MASTER IN ELECTORAL POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

CURRICULUM

MEPA Modules

- Elections and Voting as Instruments of Governance (Compulsory - 2 credits)

This first module of the Master's programme is designed to provide students with an introduction to the guiding principles of electoral governance. By focusing on the fundamentals of elections and voting, it aims to build a solid foundation that will be crucial for the topics that follow. Specifically, the module presents: (i) an account of the history of electoral politics and practice; (ii) an overview of the political elements that make up an electoral process and their interrelationships; and (iii) an analytical framework for the development of skills in electoral policymaking, administration and evaluation.

- Electoral Legal and Regulatory Frameworks (Compulsory - 3 credits)

Together with Module 1, Module 2 shapes the basic principles of the electoral field by, among other things, presenting an overview of international and national rules governing elections. The electoral legal and regulatory framework includes all laws and regulations related to the electoral process. The aim of this module is to provide a general introduction to the legal framework of elections while examining the difference between legally binding and non-binding rules and the principles used to reconcile conflicting legal provisions.

- Electoral Management Bodies (Compulsory - 3 credits)

The organization of elections is a daunting administrative task, most often carried out in a politically charged atmosphere. This module focuses on electoral management bodies (EMBs) and presents possible models, structures, mandates, and so forth. In doing so, the module also analyses how these institutions can protect their autonomy, exercise management control, safeguard integrity, maintain transparency, ensure efficiency, and professionally implement rules and procedures while maintaining a voter-friendly system. The organization of the module encourages comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of different models, mandates and organizations, with an emphasis on the factors that explain and affect particular combinations of the cited factors.

- Electoral Systems and Managing Representation (Compulsory - 3 credits)

This module provides an overview of electoral systems and their impact on participation and representation. Drawing on both the extensive literature and the practical experience of EMBs around the world, the module provides the conceptual and analytical foundations for a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of different electoral systems, as well as the elements for making an informed choice among them.

More specifically, the module focuses on: (i) an explanation of the importance of electoral systems in the implementation of the democratic right to vote; (ii) an overview of the main types of electoral systems; and (iii) an account of the most relevant approaches to the analysis and key policy issues behind the design of these systems.

- Understanding and Managing Boundary Delimitation (Optional - 3 credits)

This module introduces the concept of delimitation, including the potential for political controversy and past abuses; analytical techniques that can detect or measure the impact of manipulation; and mechanisms that can enhance the credibility and legitimacy of delimitation and prevent potential abuses. The module uses case studies to highlight how electoral boundaries can be (and have been) manipulated to the benefit or detriment of particular candidates, parties and voters. This approach is taken to promote a better understanding of the complex mechanisms, techniques, arguments and controversies that have often been used 'against' an otherwise relatively simple process.

- Political Parties, Campaigns and Political Finance (Compulsory - 3 credits)

Fair and open campaigns are a central feature of electoral processes, as they allow voters to assess the political capabilities of competing groups and individuals. Elections are the entry point for political parties and candidates into political institutions, so the stakes are very high. However, elections are only the final step in the process of obtaining an elected mandate. Before the electoral rules, there are two other stages that determine who enters politics, when and how: the nomination and campaigning phases. This module covers most of the strictly political aspects of the nomination and campaigning process and pays particular attention to the rules governing political parties and candidates throughout the electoral process.

- Electoral Planning and Budgeting (Compulsory - 3 credits)

Planning and budgeting processes and rules vary considerably from country to country. Therefore, the emphasis in this module is on promoting a general understanding of key principles by: (i) exploring the main factors that influence and structure the process of planning and budgeting for elections (and their financing), and (ii) presenting methodologies for improving the democratic quality and technical efficiency of election administration through effective planning initiatives.

- Election logistics (Optional - 4 credits)

Logistics planning is essential to ensure that equipment, personnel and communication methods are in place in time for the successful conduct of the election. The module therefore identifies the inherent logistical characteristics revealed throughout the electoral cycle, while analysing the potential temporal, technological and financial implications of electoral logistics in relation to the electoral framework, the electoral system and the state's infrastructure. In addition, this module presents the different logistical alternatives available and the methods for designing, implementing and evaluating electoral logistics.

- Voter Registration and Identification Systems (Compulsory - 3 credits)

Voter registration is one of the most crucial steps in election administration, as it provides the basis for voters to cast their ballots and contribute to political decision-making. Well-planned and executed voter registration processes help to ensure effective voter empowerment and the overall legitimacy of elections, while flawed operations can deny people the opportunity to vote and create an environment in which the validity of an election can be challenged.

This module explores the conceptual, legal and administrative aspects of voter registration and identification and the corresponding models.

- Electoral operations (Compulsory – 3 credits)

Election operations vary considerably from one context to another. An election is influenced by a wide range of environmental, historical, political, and legal factors, as well as by various costs, which together give rise to many options for how an EMB might plan and execute its key tasks. This module explores the various activities that an EMB must undertake during an election period and approaches to implementing these activities effectively. The emphasis is on understanding the basic principles and most fundamental technical issues rather than on providing a formal set of prescriptions for how elections should be conducted in every conceivable circumstance.

- Gender and elections (Optional – 2 credits)

This module aims to build a general knowledge base on the concept of gender in the electoral process. The adoption of a gender perspective in political participation is a key aspect of international and national political systems. This module provides students with an understanding of how gender shapes individual and collective interactions in various political settings and contexts, both nationally and globally. The course focuses on gender and political representation, as well as on the measures needed to make electoral organisations more gender-sensitive.

- Marginalised Electorates and Special Voting Programmes (Compulsory – 2 credits)

The module provides participants with an overview of the methodologies and processes required to inform and empower marginalised segments of the electorate and organise alternative voting arrangements for the latter. More specifically, the module aims to provide students with: (i) an overview of the sources and types of political marginalisation that occur during elections; (ii) an explanation of the importance of marginalised electorates, special voting programmes and inclusive electoral environments; and, (iii) an overview of the most relevant principles for designing and implementing administrative and political mechanisms that can inform, enfranchise and empower these otherwise marginalised electorates.

- Election Management in Public Emergency Situations (Optional – 3 credits)

This module provides participants with an overview of several types of public emergencies that can have a negative impact on electoral processes. The course attempts to explain how public emergencies (health pandemics, natural disasters, civil and political unrest) can disrupt electoral preparations before highlighting the importance of political consensus building, public communication and inter-agency collaboration as key elements of a crisis response strategy. In addition, different types of concepts related to emergency financing, rapid legislative action and electoral risk management will be presented in order to describe how the electoral process can become more resilient to future shocks.

- Electoral Integrity in the Digital Age (Optional - 3 credits)

Elections entail complex operations, thus generating massive volumes of data that usually have to be processed under tight time constraints. When used appropriately, ICT can store and process data accurately, consistently, securely, efficiently, quickly and inexpensively. In doing so, technology can increase administrative efficiency, reduce long-term costs and increase political transparency. Yet, the introduction of ICTs into the electoral process is generating both interest and concern among voters, as well as practitioners around the world. This module combines conceptual and practical approaches to present applications of electoral technology and the impact and challenges of managing these technologies in different political environments.

- Civic and electoral education (Optional - 2 credits)

Civic and voter education is about raising awareness among citizens and voters about their political rights, democracy and elections. Although they are mutually reinforcing and can often overlap, they are distinct concepts. This module examines the differences between civic and voter education, including the actors involved and the development and dissemination of related information. The module focuses on how civic and voter education should be designed to take into account the different audiences for which they are intended. The module also examines and analyses civic and voter education programmes and their impact on the quality and quantity of voter participation.

- Media and Elections (Optional - 2 credits)

The module highlights the importance of the media in democracy and analyses traditional and new media separately. The module describes how key aspects of an electoral process are communicated, deliberated and received via the mass media. The module focuses specifically on theories of media studies that are directly relevant to electoral processes in order to describe the development and management of media regulation, media relations and rumour control.

- Electoral Integrity and Malpractice (Compulsory - 4 credits)

Electoral malpractice and lack of integrity are two problems that plague both established and new democracies to the extent that they can destroy the democratic credibility of an election. The module focuses on these two problems and examines the factors that lead to them and the tools that allow the identification of vulnerabilities and types of malpractice, as well as the investigative and administrative techniques and mechanisms that can prevent or manage these vulnerabilities.

- Managing Electoral Security, Electoral Violence, and Preventing Election-related Conflicts (Optional -2 credits)

This module introduces methodologies that can be used to identify the potential for electoral conflict and analyse the dynamics of electoral conflict. Through case studies and examples, the module explores the causes and manifestations of electoral conflict and the mechanisms that can be used by state and non-state stakeholders to mitigate such conflicts.

More specifically, it provides participants with an overview of (i) the nature of electoral conflict and the vulnerabilities that can trigger it; (ii) the skills and analytical frameworks for analysing electoral conflict; and (iii) the tools for preventing, or managing, electoral conflict.

- Elections in Fragile/Post-Conflict Contexts (Optional - 3 credits)

This module will illustrate the contextual electoral dynamics and requirements of fragile and post-conflict contexts while revealing various approaches to election management in these contexts. Participants of this course should be able to design strategies for managing elections in the above-mentioned conflict contexts after identifying the constraints and challenges inherent in conducting elections in fragile contexts.

- Electoral Justice Systems (Compulsory - 3 credits)

The importance of electoral dispute resolution (ECR) has increased with the growing number of elections in emerging and new democracies around the world. Highly contested elections bring increased attention to systems for preventing, mitigating and resolving electoral disputes. The absence of a viable electoral justice system can have a detrimental effect on electoral processes. In these circumstances, an election may be perceived by some stakeholders as illegitimate or not credible. In particular, in countries undergoing a political transition to democracy, failure to address electoral justice issues can lead to violence or a return to undemocratic rule. In other cases, when voters feel that corruption or other violations go unpunished or that certain groups or factions are allowed to act with impunity, voter disillusionment or apathy can result, leading to lower voter turnout. This module provides an overview of formal and informal mechanisms for resolving electoral conflicts, as well as policies and practices for prevention, with a particular emphasis on the importance of public confidence in the electoral process.

- International Electoral Assistance, Election Observation and Monitoring (Optional - 3 credits)

Election observation has become a global standard and is now an integral part of virtually all electoral processes. This module covers domestic and international observation/monitoring to discuss the history of election observation, observation techniques and assessment criteria with the aim of providing students with the knowledge and skills to make informed judgements about the quality of the conduct of an election. To this end, this module provides an overview of the types of election monitoring and observation, the administrative challenges of conducting such initiatives, as well as election evaluation criteria and reform options.

- Policy Advice and Electoral Reform (Compulsory - 3 credits)

This module focuses on how election practitioners can apply the knowledge gained in previous modules to improve electoral processes. In particular, this module provides an overview of how practitioners can develop strategies, or assist other stakeholders in developing strategies, to bring about changes in the electoral process for the benefit of voters and to support democratic rights.
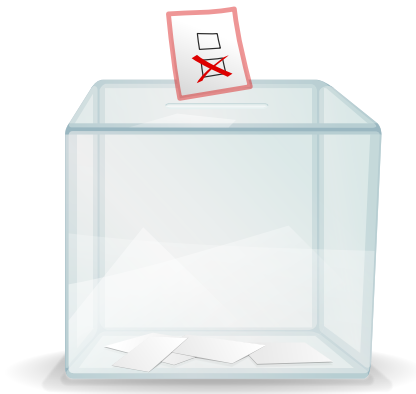
- Direct Democracy (Optional - 2 credits)

This module provides the necessary information for practitioners and election administrators on the modern direct democracy procedures available in a growing number of jurisdictions around the world. Two general types of procedures are covered: (1) those initiated by citizens themselves, such as citizens' initiatives and popular referendums, and (2) those initiated by governments, such as mandatory referendums and non-mandatory plebiscites.

- Leadership in Electoral Administration (Optional - 2 credits)

This module focuses on how election practitioners can develop a set of skills related to both leadership and dialogue skills. Participants in this course should be able to grasp the fundamentals of leadership skills and understand how to improve the inherent capacities mentioned by strengthening interactions with different electoral stakeholders, thus benefiting from their expertise in decision-making, improving participants' self-reflection and highlighting the importance of conflict resolution tools as a means of strengthening stakeholder alignment.

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