

### **Module 3: Presentation by the President Councilor and the Communication Director of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico (INE)**

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** Hello, everyone. Increasingly around the world, electoral management bodies are facing challenges that go beyond the limit of the organization of elections. Besides the complexity of assuring the right to free and informed voting and doing so in many cases under conditions of polarization, intolerance, and attacks by governments, electoral bodies now face the problem of disinformation, fake news, and hate speech. The information ecosystem in which elections are held today is radically different from that of just a decade ago. The current context is characterized by the widespread use of the Internet, the prevalence of social media, and even a growing capacity to generate and disseminate information in almost all places and at all times. In this new ecosystem, there is acute competition for public attention and gaining the vote of the citizens. This impact the institutional capacities and tools that EMBs must design to halt disinformation, make informed voting possible, and create conditions of electoral integrity. To face these challenges at the National Electoral Institute in Mexico, we have designed a strategy that seeks to substantially reduce the harmful effects of this information and fake news in the context of elections. It is a strategy that we have been implementing since the general election of 2018. The first step was for the INE to recognize that the organization of elections has become increasingly complex, in many cases due to mistrust among political actors. Therefore, we needed to design a strategy that allowed us to explain to the public clearly and in plain language how elections are carried out, what their key activities are, and which decisions and stakeholders we are facing with, that is to explain what we call at the INE "the chain of trust," which is the series of stages and decisions that offer conditions for electoral integrity. This emphasis on public reasoning, a form of pedagogy, has implied the National Electoral Institute of Mexico to communicate effectively, thus increasing people's trust in elections. Also, the INE's strategies seek to contribute to the development of a communication ecosystem that enables greater quality of information and increases the social costs of intentionally disinforming the public. For this institutional pedagogical task to work, the timing is essentially important because an event that is explained after it has occurred becomes actually a damage control rather than a genuine explanatory effort. At the same time, at the INE, we decided to move away from the regulatory and punitive approaches to freedom of expression on social media. To phase disinformation, our approach has been, from the very beginning to favor the timely, truthful and clear explanation of the electoral process, especially of those decisions taken by the INE in compliance with the law. Our approach is to phase disinformation with information and to do so assertively, not reactively.

[00:04:14] The INE strategy to phase disinformation has been anchored in three components. First of all, to establish alliances with social media platforms. In an internationally unprecedented measure in 2018, the INE signed institutional agreements with Facebook, Twitter, and Google. These agreements helped to expand the reach of information produced by the INE, including the wide number of activities it carries out and the institutional decisions taken in each election. Those agreements have remained in force ever since. The second line of action, which was strategic for the 2018 election, was the close relationship with the media and civic organizations to promote and enhance the task of verifying information that is disseminated in traditional media and in social media. Recognizing its Independence, INE works with the media and citizen organizations to promote verified information in many cases based on evidence provided by INE itself. The third component of the INE's strategy has been the development of a system to identify

disinformation strategies and act accordingly. Developed by INE, we call this system "certeza," – certainty– refers to the effort to face the uncertainty generated by fake news with truthful, clear, and timely information. This system, which operates especially on Election Day and the days leading up to it, is based on a model of social listening, information management, and evidence generation. Electoral bodies must be prepared to face disinformation and misinformation practices because they affect the social and political environment from which an election is nourished. They disrupt their trust in institutions and negatively influence the core aspect of elections. The challenges that the digital environment imposes on the recreation of democracy are multiple and cross-cutting. The challenge is not to adapt democracy to the digital age, subordinating itself to its dynamics, which, by the way, are not always democratic. The challenge is to continue making democracy an essentially civic project in the digital environment, making freedom of expression possible with the shared responsibility of society, traditional media, social media platforms, and of course, EMBs all around the world. Thank you very much, and good luck.

[00:07:12] **Speaker 2** Permanently, the National Electoral Institute of Mexico deals with disinformation and "fake news" through the use of a program called "CERTEZA" that works intensively on the eve of and during election day. CERTEZA is a program that involves different sectors of the Institute, particularly those that handle key information, participate in the decision-making process, and that have the required tools to verify and gather relevant data, that is, the owners of the data on the ground on Election Day. If it were an exclusive program of the Social Communication Office, we would not be able to know in a timely and efficient manner each of the cases in which risks of disinformation or false information are detected. The commitment of the entire INE to the CERTEZA program and to the principle of transparency has been essential in order to build a common front against disinformation. CERTEZA's first step is to locate false, incomplete, or manipulated information that may represent a risk to the exercise of the electoral and political rights of citizens by generating distrust in the work of electoral authorities. To achieve this, the INE designed a social listening mechanism, which allows constant monitor both social media and more traditional media based on both technological tools and personnel which filter information on the basis of predefined parameters such as how many times the information was replicated and if there is a valid presumption that it may affect whether the citizens decide to vote or not. When the social listening group identifies information that may be regarded as false or intentionally biased according to the predefined parameter, an Analysis Working Group steps in. This group is formed by personnel from several strategic areas of the INE, such as the Social Communication Office, the Presidency, the Executive Secretary, the Department of Electoral Organization, the UNite of Liaison with Local EMBs, as well as the Department of the Federal Voter Registry.

[00:07:12] This team analyses the information received. from the social listening mechanism and, first of all, verifies its authenticity through various means. Sometimes it is only a matter of consulting direct sources on the ground to verify the facts firsthand or simply to publicly explain what electoral procedures are to understand the reasons behind certain practices. Once the correct and complete information is at hand, the specialized team decides how to respond to each piece of disinformation. The final response is made public through the Social Communication Office of the INE. The information provided to the general public and to specific actors disseminating false or biased information may take the form of a tweet, a statement, a video, a graphic piece, or even, if necessary, a direct call to a news media to clarify an issue. In order to have a real impact on tackling disinformation or Fake News, this process cannot take long because lies and

misinformation spread faster than the real facts, so a timely response is essential. Some of the disinformation that circulates on Election Day is actually predictable. There are certain normative processes that are invariably taken out of context and misunderstood in every election, such as the fact that poll station workers have to cross out all remaining ballots in order to prevent their misuse. For this type of case, the INE is prepared beforehand with graphic and video materials that explain its legal basis and rationale, which are ready to be used when questions and misinformation appear in the media. CERTEZA's verification process is not only triggered by the monitoring of social media. Journalists also make direct inquiries about specific electoral events or processes and address these questions assertively and in time, which is the best way to prevent false news from circulating. CERTEZA's process, then, does not only imply having a monitoring and analysis team and the ability to make decisions and obtain information in a timely manner. It also requires building a communication model based on electoral pedagogy, on the constant production of content that explains, as many times as needed, the decisions taken and the activities carried out by the electoral authorities. Many stakeholders are considered in this process, including social media, academic forums, and communication with civil society organizations and a close and fluid relationship with the media in general. In the recent Presidential Recall Process, the CERTEZA team attended a total of 127 cases, the majority questioning specific parts or moments of the electoral process on Election Day and days before. Each and every one of these cases were reviewed and analyzed on its potential for disinforming. This involved the implementation of 33 communication actions by the INE, from newsletters to direct responses to twitter which is the social media where, due to its nature, spreads the largest amount of false information. The Recall Process puts the CERTEZA mechanism to the test. Ever since the Presidential Recall fulfilled the legal requirements to be carried out, for the first time in the history of Mexico, the INE had to explain and clarify a wide range of doubts and questioning. the strategy was to stop any suspicion from growing and to tackle false news as soon as possible. That is the strategy that we have adopted, not only for the Presidential Recall for this year but in all electoral processes. This is the only possible strategy in the midst of a post-truth context and assuring the respect of Freedom of Expression. In the INE, we are truly convinced that only information can fight disinformation. Thank you.