digital formats
PLATFORMS	Ranking, moderation and advertising systems

Official information and journalism

OFFICIAL INFORMATION	INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM
Authoritative procedural facts	Independent verification
Neutral institutional communication	Scrutiny of institutions and contestants
Accessible voting information	Editorial selection and context

Both are necessary. They perform different democratic functions.

The hybrid information environment

TRADITIONAL MEDIA	DIGITAL PLATFORMS	DIRECT AND CLOSED CHANNELS
Television Radio Print Online news	Search Social networks Video sharing News aggregators	Campaign databases Messaging services Creators Interpersonal networks

Content moves between all three parts of the environment.

Layered selection

ORIGIN	EDITORIAL	PAID	PLATFORM	USERS
Speaker or campaign	Format, headline and context	Sponsor, targeting and placement	Ranking, recommendation and moderation	Sharing, annotation and alteration

Visibility usually results from several decisions, not one gatekeeper.

Digital distribution concepts

Reach	Who could or did encounter content	**Prominence**	How visible or important it appears
Engagement	Observable viewing or interaction	**Recommendation**	Automated selection or ordering
Amplification	Increased distribution through paid, automated, coordinated or user activity	**Moderation**	Action affecting content, accounts or visibility

Hybrid map exercise

Ministerial TV interview

1. Broadcaster posts online
2. Party pays to promote clip
3. Supporters add subtitles
4. Platform attaches label
5. Outlet publishes fact-check

ACTIVITY | PARTICIPANT SHEETS 4A AND 4B

Political and electoral communication

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Political actors, issues and decisions throughout the year

ELECTORAL COMMUNICATION

Communication related to elections and intended, directly or indirectly, to influence voters' choices

National legal definitions and regulated periods may be narrower.

Electoral communication across the cycle

BEFORE CAMPAIGN	CAMPAIGN	SILENCE PERIOD*	VOTING AND COUNTING	RESULTS AND REVIEW
Preparedness	Access and debate	Proportionate limits	Procedures and claims	Complaints and learning

* Where national law provides for one

Electoral silence

OPTIONAL ADVANCED DISCUSSION

A legal tool used in some systems

- Not a universal democratic requirement
- Scope and subjects vary by national law
- Online and cross-border enforcement can be difficult
- Journalism and essential voter information may still be necessary
- Any restriction requires a lawful and proportionate basis

Core distinctions

Political	≠	Electoral
Editorial	≠	Sponsored
Official activity	≠	Campaign activity
Equality	≠	Equitable treatment

Further analytical distinctions

Internal pluralism	≠	External pluralism
Observation	≠	Assessment
Platform policy	≠	Law
Harmful content	≠	Unlawful content

Borderline classification exercise

- A ministry announces a benefit and the governing party reposts the clip
- A creator praises a candidate after an agency payment
- A platform reduces distribution under its own rule
- Equal free airtime accompanies favourable news for incumbents
- A false procedural claim spreads but its origin remains unknown

Opportunities and risks

OPPORTUNITIES

- Wider participation
- Accessible voter information
- Direct communication and rapid correction
- More voices and sources

RISKS

- Fragmented audiences
- Hidden sponsorship and intrusive targeting
- Rapid procedural falsehoods
- Harassment, capture and weak local media

Audience adaptation

OPTIONAL ADVANCED DISCUSSION

REGULATORS	Jurisdiction and differentiated duties
EMBS	Authoritative information and neutrality
LAWYERS AND POLICYMAKERS	Rights, definitions and proportionality
JOURNALISTS	Editorial choices and verification
CIVIL SOCIETY AND OBSERVERS	Indicators, evidence limits and referral

Where the curriculum goes next

MODULE 2	**MODULE 3**	**MODULE 4**	**MODULE 5**
Law and ethics	Fairness and pluralism	Monitoring	Manipulation
MODULE 6	**MODULE 7**	**MODULE 8**	**MODULE 9**
Platforms and advertising	Inclusion	Incidents and remedies	Response and resilience

Learning check

Return to the four opening questions

- Revise at least one initial answer
- Explain what changed your reasoning
- Map one message across traditional and online channels
- Name the next module needed for deeper analysis

Key messages

- Voters need information, alternatives and clear participation guidance
- Contestants need a fair opportunity to communicate
- Media freedom and editorial independence remain essential
- Traditional and online channels form one information environment
- Visibility does not prove persuasion or electoral impact
- Context, evidence and jurisdiction determine the next step

END OF MODULE 1