Monitoring Electoral Democracy

The European infrastructure to unlock the true potential of data-driven democracy research.

Contents

What is MEDem?

Monitoring Electoral Democracy (MEDem) starts its work as the **European research infrastructure** that advances comprehensive and innovative **Democracy Research** by harmonizing and integrating democracy data across actors, institutions, countries, and time.

On 8 April 2025, **MEDem** submitted its application for the **ESFRI Roadmap 2026.** The initiative is led by Austria, with **political support** from Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

2008	**2022**	**2025**	**2029**
MEDem idea was born	MEDem HQ established	MEDem ESFRI application	MEDem ERIC expected
1000+	**100+**	**35**	**25M€**
supporting scholars	supporting research institutions & associations	MEDem Data Networks	investments from 2022 to 2031
8	**15**	**10**	
MEDem Consortium partner institutions	political supports from governments	financial commitments from governments and partner institutions	

MEDem leverages the power of interconnected and harmonized data, unlocking vast repositories of democracy research data, and ensuring their interoperability. By harnessing this networked approach, **MEDem** will enable groundbreaking discoveries in Democracy Research that surpass the limitations of individual research groups or projects.

MEDem's main focus lies at the intersection of several Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). Beyond the SSH, **MEDem** also engages with fields such as Data Science and Complex Systems Science, where structured, comparative democracy research data can support model development, testing, and validation across a variety of analytical and computational frameworks.

Operating within an open science and open data framework, **MEDem** unites and guides quantitative democracy research networks and researchers across countries, institutions, and disciplines, offering a framework for pre- and post-harmonization on a wide range of democracy research data that will lay the groundwork for large-scale interoperability. It will provide a one-point entry that enables seamless integration, linking, and comprehensive analysis of all types of democracy research data, dealing with the intricacies of micro-level mechanisms to the broader meso- and macro-level determinants that shape democratic systems throughout Europe, while also securing resource efficiency.

MEDem will foster synergies in interdisciplinary Democracy Research to advance a comprehensive understanding of democratic systems, their processes, developments, and future prospects.

MEDem will thus serve as a key instrument for deepening our insight into democracies and their challenges—benefiting both researchers and society.

*Figure: MEDem Concept Visualization.*

Why MEDem?

Democracy Research is the study of the actors, processes, values, and contexts that shape democratic systems, including their development, functioning, and challenges. Currently, however, the European landscape of democracy research data is as voluminous and rich as it is fragmented and scattered across multitudinous data resources, containing several different types of data objects. Such data objects include, for instance, election survey data, candidate surveys, text and multimedia data from media coverage or party communication, data about political institutions or events, or country-level data stemming from official statistics, and many more and were collected over numerous years, across various research teams, networks, projects, and countries. Due to digitization, which has made data collection more convenient, the volume and fragmentation of data are expected to increase in the years to come.

This fragmentation is a severe obstacle for open science and FAIR data (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable), concerning both the existing and future volumes of data, and for generating novel research and new insights – particularly in the area of Democracy Research. This is why **MEDem** sets out to efficiently pool and interlink this massive amount of data, ensuring its widespread accessibility while generating significant added value.

To achieve this ambitious goal, **MEDem** is, for one, going to host a search engine based on deep neural networks that allows users to discover all data objects – survey data, text and multimedia data, country and institutional data – that are relevant to their topic (satisfying its mandate for findability and accessibility) and, for another, going to harmonize and standardize democracy research data to make them linkable across time, countries, data objects, and data collections (satisfying its mandate for interoperability and reusability).
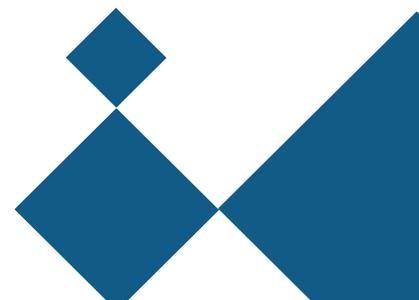
This will strengthen researchers' capabilities for exploring novel research problems as well as enhance their efficiency in data management when doing so by saving them from disproportionally large investments of time and resources.

In addition to the dispersed research data landscape, the community of democracy researchers is scattered across disciplines, countries, and institutions, to some degree impeding coordination, mutual exchange, and concerted action to tackle larger, more comprehensive, and complex research questions. **MEDem** will strengthen existing national and comparative studies on Democracy Research by connecting them to a stable European network of democracy research groups and scholars working collaboratively within the infrastructure. Already over 1000 researchers and over 100 academic infrastructures, institutions, and associations have voiced their support for **MEDem**.

Further, European democracies have faced different tides of challenges since their establishment, including, for example, institutional distrust, the spread of mis- and disinformation, decreasing voter turnout, and growing dissatisfaction with democratic processes. We are witnessing the onset of new challenges, with political communication, for example, ever more relying on social media and AI-based devices. That is why **MEDem** will – additionally to serving researchers' needs – as well provide interested citizens, journalists, and policymakers with the newest insights and findings from Democracy Research and offer research data that is accessible for people without prior statistical training. In doing so, **MEDem** aims at counteracting misinformation, enhancing news reporting, and enabling citizens and policymakers alike to base their political decisions on solid grounds.

Who is MEDem?

MEDem dates back to and builds upon prior successful design studies and initiatives of European democracy researchers to unite and produce comparable and linkable democracy research data. The FP7-funded project **PIREDEU** (2008-2011) or Horizon Europe-funded **OPTED** (2020-2023) are among these initiatives. Scholars have found these initiatives fruitful and useful for advancing European research on democracies to new levels of excellence and have since worked towards the institutionalization of the thriving European cooperation in Democracy Research.

In 2022, the Austrian Government and the University of Vienna decided to provide financial support for the **MEDem** initiative. This crucial commitment enabled the establishment of the **MEDem Headquarters** at the University of Vienna, led by Hajo Boomgaarden and Sylvia Kritzinger from the Faculty of Social Sciences. Concurrently, the **MEDem Board of Directors** (**MEDem BoD**), r, includes representatives from the University of Lausanne/Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), GESIS Cologne/Mannheim, the University of Florence, the University of Gothenburg, LUISS University Rome, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and the University of Silesia in Katowice. The committee aims to actively participate in the infrastructure and foster joint efforts as well as collective engagement in the development of **MEDem**.

Legal and Financial Framework

On 8 April 2025, **MEDem** has applied for the **European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) Roadmap Update 2026** with political support from 15 European countries. Austria leads the initiative with support from Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovakia and Switzerland. **MEDem** has been invited by ESFRI to participate in a **Hearing** on 23 February 2026.

As it prepares for its official inclusion in the ESFRI Roadmap, **MEDem** is entering its **Preparation Phase (2026-2028)**, focusing on the development of services provided by its Service Centers and laying the groundwork to establish itself as a European Research Infrastructure. The **MEDem** budget for this phase is estimated at around €8M and will be funded by Austria and the Consortium partners.

During its **Implementation Phase (2029-2031)**, **MEDem** is expected to become a **European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC)** under European legal status and to be funded by its member states. Each member will pay a fee based on the country's GDP and is entitled to a seat in **MEDem**'s General Assembly. Two countries have already officially committed to paying membership fee: Austria (host-country fee) and Germany. The **MEDem** budget for this phase is estimated at around €14M.

Including the €3M cost of the **Design Phase (2022-2025)**, total **MEDem** investment between 2022 and 2031 is estimated at €25M.

The eight research institutions participating in **MEDem** have signed a **Consortium Agreement** that governs their collaboration and serves as the legal foundation for their joint activities until the establishment of **MEDem-ERIC**. The **MEDem Consortium Agreement** came into effect on 1 April 2025.

MEDem Lifecycle

| Phase	From	To
Design	2022	2025
Preparation	2026	2028
Implementation	2029	2031
Operation	2032	-

Relationship to other ERI's

MEDem will significantly enrich the European Research Infrastructure landscape by addressing a crucial gap as the dedicated infrastructure for Democracy Research. By fostering close collaboration with other European Research Infrastructures such as CESSDA, CLARIN, DARIAH, ESS, GGP, SHARE, and others, **MEDem** will complement their services, rounding out a comprehensive ecosystem of research infrastructures in the Social Sciences and Humanities. While CESSDA focuses on data management, metadata standards implementation, and data archiving, **MEDem's** primary task will be to make existing data, often stored within CESSDA, interoperable and linkable within the realm of Democracy Research.

Moreover, **MEDem** will actively work towards establishing harmonization and quality standards for future data collection that go beyond metadata, thereby not only making comparative research more accessible for researchers but also facilitating easier archiving within the CESSDA framework in the long run. In this endeavor, collaboration with other infrastructures like ESS, GGP, and CLARIN will be instrumental in defining data collection standards for surveys and text data, respectively. Yet, **MEDem**'s overarching vision of pre- and post-harmonizing diverse data collections and achieving long-term data interoperability between different types of data objects sets it apart, even as it thrives on synergies with other European Research Infrastructures.

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have already been signed with CESSDA, CLARIN, ESS, GGP, SHARE, officially launching the collaboration with these ERICs and ESFRI project.

MEDem is also a member of **SSHOC**.
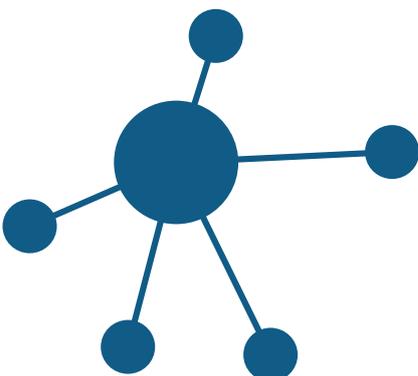
Source: MEDem Conference 2023.

What services will MEDem provide?

MEDem is dedicated to creating a unified platform for discovering and integrating diverse data collections and data objects. By implementing pre- and post-harmonization processes, MEDem ensures large-scale and long-term interoperability across all types of democracy research data. In addition to this core mission, MEDem offers a comprehensive suite of specialized services tailored to meet the needs of various stakeholders. These services collectively enhance the accessibility, quality, and usability of democracy research data, fostering education, collaboration, and informed decision-making across Europe.

- The MEDem Platform is going to be a one-stop-shop, where users can query for concepts and datasets using the MEDem Search System. This will guarantee an efficient user experience that goes beyond simple keyword-searches, allowing for queries across the full range of available datasets, relevance ordering, and multilingual queries.

- The MEDem Measurement Map will compile and document the measurement of concepts and items/scales used in different data collections in the field of research on democratic processes, politics, and elections. The Map is meant to serve as a living encyclopaedia that assists researchers when working out the empirical details of their research questions, helping them to pick valid and reliable measurement instruments.

- The MEDem Harmonization and Linking Services will provide users with an overview of and access to harmonized variables across diverse datasets relevant to Democracy Research and emerging from the MEDem Data Networks and with a range of linking tools to facilitate identifying linkage keys that allow for combining datasets from different data types.

- The **MEDem Training Opportunities** will offer training and capacity building for students at various stages of their academic career, from providing teaching materials for high school students, supporting their democratic formation, to providing online courses (MOOCs), and summer schools for (post-)graduate students on research and methods-related topics, laying the groundwork for academic excellence.

- The **MEDem Expert's Advice** will offer advice and expertise to its members and associated partners on various topics like legal and ethical issues, or individual methodological and technical questions – helping members to make informed decisions when designing new data collections.

- The **MEDem Communication Hub** will devise tools to improve the communication among researchers, where researchers can benefit from the experience of others to make fragmented knowledge accessible to everybody: who is working on what, methodological notes, early access to codebooks and questionnaires, statistical scripts, replication data, or info on pretests.

- The **MEDem Dashboard** will cater to researchers from diverse disciplines and methodological backgrounds, enabling effortless exploration of democracy research data. With its intuitive interface and powerful visualization tools, users can inspect, analyze, and apply the data to their research contexts.

- **MEDem** will also **offer training for (data) journalists** on how to effectively utilize quantitative democracy data. This training will equip journalists with the necessary skills to access and interpret such data, empowering them to produce accurate and insightful reports. Furthermore, **MEDem** will provide a comprehensive link list covering different topics (elections, parties, parliamentary speeches, etc.).

Source: MEDem Conference 2023.

The MEDem Prototypes

MEDem is already making significant strides in developing the research infrastructure through the creation of prototypes. **ATLAS** and **METEOR** serve as proof of concept, demonstrating **MEDem**'s commitment and capacity to deliver invaluable resources to the research community. **ATLAS** is focused on compiling concepts, variables, and operationalizations within opinion and expert survey datasets, while **METEOR** is dedicated to gathering data resources for political text data. These initial research inventories will provide researchers with a comprehensive overview of the field, accessible data resources, and robust tools to refine their empirical research questions and select valid and reliable measurement instruments. Both prototypes will later feed into the **MEDem Measurement Map**. By developing these prototypes, **MEDem** is gaining critical insights into the resources and workload required to advance its mission.

The **MEDem Prototype ATLAS** serves as a living encyclopedia, meticulously compiling and documenting the measurement of concepts and items/scales used in opinion and expert survey data. Specifically, **ATLAS** will offer:

■ **Comprehensive Collection:** Gather all relevant concepts, including original language versions and English translations, listing studies that utilized these concepts and describing their theoretical foundations.

■ **Operationalization Details:** Provide detailed descriptions of operationalizations, highlighting variations across times, regions, languages, and data types, and pointing to relevant empirical literature.

Source: Interface of MEDem Prototype ATLAS.

■ **Validity and Reliability Evaluation:** Assess the validity and reliability of measurement instruments in various contexts, including geographic, temporal, topical, and data domain-specific settings.

The **MEDem** **Prototype** **METEOR** was developed within the **MEDem** design study **OPTED**, and is a meta-database that links various resources for political text data

through an integrated graph structure, enabling seamless navigation and fostering discoverability. Specifically, **METEOR** offers:

■ **Broad Curated Resource Coverage:** Lists a diverse range of curated datasets, media archives, tools for data analysis, collections, and scientific publications focused on political texts.
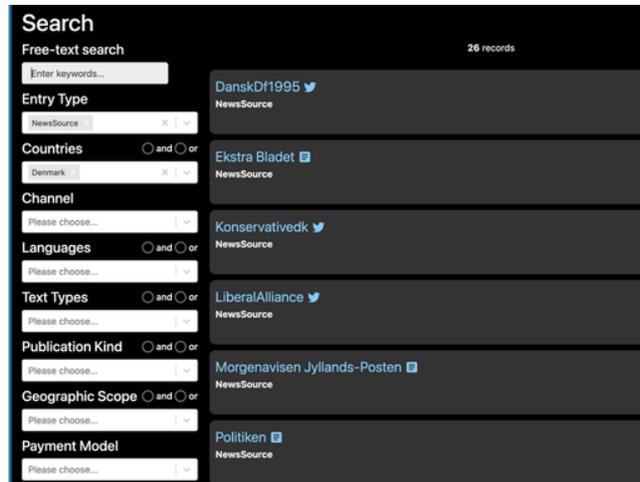
Source: Interface of MEDem Prototype METEOR.
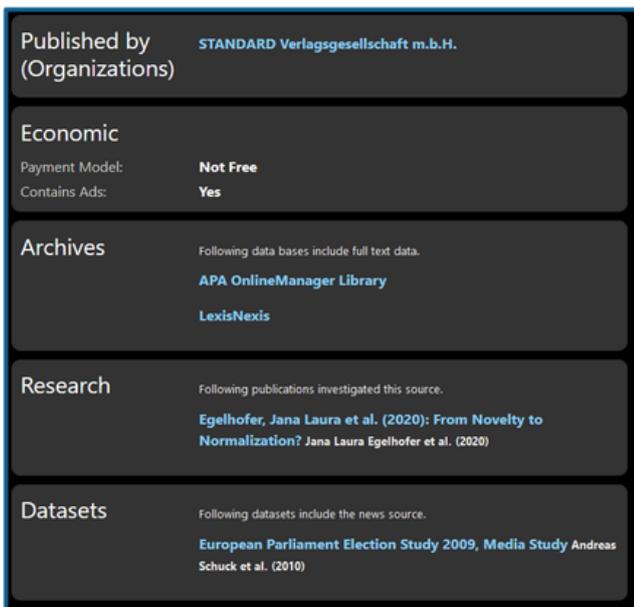
Source: Interface of MEDem Prototype METEOR.

■ **Operationalization Details:** Provides detailed descriptions of operation-alizations, highlighting variations across times, regions, languages, and data types, and pointing to relevant empirical literature.

■ **Validity and Reliability Evaluation:** Assesses the validity and reliability of measurement instruments in various contexts, including geographic, temporal, topical, and data domain-specific settings.

Both **ATLAS** and **METEOR** will be integral to the **MEDem** **Platform**, stored as a knowledge graph to facilitate data linking. Access will be provided free of charge [upon registration] to all interested users. These prototypes aim to save researchers significant time by offering a concise overview of the current state of disciplines, their resources, and their measurement instruments. Both prototypes are updated continuously and will continue to be updated as the field evolves.
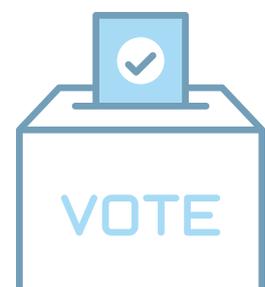
MEDem Service Centers

As a distributed research infrastructure, **MEDem** will provide its services through different **Service Centers (SCs)**, which are spread across various leading European universities, with scholars working at the forefront of European research in their areas. The research institutions that are part of the **MEDem Consortium** will host **SCs** and take responsibility within the infrastructure: the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS)/University of Lausanne, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the University of Florence, the University of Gothenburg, LUISS University Rome, GESIS Cologne/Mannheim, and the University of Silesia in Katowice. They currently employ a total of around 8 FTEs of staff working towards the establishment of **MEDem**. The heads of the individual **SCs** are represented in the current **MEDem Board of Directors**.

For one, there will be three data-oriented **Service Centers** (data object **SCs**) focused on preprocessing the various data objects:

The **Service Center for Survey Data** (SCSD) at FORS

plays a pivotal role by serving as the central hub for projects that revolve around survey data at the micro level. With a specific emphasis on data derived from both voters and politicians, the SCSD provides coordination and integration for a wide range of survey-based research endeavors encompassing various dimensions of democracy, including – but not restricted to – election surveys. By consolidating and harmonizing these self-reported survey datasets, the SCSD empowers researchers to conduct rigorous comparative analyses that contribute to a deeper understanding of democratic processes at the micro level.

The **Service Center for Text and Multimedia Data** (SCTMD) at the University of Vienna and the VU Amsterdam

will assume responsibility for distinct forms of communicative content, such as media coverage or party communication. With a unified objective, the SCTMD will effectively coordinate and integrate all research endeavors pertaining to diverse data objects extracted from an extensive array of texts encompassing written, oral, and visual mediums on the micro (i.e., individuals) and meso (i.e., organizations) level.

The **Service Center for Country and Institutional Data** (SCCID) at the University of Florence

organizes valuable data on the meso or macro level encompassing various elements of democracy such as roll call data, election results, aggregate details on parties or media audiences, party or media system data, expert-based country-level indices measuring the quality of democracy and its institutions, as well as broader official statistics (e.g. OECD data). This expansive range of country and institutional data enhances the comprehensive analysis and comparison of democratic systems within MEDem's comparative framework.

For the other, there will be Service Centers dealing with the conceptual and technical linking of the data objects, on the one hand, as well as with training of the academic and non-academic communities in terms of methods, data, and theories, on the other.

The **Service Center for Interoperability** (SCI) at the University of Gothenburg

will be responsible for ensuring interoperability across data object SCs and thereby creating the basis for the reusability of existing data sources. That is, the SCI will – on a conceptual level and in close cooperation with the different data object SCs – flesh out key concepts of Democracy Research. To increase interoperability, the SCI will, furthermore, develop innovative methods for data linkage and data imputation (i.e., probabilistic linkage and synthetic data). Through its efforts, the SCI enhances the analytical capabilities within the **MEDem** community, enabling comprehensive democracy research that captures the multifaceted nature of democracies.

The **Service Center for Platform Development** (SCPD) at LUISS

will play a vital role within **MEDem** by establishing the **MEDem** Service Gateway Hub and focusing on two key services. Firstly, SCPD develops algorithms for efficient data retrieval and seamless data access, ensuring researchers can easily retrieve the required datasets. Secondly, SCPD works on developing algorithms for data harmonization and linkage, enabling the integration and harmonization of diverse datasets. Through these efforts, SCPD enhances data findability and accessibility, promotes data reusability, and facilitates comprehensive analyses within the **MEDem** framework.

### The **Service Center for Data Linkage** (SCDL) at GESIS

will collaborate closely with data object SCs to identify linkage keys that permit the combination of the various survey, text and multimedia, institutional, and official statistical country data. The SCDL will be developing coding standards for and maintaining the list of linkage keys. Allowing for the technical linkage of datasets. Furthermore, the SCDL will work on a framework to geographically link data.

The **Service Center for Training and Capacity Building** (SCTCB) at the University of Silesia in Katowice

will offer two primary services. Firstly, it will provide valuable training opportunities for the academic community, equipping researchers with the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct high-quality democracy research within the **MEDem** framework. Secondly, SCT will ensure the dissemination of democracy research findings and data beyond the academic realm, catering to the non-academic community encompassing citizens, journalists, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

Through these efforts, SCT bridges the gap between academia and society, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and promoting the wider impact of **MEDem** and the field of Democracy Research more generally.
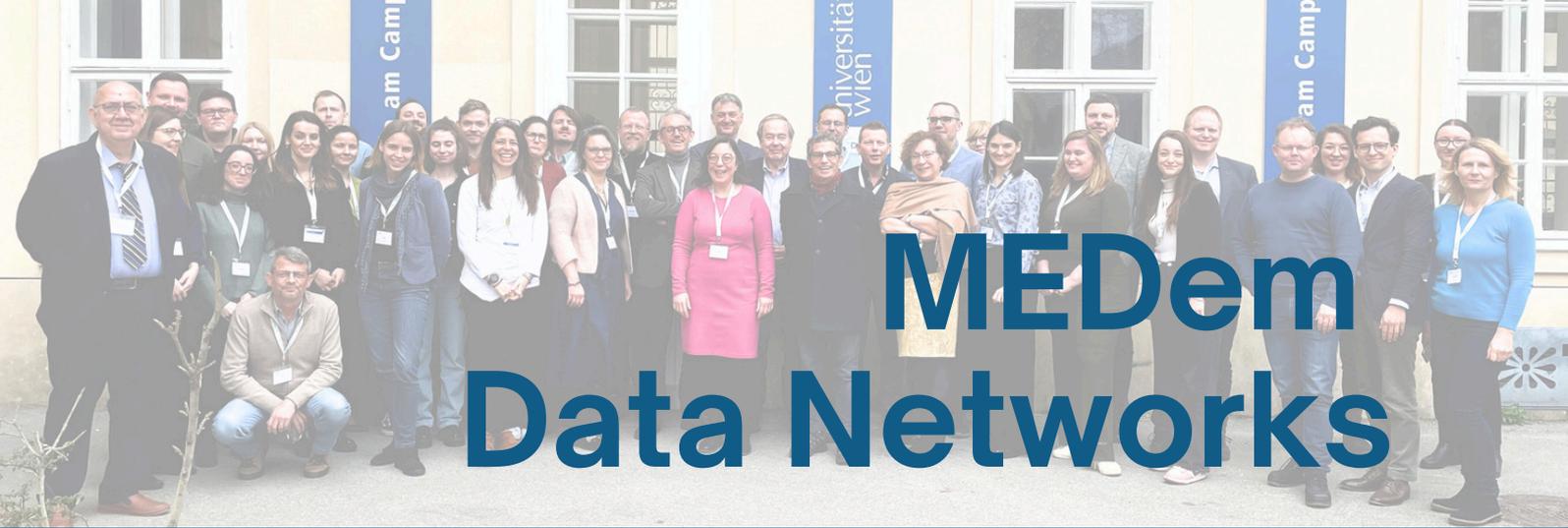
MEDem
Data Networks

The 35 international research networks listed below, renowned for their expertise in Democracy Research, encompass a diverse range of data and methodological frameworks, including survey design, content analysis, social media, expert data, and institutional data. Eighteen research groups have already signed an MoU with **MEDem**. They will form the **MEDem** Data Networks. Many more have already expressed their will to collaborate with **MEDem** upon its inclusion in the **ESFRI Roadmap**:

Campaigning for Strasbourg (CamforS)	Italian National Election Study (ITANES)
Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)	Manifesto Project (MARPOR)
Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)	Network of European Political Communication Scholars (NEPOCS)
Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES)	
Comparative Legislator Database (CLD)	Parliamentary Speech Dataset (ParlSpeech)
Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA)	PartySOME
Consortium of National Election Studies (CNES)	Political Data Yearbook (PDYi)
Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS)	ParlLawSpeech (PLS)
Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)	Political Party Database Project (PPDP)
Demscore	The PopuList
Digital Election Campaigning Worldwide (DigiWorld)	Paths to Power (PtP)
Database of Variables for Content Analysis (DOCA)	Representative Democracy Data Archive (REPDEM)
Executive Approval Project (EAP)	Dutch Electoral Research Foundation (SKON)
European Election Studies (EES)	Swedisch National Election Study (SNES)
European Values Study (EVS)	The PopulisTree (TPT)
The Far-Right Protest Obervatory (FARPO)	Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)
Finnish National Election Study (FNES)	Voting Advice Application (VAA)
Icelandic National Election Study (ICENES)	WhoGov

MEDem Governance Structure

During the Preparation Phase, **MEDem** operates with a streamlined governance structure to allow for flexibility while establishing the foundation for its future framework.

Regular meetings with the **Interim General Assembly** will allow informal exchanges to take place with representatives from ministries of prospective member states to ensure alignment with national priorities.

Strategic oversight is provided by the **Board of Directors**, which guides **MEDem**'s development and direction. At this stage, a dedicated **MEDem Director** is not yet in place, allowing for a more adaptable leadership approach. The **Board of Directors** ensures coordination across key operational and scientific areas.
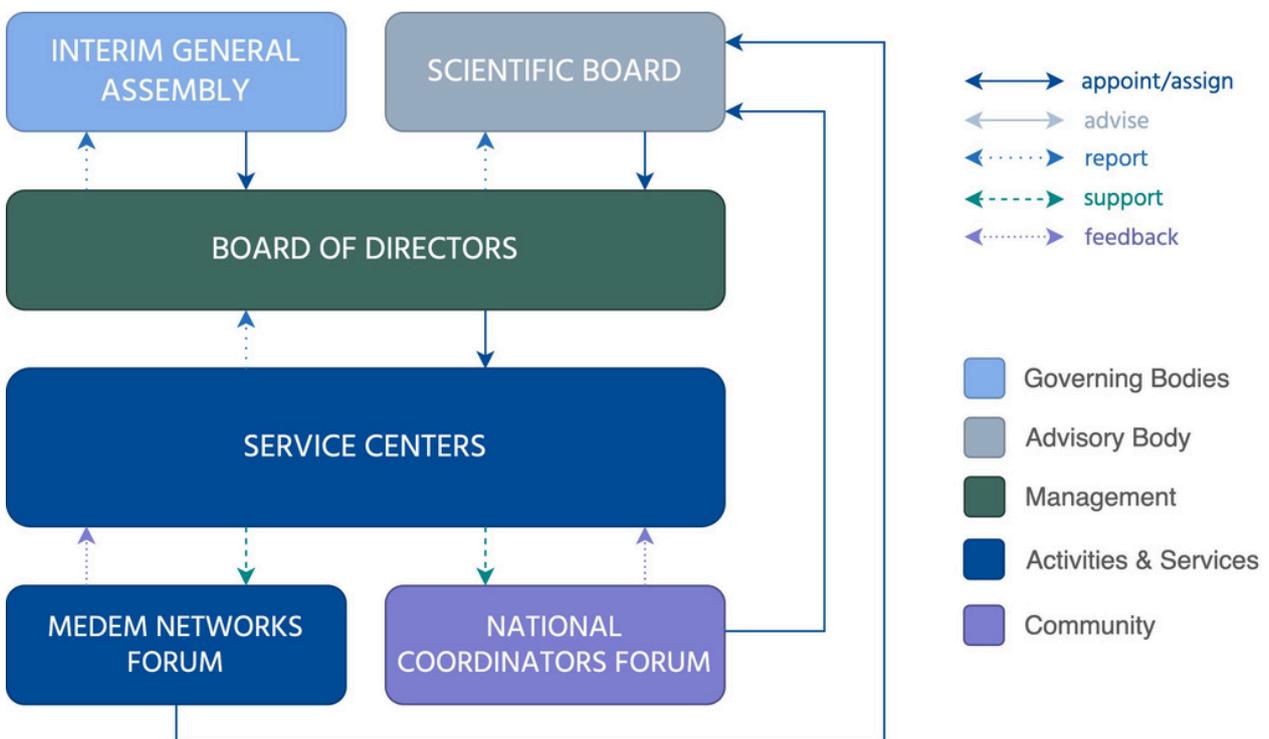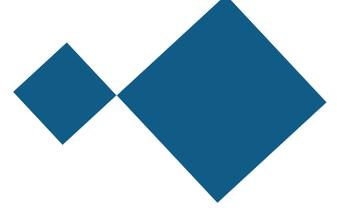

Figure: MEDem Governance Structure

The **Service Centers** play a central role by providing specialized expertise and services in key areas, including population surveys, multimedia analysis, country and institutional data, data linkage, and capacity building. These centers will strengthen **MEDem**'s capacity to support high-quality research.

The **Scientific Board** serves as an open advisory body. It integrates broad input from the **MEDem Networks Forum** and **National Coordinators Forum**, ensuring that expertise from national and international research communities informs the infrastructure's development. However, during this phase, the Scientific Board does not yet engage in decision-making processes.

MEDem is planned to eventually evolve to provide a more formalized leadership and operational framework. This will include the establishment of the **General Assembly** as the primary decision-making body representing the **MEDem** Member States. Dedicated forums, the **MEDem Networks Forum** and **National Coordinators Forum** will continue to ensure engagement at national and international levels, integrating diverse perspectives into **MEDem**'s strategic and scientific direction. To that end, the **Scientific Board** will transition into the **Scientific Council** as the second body with direct decision-making powers. Finally, to provide independent, high-level expertise, an **External Advisory Board** will offer guidance on complex and evolving challenges. This ensures that **MEDem** remains at the forefront of research, legal, ethical, and infrastructure development.

Contact MEDem