

## “Opportunities as never before to interact with citizens”

Interview with Laura Chinchilla

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### As a former politician, what has been your own experience with social media in political campaigning?

My political campaign was the first one in my country to use social media. This was in 2009. So it was the first stage of social media being introduced

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in politics and at that time I would say that there were more positive than negative effects. At the time, I felt it was very important to use social media to bring my message to more people than before. Social media enabled me not only to communicate my message, but also

to listen to the people. It was a kind of two-way communication, providing us with the opportunity to interact with citizens as never before and to learn about their concerns and address them via our political platform. So in general terms, I would say that it was a very good experience. Of course, there were already fake news and insults from anonymous sources as well. But on balance, it was more of a positive experience than a negative one back then.

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### What are the risks of social media that have arisen since then?

Unfortunately, we have seen many kinds of risks arising from the use of social media. It is not social media itself: it has to do with the way some people are using it. The most important risk, in my opinion, comes from fake news and disinformation, creating an aggressive environment around elections.

We have also seen in some elections, for example in Latin America and the United States, how some sources use social media to delegitimise the role of the electoral authorities. There have been attempts to suggest that elections were rigged if the result was not favourable to one specific candidate. So what we see is that social media is not only being used in a traditional way, for example to highlight the contrasts between candidates’ policies, but also to spread disinformation and discredit the electoral authorities.

**“Some sources use social media to delegitimise the role of the electoral authorities.”**

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### What actions can the international community take to fight online disinformation and hate speech?

We have to recognise that this is an international problem which requires attention from the international community. We need to create awareness about the seriousness of misusing social media and its impacts. There are also really good experiences of how to neutralise the negative use of media. So international and regional organisations can collect these experiences and share them with different kinds of actors around the world. It is also important to promote recommendations on how to deal with this issue, for example through codes of conduct and principles that should inspire the regulations we are trying to implement.

## What is the Commission's contribution in addressing these challenges?

The Commission is trying to identify the most important challenges coming from social media, especially with regard to electoral integrity. Something we have noticed is that most of the discussion around this topic is coming from the Global North.

**“We want to focus our attention on the Global South, because many countries do not have enough tools to face the challenges around social media.”**

Most of the recommendations are also coming from the developed countries. For this reason, we want to focus our attention on the Global South, because we see that many countries do not have enough tools to face the challenges around social media, even though they are arising in these countries as well.

### Laura Chinchilla



Laura Chinchilla, former president of Costa Rica (2010-2014), currently chairs the Kofi Annan Commission on Elections and Democracy in the Digital Age. She also holds the position of Vice President of the Club de Madrid. In addition, she is a guest professor of the Technological Institute of Monterrey in Mexico, of the University of Georgetown in Washington D.C. and the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil. She holds an M.A. in Public Policy from the University of Georgetown.

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