



Concept Paper

The incursion, quick expansion and constant sophistication of new information and communication technologies—especially internet platforms and mobile applications—have profoundly changed the way in which an important share of the population relates, communicates and interacts with its living environment, as well as how anything happening outside it is perceived, interpreted or analysed.

General public issues do not escape from that dynamic, nor those specifically related with politics and elections, or with democratic rules, institutions, values and procedures. Quite the opposite, as it has become clear in recent years for those involved—even if occasionally—with public interest issues, politics and elections of the renovated global village through the widely disseminated examples—through both conventional and new mass media—of governments, politicians, parties, candidates, and other stakeholders who either promote (sometimes obtrude) their views, agendas, and sheer interests, or attack those of their opponents by using that immense arsenal of novel and highly sophisticated tools and technologies.

It is with the incursion of those new technologies that the relation between the media, politics, and the competition for power—already complex and quite evasive—sees the incorporation of much more cruxes and knots happening in various arenas and striving after different objectives which are not always in line with commendable principles or democratic values.

It is precisely for that reason that the reflections, exchanges and debates of the 9th edition of the Forum on Democracy are intended to be articulated, from a democratic point of view, around some of the planes where new information technologies, communications, and the political and electoral universe converge. Any person who is attentive and observant of the political development of our times would agree the thematic selection is both essential and unavoidable. We trust the restricted crosscutting approach under which the topic will be scrutinised at the 9th Forum will contribute to its appropriate appreciation.



Amongst the queries that will guide this Forum's reflections and deliberations are those related with the entailments and effects the use of these new technologies has had, so far, in the way politics is understood and made; the assessment and reformulation of the mechanisms for political participation and representation; and, the challenges for maintaining and strengthening democratic coexistence and values.

In addition, elucidation will be sought on whether the dynamics shown in the access and use of new information and communication technologies are somewhat homogeneous, or if it reinforces pre-existing—and even novel—social exclusion and distinction patterns. And, should the latter be the case, what are the challenges for democratic education endeavours.

In strictly electoral terms, the expectation is to bring the focus on the impact they are having on both the vying for votes—campaign strategies, formats and contents, and their various intents and effects—and the management of electoral processes, particularly for inclusion and integrity purposes. While circumstances are propitious for information manipulation or distortion so as to influence how the competition is perceived or the electorate's preferences are structured, there is the aspiration that the Forum's exchanges and discussions will help in the measuring and weighting of these phenomena, as well as to profile alternatives for promoting duly informed voting.

Renewed efforts will be made for these cruxes and knots—along with others of transcendence and thought-provoking—to be addressed from a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary perspective through the convergence of the ideas, voices, and opinions from leaders and representatives of the political, legislative, academic, and organised civil society arenas, as well as from the very media involved in the field of information and opinion-building.

