The Role of UNESCO in the Digital Era with Guilherme Canela

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** Hello again. I do hope you are enjoying these more information and elections in digital era. My name is Guilherme Canela and I am the chief of the UNESCO's section on freedom of expression and safety of journalists. In this particular video, we're going to speak about this correlation of freedom of expression and elections, and in particularly the role of UNESCO's within the United Nations system to help fostering free and fair elections while protecting and stimulating freedom of expression. But first, very quickly, you probably heard of UNESCO's for its areas of mandate or an education and culture, maybe also hard sciences, natural sciences and social and human sciences. But UNESCO's also the U.N. agencies in charge and the agency in charge of an umbrella area called Communication and Information Where is located. Our mandate to Protect and Promote Freedom of expression. And as you know, you didn't you saw in different moments of this smoking the smoke. I read The Freedom of Expression has a strong link with free and fair elections. Freedom of expression is essential for the guarantee of free and fair elections. And we are going to see why. Very briefly during this video. So first, obviously, freedom of expression is a key element for democracies in general, including for the electoral processes. If you look into the interests of different stakeholders related to elections, I mean the role of parliaments, of regulators, of civil society organizations, of academics such as political scientists, you will see that those different stakeholders trying to guarantee free and fair elections, they were also throughout history paying a special attention on the relationship with freedom of expression in general, in media freedom in particular. So we will see, for instance, studies or regulations or loss about issues like what we what to do with political advertisement, what to do with impartiality in these elections, things like the Fairness Doctrine, what to do with sentinel rights, and what's also another important kind of regulation that is present in several countries how to protect the safety of the journalists who are covering these elections. And we will see that this has only expanded with the digital era. So the impact of the digital ecosystem or the impact of digital digitalization for our lives is gigantic. Maybe this is the biggest revolution for freedom of expression, for instance, since Gutenberg. But particularly for elections, it has revolutionized the way that people interact with the public sphere in general and also during elections. And it has also revolutionized the way people share information and also disinformation and misinformation. So in one hand, it offers gigantic opportunities for freedom of expression, but also some risks which should be met to mitigate some harms that should be eventually prosecuted. So in terms of one particular phenomena, the issue of disinformation, misinformation, more information, these has a stronger might have a strong impact on elections depending on the different context. So this ability, I mean, misinformation and disinformation was always used during elections, as you probably heard during these these look during these these days of these. But the new story here is how the IT volume and virality is impacting the spread of disinformation and news information and therefore impacting elections. But there are extra elements here, the capability of micro-targeting, a particular individual with any specific disinformation that can change the way he or she will perceive the electoral process or a particular candidate is is a gigantic change in the way that campaigns and campaigns that are not playing by the rules are using these kind of structures or this kind of possibilities in the digital ecosystem to election. So this is particularly relevant for the process of guaranteeing free and fair elections and the associated with the phenomenon of disinformation and misinformation. We also have associated elements such as, for instance, hate speech against particular groups or particular ethnic groups or conspiracy theories. So those different elements, which again are not new as concepts, but the way they are spread and they are used and they are microtargeting it in the in the digital sphere is particularly new. And this is what we need to pay extra attention, we say, with a new vision on how to deal with those issues

through, for instance, the international standards, with the international standards of freedom of expression and within the multilateral system. So UNESCO's, as we said in the very beginning, is the UN agency to foster, to protect and promote freedom of expression and how this is correlated specifically with elections and to counter these phenomena like such as disinformation and these information which have a particular impact in the electoral process. So one thing is that UNESCO's has a function of a laboratory of ideas. So with that, we have been publishing a series of toolkits, policy briefs, specific discussions, trying to alert on this problem, trying to suggest recommendations, policy recommendations for the different stakeholders involved on how to deal with with these particular problems during the election time while protecting freedom of expression. Another important function of UNESCO's capacity building. What we are doing here with this book, what we have been doing with different electoral manager bodies, are journalists in the specific context of these specific elections. We also are as standards setters, so that the recently recommendation that our general conference approved on the ethics of artificial intelligence underlines some important standards for the digital ecosystem that can help to organize these digital ecosystem in a way that is more protective to the democracy or to democratic process, such as electoral processes. We also work as a clearinghouse, gathering different information projects, initiatives, good practice as far east as we do for media information, literacy and good practices, which is another important element to counter disinformation and misinformation by empowering the citizens. And of course, we are also catalysts of international cooperation. So, for instance, this book is an initiative of UNESCO's of the U.N., DBE and the Ninth Center at Texas University. So these international cooperation involving electoral managerial bodies, involving journalists, is fundamental to tackle such a complex problem, like the countering of disinformation, misinformation and context of elections. And this also must have a multi-stakeholder approach, which means that the different stakeholders are relevant here. So, for instance, during our World Press Freedom Days, which is a moment of raising awareness on specific issues that should be tackled under the bigger umbrella freedom of expression. We have been stimulating journalists, media houses, regulators, judges, prosecutors, civil society organizations, academics to think about these issues as we did this year, when we decided the main topic would be journalism under digital siege, which again trying to understand the impacts of the digital era ways to do professional. Journalism. But also, for instance, in 2019, when we had the World Press Freedom Day in the Ethiopian in Addis Ababa, the specific issue was particularly the correlation between press freedom and elections. We have been releasing different suggestions on how to deal with this with these issues, different recommendations like these one on social media and elections, where the specific recommendation was particularly for the electoral managerial bodies to interact with the private sector, with the Internet companies. And we saw the relevant stakeholders trying to find a joint solution to these kind of issues, trying to find a joint approach to tackle an issue that is of everybody's concern. They should that we are undermining democracy by affecting our or interfering with the electoral process in a way that is not desirable. With this new phenomenon that we just described in the end during this video, and finally the day when we recommended that these different aspects of the efficacy of artificial intelligence, if you read the recommendation, you will see that it is that several elements of this recommendation are underlining the different roles of different stakeholders in this kind of space. So this was a very brief overview on this relationship freedom of expression, elections, and the role of a particular United Nations agency. In this case, UNESCO's on how we can support the different stakeholders in tackling these kinds of problems, disinformation and misinformation, for instance, in the context of elections, but also how we can support and how we can foster the huge opportunities that an expanded digital sphere can have in the context of elections, in informing the citizens and stimulating the public debate that is so relevant for our democracy. Thank you very much.