UNDP's Dan Malinovich

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** It is my pleasure to welcome you to one of the videos for the first module, our massive open online course on Information and elections in the digital era, co-organised by UNESCO's United Nations Development Program and the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas. My name is Dan Milanovic and I am an electoral policy specialist and focal point for electoral assistance, the UNDP's Bureau for Policy and Program Support. In this session, I would like to talk about the place of electoral assistance in today's digitized world. After that, I will introduce you to the electoral cycle approach and the relevance of the role of digital media during electoral processes. We are witnessing an unprecedented increase in digital information sharing. In today's digitized world, information is spreading quickly based on its ability to grab attention rather than truth or accuracy. Consider, for instance, the fact that roughly 30 new people have started using social media every second since this time last year. These increased opportunities to share and receive political information are really the oxygen to the entire electoral process. But it is also, as you know, very well enabled pathways for false or misleading information related to elections to be flowing at a scale, speed and reach never seen before. Precisely because of this ease of access and because elections constitute a cornerstone of our political life, electoral processes are particularly vulnerable. Around the world. Misinformation and disinformation. One of the most pressing challenges of the modern era is spreading and wreaking havoc on political and social norms and values. It undermines the social contract and the roads trust in the electoral, electoral processes and institutions. It prevents informed decision making and collective agreements on truth and facts. And also also misinformation and disinformation in politics is nothing new. What is new is the rapid acceleration of disinformation enabled by ever growing use and abuse of digital technology and the features of the use of these digital tools, including virality, velocity and anonymity. This unprecedented challenge requires an unprecedented response and above all, an unprecedented level of cooperation. As the largest implementer of U.N. electoral assistance, UNDP is an essential component of U.N. electoral assistance architecture established by the U.N. General Assembly and led by the U.N. wide focal point for electoral assistance. The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Our work is grounded in the electoral cycle approach approach which was developed by the European Commission, International Idea and UNDP as a response to obstacles in the implementation of electoral assistance, emphasizing the importance of long term activities and aimed at developing capacities for inclusive political participation. In short, the electoral cycle looks at the elections as a process, not an isolated event. It's divided into three main periods free electoral, electoral and post electoral. The pre-electoral period focuses on elements such as voter registration, candidate nominations, civic and voter education, electoral preparations and so on. The electoral period is primarily focused on Election Day itself. And includes voting at polling stations, alternative voting mechanisms, training of the election staff, observers, and so on. The post-electoral period concerns areas such as electoral disputes, resolution archiving and research audits, evaluations and post-election review. Notably, the electoral cycle has no fixed starting or ending points, which is also true for the three periods and for the segments within the cycle. The media, social media and information sharing plays an indispensable role throughout the electoral cycle, whether it's information on the electoral calendar, civic or voter education. Voter information. Information on the vote counting. And official results. Or something else. In addition, elections are composed of several integrated building blocks with different stakeholders. Each stage of the electoral process requires attention and problems in any one. inflams of the process will have different implications depending on where in the cycle it is happening, which will then ultimately affect the quality and integrity of elections overall. The breakdown of one aspect. For

example, inflammatory rhetoric by contestants or distribution of false information on vote counting or misinformation on the location, time or eligibility can all negatively impact on any one other part of the electoral cycle. These implications require different approaches. To take an example. Much online information relating to elections is channeled via internet platforms that earn most of their revenue through advertising services. This information is automatically ranked to keep users engaged and connected. Favoring emotional or divisive content over accuracy or editorial integrity. Anyone, including state political and commercial actors, can exploit this business model to spread electoral misinformation or disinformation for financial, political or ideological gain. As a result, people can be exposed to false or misleading electronic information which can undermine their trust in the electoral processes overall. Consequently, affecting the integrity, credibility and legitimacy of the institutions themselves. So how can we address these challenges? Finding appropriate responses to the misuse of social media and digital technologies during elections is a balancing act. We need to foster political participation and protect human rights, but at the same time, we need to ensure that the online space is safe and that any regulations do not impose, impose, undo restrictions. Clearly with this in mind, there are no plug and play solutions, at least not yet. A statement in the U.N. secretary general's report on elections. Political leaders have also a role to play in tackling the harmful use of social media and online platforms. Not one actor. Neither the U.N. nor the governments, nor the electoral management bodies, nor the social media platforms themselves can address this challenge alone or in a silo approach. We need cross-sectoral engagement by governments, by civil society, private sector and citizens. And we need greater cooperation between social media platforms and electoral management bodies. This requires an integrated, coordinated and above all, sustained action on the part of all electoral stakeholders, including those of us who are working on a daily basis to support the. Governments can adopt regulatory and legal responses to hate speech that are carefully balanced against the rights to freedom of expression and the rights to have access to information. Civil society organizations can contribute to those efforts by monitoring abuses and misinformation and disinformation disseminated online during elections. And social media companies can play a role in developing policies to monitor online harassment and hate speech and to address them in a consistent manner in line with the standards of international human rights law. We need long term measures such as information and technology literacy campaigns to build resilience in handling false, emotional and incendiary content. Thank you.