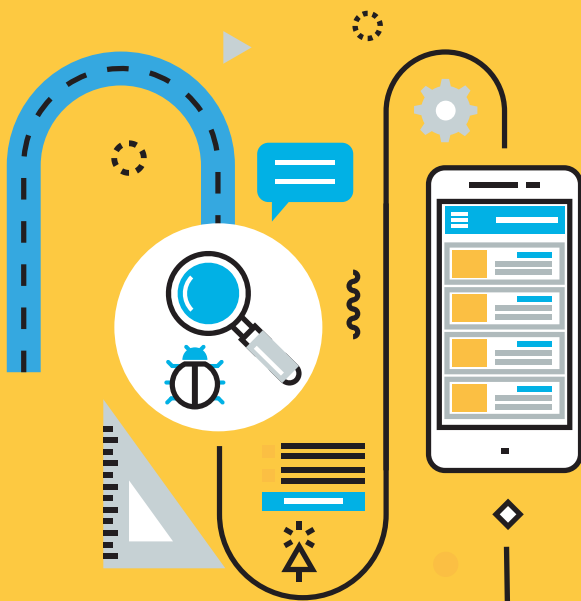


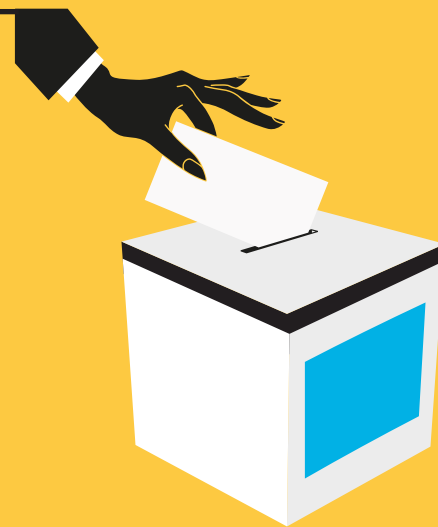
UNESCO COLLOQUIUM

IMPROVING

THE
COMMUNICATIONS
AND INFORMATION
ECOSYSTEM



TO PROTECT
THE INTEGRITY
OF ELECTIONS

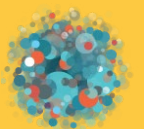


PARIS, 8 FEBRUARY 2018

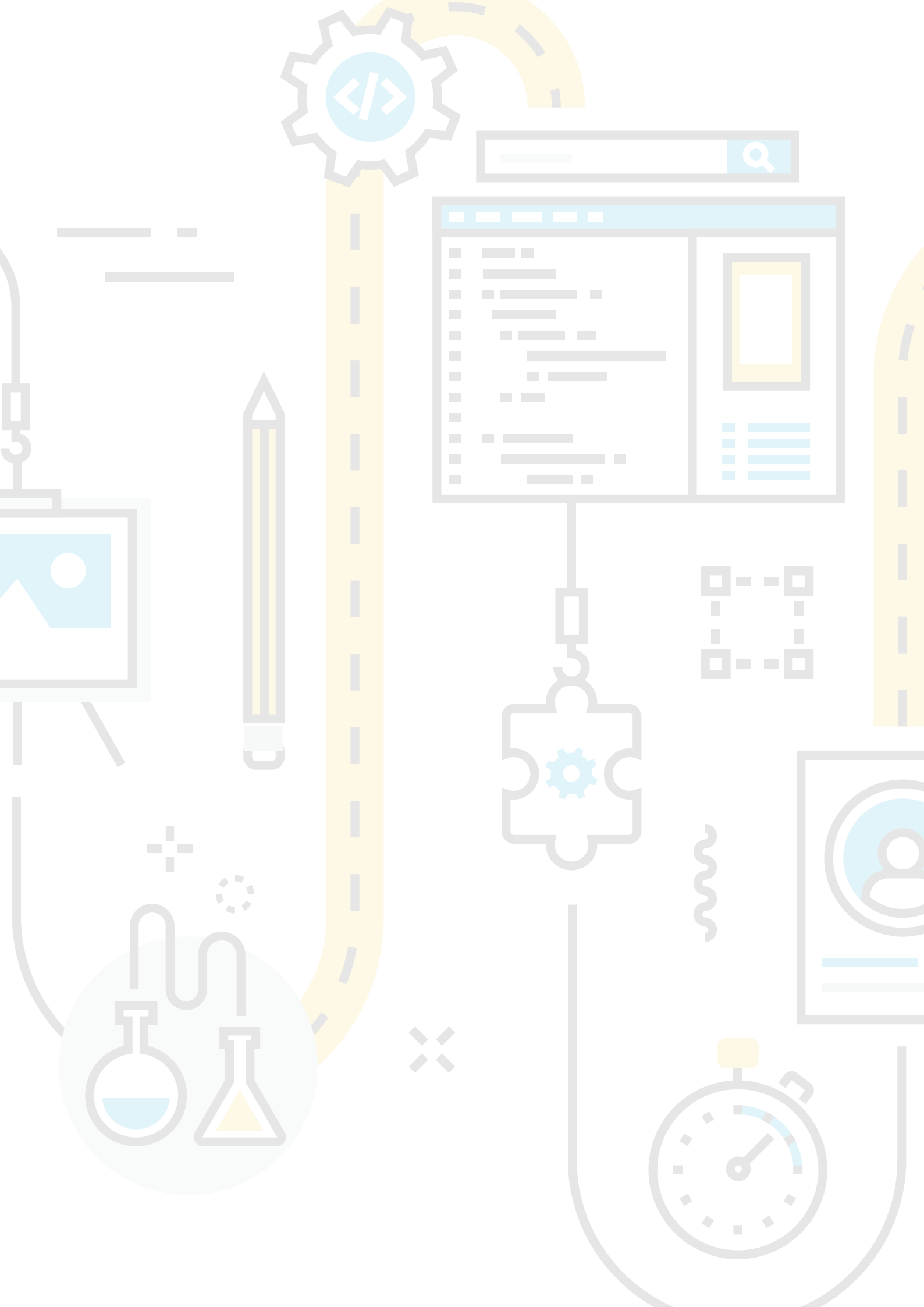
CONCLUSIONS



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



GLOBAL
NETWORK
INITIATIVE



Summary

UNESCO¹ and multistakeholder organization, the Global Network Initiative², convened a colloquium on 8 February 2018 to assess issues around Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and elections. The focus was on what UNESCO, and other UN actors, as well as the private sector, civil society and academics could do to maximise the benefits that digital technology brings to democracy, while minimizing the negatives that interfere with civil and political rights.

Background

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights marks its 70th anniversary in 2018. Still relevant today, it affirms that “*everyone has the right to take part in the government of his [or her] country, directly or through freely chose representatives*”. It also states: “*The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures*”. This is part of the background as to why the UN is engaged in supporting electoral processes worldwide.³

The UDHR also affirms: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Not only are rights indivisible in general, the right to elections and the right to freedom of expression especially go hand in hand. This connection endures after 70 years.

Looking at the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it is stated in Article 25 that every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity:

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.

Article 19 of the ICCPR also affirms that:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

These two rights have a powerful intersection. The integrity of democracy -- and thus its related election processes -- rests upon a free flow of information and secure, uninterrupted communications. The freedoms involved (to vote, and to seek/receive and impart information and opinion) are deeply interconnected. This observation resonates with the world's Sustainable Development Agenda which enjoins stakeholders to achieve “public access to

1 Within the UN family, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of information. This includes work to support free, independent and pluralistic media, online and offline, and the training of journalists to better cover elections. These activities help strengthen the integrity of electoral processes in the field of media and communication.

2 The Global Network Initiative (GNI) is a multi-stakeholder organization of information and communication technology companies, civil society organizations, academics, and socially responsible investors, working collaboratively to promote and protect freedom of expression and privacy on the Internet.

3 See: Report of the Secretary General. 2017. Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization” [A/72/260*](#)

information and fundamental freedoms". In the UN system, some of these issues have been touched upon in the UN Development Programme's 2014 publication "[Media and elections: a guide for electoral practitioners](#)", but developments since then have raised additional questions, particularly as regards information and expression on the Internet.⁴

Today's world, including elections, increasingly cannot be imagined without ubiquitous and always-on Internet. Yet, large-scale Internet disruptions such as shutdowns or arbitrary throttling, alongside the arbitrary blocking and filtering of online content, have been on the rise in the last five years, according to the latest edition of the UNESCO [World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development](#).

While the Internet can deepen and broaden information that strengthens the electoral process, there are growing threats from malicious actors using and abusing ICT to challenge the trust and confidence of voters.⁵ In this context, UNESCO collaborated with the Global Network Initiative (GNI) to organize a Colloquium titled "*Improving the information ecosystem to protect the integrity of elections*". Organized at UNESCO Headquarters on 8 February 2018, the event examined how the Internet could support electoral integrity, as well as counter threats such as disinformation and Internet shutdowns, which reduce the trust and knowledge of voters. The event brought together a wide variety of stakeholders representing UNESCO Member States, UN agencies, civil society, representatives of regional organizations that undertake election observation missions, national electoral authorities, ICT companies, media organizations and academics.

Opening Session

During the opening session of the Colloquium, participants were reminded that Internet technologies, including social media, have strengthened the integrity and transparency of electoral processes and enriched democracy because:

- Political parties and candidates are using them to better reach out to constituents, mobilize supporters and raise funds.
- Voters use social media to talk to candidates and to each other about election-related issues, and to get involved in campaigns.
- Civil society groups and citizens are using social media to monitor elections.
- Social media are used to provide a certain amount of space for opposition, to compensate for restrictions that might exist.

However, challenges stemming from the risks of digital technologies being abused by malicious actors have also arisen, and can lead to conflict or declining public confidence in the outcomes of elections.

The dual-edged nature of the Internet in regard to elections exhibits the observation by Professor Melvin Kranzberg: "*Technology in itself is neither good nor bad nor neutral: it is what men [and women] do with it.*"

Examples of the weaponization of digital technologies to undermine elections include:

- Internet and telecom network connection services disruptions, restrictions, filtering and even complete shut-downs during election times.

⁴ The UNDP guide does note, however, that: "When assessing the proportionality of the restriction on freedom of expression on the Internet, the impact of that restriction on the ability of the Internet to deliver positive freedom of expression outcomes must be weighted against its benefits in terms of protecting other interests." (p.42).

⁵ See for example The Omidyar Group. 2017. [Is Social Media a Threat to Democracy?](#)

- Threats to the data security of voters, candidates, and political parties, as well as threats to privacy posed by malware attacks and arbitrary surveillance of journalists and human rights activists.
- The use of social media and technologies to spread misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in times of elections.
- The use of social media to spread “results” of elections before the official results announcements and to circulate information in countries where the news media observe an official period of election silence.
- The issue of data mining for micro-targeting campaigning and campaign advertising (“dark ads”), making it possible for undetected efforts to influence the results of the elections.

The colloquium provided a platform to share good practices developed individually or collectively to reduce these risks of abuse.

Take away points from the opening session included

- A call to adapt and further develop clear international expectations and guidance to address new digital challenges, as the digitalization of electoral processes and evolutions in media development are moving at a faster pace than the international normative frameworks around those issues.
- An appeal to follow the UNESCO ROAM principles on [Internet Universality](#), which advocate for a human Rights based, Open and Accessible Internet governed by Multi-stakeholder participation, to contribute to the realization of Internet-enabled Knowledge Societies and the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Elections implicate online Rights, Openness, and Accessibility, and Multistakeholder involvement in policies that impact on the Internet in relation to the holding of a poll.
- A reminder of the need to reduce the digital divide which impacts on political participation. According to data from the International Telecommunication Union, only 39% of the world’s population had access to the Internet in 2013. A total of 75% of Europeans are online, while only 16 % of Africans have access to the Internet. Only 37% of women in the world are online, compared to 41% of men.
- The importance of the colloquium as a multi-stakeholder engagement to help bridge the gaps between countries, which are also differently equipped to address new digital challenges to electoral processes and systems.
- The importance of considering technology in an inclusive way. Technology introduced in the management of elections - be it electronic voter registration, electronic voting or systems of transmission and results management - should be easy enough to explain so that an uninitiated person can understand it.
- The importance of understanding the different and complementary roles that states, companies, civil society and other actors can and should play to safeguard and strengthen elections systems and processes.

Panel I: Network availability, security and integrity around elections

The integrity of the democratic process and political campaigns relies on a free flow of information and uninterrupted communications. This points to the need for communications to be unhindered by arbitrary filtering, blockage or network disruptions. In addition, it requires election-related communications, the platforms and networks that carry them, and the servers and devices which store relevant data, to be resilient to breaches and unauthorized intrusions.

Representatives of tech companies said they sought to operate according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as well as the GNI Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy and to work together in order to respect human rights. In this light, they highlighted the difficulty they faced regarding government-ordered network disruptions in the context of elections. They expressed the difficulties they have experienced as the last years have seen an exponential increase in politically motivated demands for network disruptions, including in election periods. The ability of mobile network operators and Internet service providers, which are licensed by local authorities, to push back against these orders can be quite limited – situations were noted where employees have been ordered at gunpoint to cut the network, or where employees were arrested for not complying with sufficient alacrity. In addition, some governments find ways to circumnavigate the companies' control on the networks and implement restrictions on their own. To resist arbitrary demands, tech companies ask that official demands of Internet and network disruptions come in writing from authorized personnel pursuant to appropriate legal process. Transparency about demands could enable the public to know what is going on, and keep a check on demands that are disproportional or outside the realm of legitimate purpose.

The panel discussed not only the tremendous economic cost of operating Internet restrictions, but also the negative impact these have on societies and on user trust. A civil society participant said that users needed to know why they were being cut off, and why providers were being compelled to suspend service. Greater transparency, communications and support for users to find other ways to connect were advocated.

Speakers also elaborated on the seriousness of transnational threats in the context of elections. Building upon those concerns, a panelist described the risks of the proliferation of hacking and malware attacks, and the value of encryption as one of the defenses. This illustrated governments' role in protecting data (including through having an enabling policy on encryption). The risk of authorities abusing surveillance methods in relation to elections was also raised.

As ICTs will be increasingly used in times of elections, they become a "black box" which cannot be observed (although observers might seek to get involved in certifying the integrity of the technology that is used). Situations of suspicion in relation to fears of manipulation of the "black box" could emerge, highlighting the need for steps to build the trust of voters in regard to the integrity of ICT during an election.

One representative asked about the extent to which data-mining for political purposes could be regulated.

In general, a lack of trust of citizens in elections stems from a common situation: a great deal of powers concentrated in a handful of institutions and insufficient transparency. For voters to trust that the results are a truthful reflection of their votes, there could be value in promoting decentralised verification, accountability, transparency and a multistakeholder approach.

Speakers on the first panel highlighted the challenges around setting national or regional regulations on Internet governance, given the global nature of the Internet and the potential for interference with the integrity of the process when electoral regulation in this area was overbroad or lacking in independence and legitimacy.

Individual speakers suggested options to

- Develop norms related to the protection of the Internet and related infrastructures from being attacked in times of peace (a “Geneva Convention for the Internet”).
- Highlight the incompatibility of Internet restrictions with the free flow of information that is needed for elections. Warn governments operating network disruptions of the risk of distrust and huge economic loss to which such practices expose them. Hold governments accountable for network disruptions.
- Build a global database, managed by genuine well-respected experts, to track and attribute the origin of cyberattacks and allow for public naming and shaming of the perpetrators in order to mitigate the risks.
- Ensure that there is parallel paper trail process for votes, in addition to the electronic transmissions during elections (ensuring for instance that in the polling stations there are copies of all the tally sheets which were given to each political party and that the tally sheets are published on the central website).
- Ensure that steps are taken by governments to protect voters’ registration data, regulate political advertising, and secure critical election infrastructure like voting machines, while avoiding unintended consequences and the appearance of impropriety and raising voters’ suspicions. Those policies and practices must protect, respect and fulfil rights to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Enhance the trust of users in ICTs by addressing the issue of network vulnerability and enhancing transparency and the multi-stakeholder approach.

Panel 2: Enhancing the quality of information around elections

Elections are periods when disinformation is often presented in various forms, thereby posing challenges to free, fair and transparent political contest. However, relevant actors often struggle to address this challenge without affecting legitimate expression and the circulation of information for political debate. This panel explored efforts to thread the needle between these conflicting interests, including what principles can guide those efforts, what works, and what the unintended consequences may be.

In spite of all the challenges, the panel recalled that social media still represents a strong opportunity for citizens to hold politicians and governments accountable. Nevertheless, the debate has recently focused on the issue of online misinformation and disinformation.

The panel looked at definitional problems surrounding the notion of “fake news”, which has not been strictly defined, and is therefore also used to denigrate contradictory opinion or to dismiss journalistic reports. Putting the monitoring process of “fake news” into the hands of government representatives could be problematic as they could then be in a position to decide what falls under this label. The risk is that “the treatment becomes worse than the disease”.

It was noted that there are also specific challenges tied to the capacity of regulatory authorities to monitor social media content, which exhibits enormous scale and some of which is individually targeted or in small groups and therefore “off-the-radar”. The distinction was noted about regulating companies and regulating the users of intermediary platforms. As a result, techniques applied to regulate traditional media are often not transferable to social media. However, a point made in the first panel was that electoral regulation of disinformation can be more practical once this kind of messaging transfers from social media into the public space of news media such as broadcasters.

Self-regulation efforts by Internet intermediaries was discussed, in particular the tools developed to address online disinformation/misinformation. Among the tools developed are: the removal of fake accounts on Facebook through enforcing the company's real name policy; the disruption of economic incentives that drive a lot of "fake news"; and the creation of newsfeed ranking techniques to identify "fake news" and downgrade their visibility. Involvement with fact-checking groups and promoting news literacy were also mentioned. Facebook said it would roll out transparency on political advertising in the course of the year.

Nevertheless, some describe these steps as patchwork-type solutions. There was a call for more transparency by the companies and greater multistakeholder engagement by them in order to help ensure the quality of information and build trust in times of elections. It was stated that fact-checking is a slow instrument requiring a great number of resources, while the volume of disinformation shared online is becoming larger and larger.

The work of academia on the impact of social media in shaping voters' information was also presented. It was highlighted that no evidence-based correlation has yet been made between "fake news", filter bubbles or media echo chambers and election votes. It was argued that attention could be shifted to ensuring that social media functioned as a space for public interest, rather than simply a business based on gaining the attention of users, often in an automated way.

Building on this, the importance of strengthening what UNESCO calls Media and Information Literacy (the growing body of competencies essential for information society today), especially among younger generations, in order to raise awareness among "netizens" of digital rights and threats during elections, was underscored. It was recommended that such efforts should be combined with upgrading the quality of information online with more training of journalists. The point was made that journalists need training to improve their coverage of rumours, hoaxes and other types of disinformation during elections. It was highlighted that the quality of information also depends on the ability of public authorities to protect journalists who are particularly vulnerable during elections campaigns to manipulation as well as threats.

An example was cited of the Crosscheck project during the 2017 French elections, involving 30 media houses, with support of a technology company, which investigated "false news" stories and publicised what was false or partly false.

Recommendations made by individual speakers on Panel 2 included the possibility to

- Work on methodologies that can benefit election stakeholders who monitor electoral communications, to provide a knowledge base for policy on regulation and self-regulation
- Monitor the potential over-regulation of digital electoral communications which can disproportionately limit freedom of expression and privacy.
- Create quality guidelines for social media, track where news items were coming from and signal if they were fact-checked, and develop policies on election advertising.
- Create fact-checking tools that allow everyone to see immediately online if a piece of news has been fact-checked or not.
- Empower media users by strengthening Media and Information Literacy, especially among younger generations, and to raise awareness among "netizens" on digital rights and threats, and in particular during elections times.
- Develop partnerships between those involved in voter education and those engaged in Media and Information Literacy in order to promote "digital citizenship".

- Disseminate good practices for fact-checking techniques regarding online media content and links, and transferring relevant skills among stakeholders.
- Train journalists to be able to give deeper coverage of the role of social media in relation to polls, including ways to track and rebut disinformation online.

Conclusion

The colloquium underlined two key messages concerning the interface between election integrity and online expression. For election integrity:

- The Internet needs to remain on, and digital infrastructure needs to be kept secure;
- The quality of online information needs to be enhanced by social media institutions and news media, and users should be empowered to critically engage with it.

Further documents

News article:

<https://en.unesco.org/news/open-internet-and-quality-information-key-preserve-integrity-elections>

Concept note for the colloquium:

https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/protect_integrity_elections_concept_note_en.pdf

Address by Getachew Engida, Deputy Director General of UNESCO:

https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ddg_opening_remarks_unesco_gni_colloquium_8_february.pdf

Opening remarks by Simon Pierre Nanitelamio, Deputy Director, Electoral Assistance Division, Department of Political Affairs, United Nations:

https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/opening_remarks_by_simon-pierre_nanitelamio_at_the_unesco_colloquium_on_communications_and_elections_on_8_february_2018_in_paris_-_8_february_2018.pdf

AGENDA

8.30 - 9.00 a.m.

Registration and badge pick-up 7, place de Fontenoy, UNESCO entrance

9.00 - 10.00 a.m.

Opening Remarks (Room XI)

- Getachew Engida, Deputy Director-General, UNESCO
- Judith Lichtenberg, Executive Director, *Global Network Initiative*
- Simon Pierre Nanitelamio, Deputy Director, Electoral Assistance Division, *United Nations Department of Political Affairs*
- Patrick Costello, Head of Division, European External Action Service, *European Union*

10.00 - 11.15 a.m.

Panel 1: Network availability, security and integrity around elections

Moderator:

- Chinmayi Arun, Research Director, *National Law University, Delhi, India*
 - » Aiste Zilinskiene, Member of the Central Electoral Commission and Chair of Online Media Association, Lithuania
 - » Constance Bommelaer, Senior Director, Global Internet Policy, *the Internet Society (ISOC)*
 - » Fernando Garcia, Executive Director, *Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales, Mexico*
 - » Steve Crown, VP and Deputy General Counsel, *Microsoft*
 - » Yves Nissim, Head of Transformation and Operation in CSR, *Orange*

Open microphone

11.15 - 11.45 a.m.

Coffee break and snacks

11.45 - 12.55 p.m.

Panel 2: Enhancing the quality of information around elections

Moderator:

- Abeer Saady, Vice President, *International Association of Women in Radio and Television, Egypt*
 - » Alexandria Walden, Counsel for Free Expression, *Google*
 - » Andy O'Connell, Public Policy Manager, *Facebook*
 - » Divina Frau-Meigs, UNESCO Chair Savoir Devenir, *Nouvelle Sorbonne, Paris*; member of the European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on fake news and online misinformation
 - » Nana Gyan-Appenteng, Chairperson, *National Media Commission* and President, *African Communications Regulation Authorities Network, Ghana*
 - » Olivier Schrameck, Président, *Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel, France*
 - » Rob Mahoney, Deputy Director, *Committee to Protect Journalists*

Open microphone

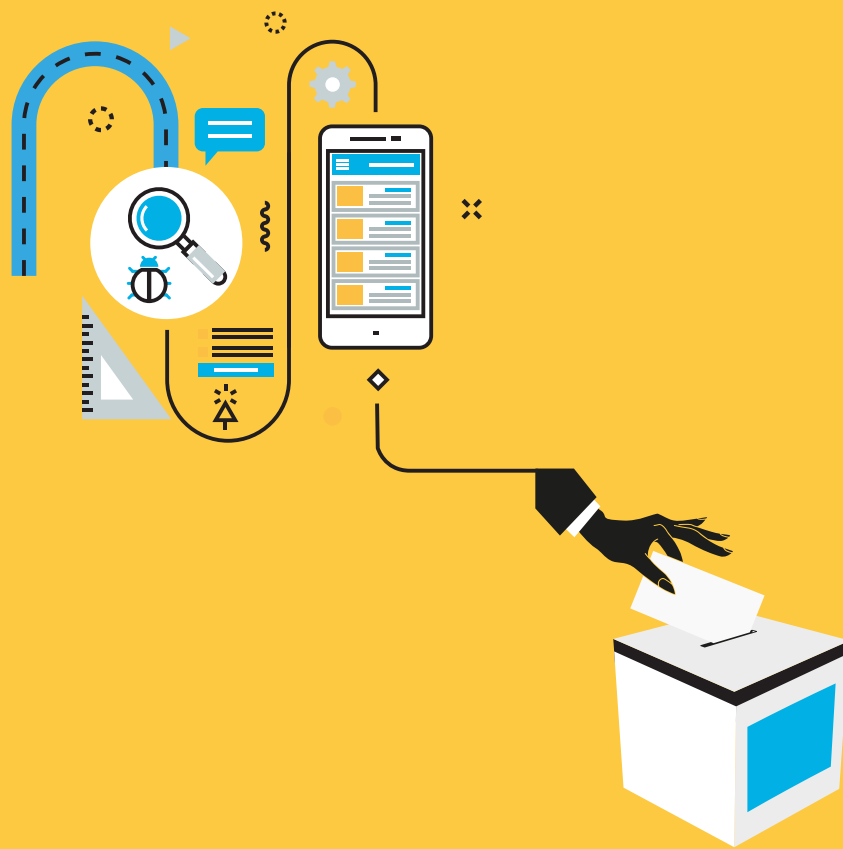
12.55 - 13.00 p.m.

Concluding Remarks

- Guy Berger, Director of the Division for Freedom of Expression and Media Development, *UNESCO*

Ludovic Peran stepped in for Alex Walden of Google; Olivier Schrameck, President of CSA, was unable to attend.





More info, visit:

en.unesco.org/integrity-of-elections

plus d'info, visitez :

fr.unesco.org/integrity-of-elections