5th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network

#ParlAmericasOPN

🏷️ **TITLE:** Countering Disinformation to Promote Responsible Public Discourse

THEMES: Gender and disinformation, ethical algorithms, data protection, electoral integrity

📅 **DATES:** March 15, 19, and 26, 2021

📍 **LOCATION:** Virtual

🎤 **PARTICIPANTS:** More than **200** parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, experts, and representatives of civil society organizations and youth organizations from **30** countries

🤝 **HOST:** Parliament of Canada

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

These activities aligned with SDG 16.

The 5th OPN gathering consisted of two working sessions, each with a series of thematic breakout groups, and an interactive panel and plenary session. These meetings brought parliamentarians together with diverse stakeholders from across the hemisphere to discuss some of the most critical issues related to the effects of disinformation and computational propaganda on democracy, institutions, and social dialogue.

Starting from the understanding that disinformation is multifaceted, globalized, and systemic, the gathering's working sessions were designed to analyse the multiple manifestations of disinformation from different perspectives, including its gendered dimensions, the protection of personal data, electoral integrity, the role of the media, and ethics in algorithms.

To set the stage for the breakout group discussions, each of the working sessions was inaugurated by a keynote address from a subject matter expert who contextualized the disinformation phenomenon, shared their reflections on its primary effects on democracy and social dialogue, and offered insights on the actions parliamentarians can take to mitigate its consequences.

The plenary session explored the critical issues related to new information and communication technologies, digital disinformation, and computational propaganda. Participants exchanged on the inherent complexity of several of the main aspects of these issues, such as the tension that exists between content moderation and freedom of expression; the magnitude, power and decentralized nature of large technology companies; the primary considerations that legislation must take into account to counteract the effects of disinformation and regulate digital platforms and applications; the worrisome prevalence of online violence against women and girls; among others.

Among the key references and documents presented in the gathering were:

- Guide to guarantee freedom of expression regarding deliberate disinformation in electoral contexts. Organization of American States – OAS, 2019.
- Social media guide for parliaments and parliamentarians. Inter-Parliamentarian Union, 2021.
- Creating a Data Protection Framework: a Do's and Don'ts Guide for Lawmakers. Access Now, 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SESSIONS

Opening remarks by:
- The Honourable **Anthony Rota** (Canada), Speaker of the House of Commons
- Senator, the Honourable **Pierrette Ringuette** (Canada), Speaker Pro Tempore of the Senate
- Senator, the Honourable **Rosa Galvez** (Canada), President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change
- Member of Parliament **Bruce Stanton** (Canada), Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons
- Senator **Blanca Ovelar** (Paraguay), President of ParlAmericas

Dialogues moderated by:
- Senator **Bertha Alicia Caraveo Camarena** (Mexico)
- Senator, the Honourable **Ranard Eric Henfield** (The Bahamas), Vice-President of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network for the Caribbean

Panellists:
- Ms. **Catalina Botero Marino**, Member of the Facebook Oversight Board
- Ms. **Lucina Di Meco**, Gender Equality Expert and Co-founder of #ShePersisted Global
- Member of Parliament **Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** (Canada), International Grand Committee on Disinformation

Closing remarks by:
- Member of Parliament **Marc Serré** (Canada), ParlAmericas Board Member
- Member of the National Assembly **Maritza Espinales** (Nicaragua), ParlAmericas Board Member
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Javier Macaya Danús** (Chile), President of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network

Key takeaways from the thematic working groups (March 15 and 19)

Breakout group themes included: Gender and disinformation; collaborating with the news media sector; promoting ethical algorithms; ensuring privacy and the protection of personal data and securing electoral integrity.

1) Gender disinformation seeks to negatively alter public perception of the career paths of women politicians in order to obtain immediate political benefits and discourage their involvement in public affairs.

2) Legislators can shed light on this phenomenon , for example, by raising public awareness of its consequences and establishing support networks for women who have been affected. It is likewise important to promote public literacy programs with a specific emphasis on gender disinformation that evaluates the impact of new technologies and applications in order to have better tools for decision making.

3) The disruptive nature of digital communication, the globalized nature and influential capacity of major technology companies, as well as the very characteristics of the digital market, require that the laws and regulations governing the telecommunications industry be revised and updated to better respond to the challenges of a new and complex reality and to avoid any type of censorship.

4) Public authorities need to acknowledge the importance of independent journalism and the diversity of the media ecosystem and civic spaces as allies in mitigating the effects of disinformation and computational propaganda. In addition, there is a pressing need to promote media and information literacy among users and journalists to counter digital disinformation.

5) Due to their complexity, ubiquity, and specific effects on people's lives, it is necessary to consider policies and regulations to promote algorithmic literacy, and the transparency and oversight of algorithms and their consequences on people's lives.

6) It is imperative that parliaments advance discussions that convene government and private sector representatives to promote democratic, transparent, inclusive and ethical paradigms in the design of artificial intelligence and computational algorithms.

7) Regulations that seek to protect personal data must be based on the right of all individuals to know, update, and rectify any information collected about them in public and private databases or files, as well as in the applications and social media platforms with which they interact.

8) It is important that the laws that are implemented or updates made to the existing regulatory frameworks for data protection, follow the highest international standards in this area and include the principles of quality, lawfulness, purpose, and proportionality in the collection, transfer, and use of personal data, and communicate to citizens in a transparent manner their rights and guarantees.

9) In the Americas and the Caribbean, disinformation campaigns deployed through social networks and digital messaging systems tend to exacerbate political polarization, and target minorities (particularly migrants), political dissidents and women (both politicians and voters).

10) To counteract the effects of digital disinformation and computational propaganda in electoral processes, it is necessary to contemplate a series of actions that may include moderating online content and behaviour during

campaigns and elections (in observance of freedom of expression rights); promoting transparency during campaigns and elections; strengthening campaign finance regulations to promote fairness; and facilitating the dissemination of transparent and reliable information during campaigns and elections.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Keynote address:
- Professor **Taylor Owen**, Beaverbrook Chair in Media, Ethics and Communications at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at Canada's McGill University
- Mr. **Marco Aurelio Ruediger**, Director of Public Policy Analysis at the Getulio Vargas Foundation of Brazil

Thematic working group presentations by:
- Ms. **Amalia Toledo**, Consultant on gender and technology
- Ms. **Sandra Pepera**, Director for Gender, Women and Democracy, National Democratic Institute
- Ms. **Elena Gil González**, lawyer, doctoral candidate and professor at the Instituto de Empresa Law School
- Ms. **Estelle Massé**, Senior Policy Analyst and Global Data Protection Lead, Access Now
- Mr. **Pedro Vaca Villarreal**, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)
- Mr. **Daniel Arnaudo**, Advisor for Information Strategies, National Democratic Institute
- Ms. **Victoria Welborn**, Program Manager for the Technology and Innovation Program, National Democratic Institute
- Ms. **Laura Zommer**, Executive Director, Chequeado
- Ms. **Nazima Raghubir**, First Vice President of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers
- Ms. **Micaela Mantegna**, Professor at the Center for Technology and Society, University of San Andrés, and Affiliate Researcher at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center

Good Legislative Practices

The working groups also provided an opportunity to exchange good legislative practices related to different aspects of disinformation, online violence, electoral integrity, and data protection.

Disinformation and Fake News

Representative **Cecilia Bottino Fiuri** (Uruguay), Chair of the Committee on Constitution, Codes, General Legislation, and Administration, presented the Ethical Pact against Disinformation, an initiative signed by Uruguay's political parties to combat the creation and dissemination of disinformation campaigns and fake news. Among other commitments, the signing parties agreed "not to generate or promote fake news or disinformation campaigns targeting political adversaries."

Consult the text of the pact here (in Spanish).

Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Orlando Silva** (Brazil) presented *Comprove*, a tool developed by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies which, through a WhatsApp channel, allows citizens to clarify information about parliamentary work and verify the veracity of information and news about the Chamber disseminated through social networks.

Consult everything related to *Comprove* here (in Portuguese).

Online Gender Violence

Senator **Martha Lucía Mícher Camarena** (Mexico), Chair of the Senate Committee for Gender Equality, presented the professed "Olimpia Law," a set of reforms to the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence that criminalize digital violence and punish crimes that violate the sexual intimacy of individuals through digital media.

Consult all of the details and background of the law here (in Spanish).

Electoral Integrity

The Honourable Senator **René Cormier** (Canada) presented some of the updates introduced to the Canada Elections Act. The amendments, which were designed to boost voter participation, make voting more accessible, and improve the transparency and security of electoral processes, included aspects such as adjusting limits on third-party financial contributions and tightening restrictions on the political activities of foreign individuals and organizations.

Consult the law introducing amendments to the Canada Elections Act here.

Artificial Intelligence and Algorithms

Senator **Kenneth Pugh Olavarría** (Chile) shared some of the interesting and pioneering experiences being advanced by the Chilean Congress on issues related to neurorights (in Spanish), ethics in algorithms, the role of artificial intelligence in governance, and data protection.

Consult the Artificial Intelligence for Chile report, prepared by the Senate of Chile, here (in Spanish).

Data Protection

Member of the National Assembly **César Solórzano** (Ecuador), Vice- President of the National Assembly, presented some of main highlights of the Organic Law on the Protection of Personal Data, including, for example, the recognition of proactive responsibility as the central element and the incorporation of some of the highest standards regarding the treatment of personal data: lawfulness, transparency, legitimacy, purpose, and relevance, as well as proportionality of the treatment, consent, confidentiality, quality, conservation, and security of such data.

Consult the text of the law here (in Spanish).

His Honour **Reginald Farley** (Barbados), President of the Senate, presented the Data Protection Act, which was passed in 2019. This law, inspired in large part by the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), has been recognized as one of the most advanced privacy laws in the Caribbean as it incorporates some of the highest international standards in the field.

Consult the text of the law here.

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Dialogues moderated by:
- Senator **Natalie Campbell-Rodriques** (Jamaica)
- Member of Congress **Andrea Villagrán** (Guatemala)
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Ramiro Gutiérrez** (Argentina)
- His Honour **Reginald Farley** (Barbados), President of the Senate
- Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas (2019-2020)
- Member of the House of Representatives **Juan David Vélez** (Colombia)
- Senator **Antares Vázquez** (Mexico), Member of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas
- The Honourable **Alincia Williams Grant** (Antigua and Barbuda), President of the Senate and Member of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas

Senator, the Honourable PIERRETTE RINGUETTE (Canada), Speaker Pro Tempore of the Senate

Disinformation campaigns during an election can have a range of harmful impacts. For example, the disinformation spread through such concerted campaigns can obscure legitimate information for voters, polarize social discourse, and weaken confidence in the electoral process.

Member of the Chamber of Deputies JAVIER MACAYA DANÚS (Chile), President-elect of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network

We are experiencing the multiple ways in which disinformation is affecting democracy and the fundamental values and principles we share by allowing national and foreign actors to spread harmful narratives, exacerbate social and political polarization, and instigate anti-democratic visions among the citizenry.

Senator BLANCA OVELAR (Paraguay), President of ParlAmericas

Mitigating the effects of disinformation and computational propaganda, responding to the consolidation of monopolistic models in the information and communication technologies sector, and promoting the use of ethical and inclusive algorithms are initiatives of such magnitude that they are only viable if they are developed jointly.

The Honourable ANTHONY ROTA (Canada), Speaker of the House of Commons

Disinformation during a global pandemic can endanger public health and safety, especially if people believe false prevention measures or treatments, or if their trust in health services and public institutions is undermined.

Member of Parliament MARC SERRÉ (Canada), ParlAmericas Board Member

We can learn from the national initiatives and innovative legislative practices being implemented around the world. We learned about a few of them today. In Canada, for example, we are developing the Digital Citizen Initiative, a multi-component strategy that aims to support democracy and social cohesion by building citizen resilience against online disinformation and building partnerships to support a healthy information ecosystem.

Senator, the Honourable RANARD ERIC HENFIELD (The Bahamas), Vice-President of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network for the Caribbean

Facing the multifaceted, globalised and systemic nature of disinformation requires addressing its multiple expressions from different perspectives. This gathering will provide an opportunity to engage in dialogues around some of those pressing issues and to share innovative legislative practices to curb their effects, keeping in mind that promoting legislative openness is a great way to contribute to combating disinformation.

Presentation of the results of open parliament commitments adopted at the 4th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network, and new commitments.

Parliamentarians across the Americas and the Caribbean are undertaking openness efforts through the implementation of commitments adopted as part of an Open Parliament Action Plan, an Open Government Action Plan submitted by countries to the OGP (Open Government Partnership), or through other initiatives reported to ParlAmericas during the annual gatherings of the OPN.

The ParlAmericas Open Parliament Commitment tool allows users to visualize, compare, download and track parliaments' progress on the achievement of the legislative openness commitments presented, using a traffic light model. The commitments can be viewed by country and by Open Parliament Pillar (transparency, accountability, citizen participation, strategic planning, and ethics and probity).

The following parliaments presented updates to commitments made during the 4th gathering: Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

NEW COMMITMENTS TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN 2021-2022

Country	Pilar	New Commitments
Canada	Strategic Planning	**Presentation of the road map for developing an Open Parliament Action Plan in the Parliament of Canada** Present before the Senate and House of Commons the Road Map for Developing an Open Parliament Action Plan, as adopted by the Executive Committee of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, and undertake the necessary efforts to implement the concrete actions established therein.
Chile	Strategic Planning	**Co-creation of the legislative commitments of the 5th Open Government Action Plan 2020-2022** (in Spanish) Co-create new open parliament commitments with civil society, which will be included in the 5th Open Government Action Plan 2020-2022.
Honduras	Strategic Planning	**Capacity-building for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff concerning open parliament, with a goal of developing the next Open Parliament Action Plan** Development of capacity-building sessions in which parliamentarians and parliamentary officials can deepen their knowledge of open parliament, legislative transparency and citizen participation.

NEW COMMITMENTS TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN 2021-2022

Country	Pilar	New Commitments
Costa Rica	Citizen Participation	**Implementation of the legislative commitments of the Open State Action Plan 2019-2021** Co-create a comprehensive, innovative, and multi-channel strategy for citizen participation for the Legislative Assembly, based on the opening of collaborative spaces and processes. Additionally, establish an Open State Civic Forum that brings together citizens and civil society organizations to evaluate existing regulations on transparency, access to information, accountability and citizen participation, and promotes new proposals and reforms to existing legislation. These proposals will be presented to the Members of the Legislative Assembly for their evaluation and possible adoption.
Ecuador	Strategic Planning	**Presentation of the Regulations for Implementing Open Parliament in the National Assembly** (in Spanish), **approved by the Legislative Administration Council** Submit to the Assembly the regulations, whose proposal includes principles of open parliament and open government, as well as international best practices in the matter. The proposal was formulated in conjunction with civil society, through a process of co-creation of regulations, with a consulting team with national and international experience in the promotion of Open Parliament policies, and National Assembly officials involved in the operation of open parliament in the institution.
Colombia	Strategic Planning	**Implementation of the 5th Action Plan for an Open and Transparent Congress 2020-2021** (in Spanish) Implement the commitments of the 5th Action Plan co-created with civil society organizations around 5 pillars: citizen participation; technological innovation; transparency and the fight against corruption; accountability and austerity; and corporate ethics and morality.

NEW COMMITMENTS TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN 2021-2022

Country	Pilar	New Commitments
Paraguay	Strategic Planning	**Co-creation of the legislative commitments of the 5th Open Government Action Plan 2021-2023** (in Spanish) Co-create new open parliament commitments with civil society, which will be included in the 5th Open Government Action Plan 2021-2023.
Trinidad and Tobago	Citizen Participation	**Strengthening citizen participation and accountability** Promote youth participation by restructuring the National Youth Parliament to allow for hybrid debates that facilitate participation. In addition, Parliament intends to recommend to the Executive that the presentations and perspectives of young people in the debates be taken into account in the drafting of legislation. It also seeks to improve the use of survey tools in all committees to allow for greater citizen participation. Lastly, it seeks to ensure better financial accountability through continuous, real-time monitoring of the annual budget by the Civil Service and Budget Committee through the submission of timely and detailed quarterly reports of all allocations and expenditures of the various Department and Agency heads.
Nicaragua	Citizen Participation	**Strengthening the Policy of Protagonism of the People in Parliamentary Activity** (in Spanish) Strengthen the mechanisms and spaces for public participation in parliamentary work by fostering dialogue between citizens and their representatives in parliament, through visits by elementary, high school and university students, social organizations and State institutions; providing lectures or talks in and outside of the National Assembly on the laws and their contents, the structure and functioning of the National Assembly, etc.; conducting visits and tours of the "Carlos Núñez Téllez" Legislative Complex; welcoming visits from foreign delegations interested in learning about the National Assembly; and explaining the media and social networks used by the National Assembly to disseminate and publicize the legislative and institutional work of Parliament.

Executive of the Open Parliamentary Network

Following the elections held during the plenary session of the gathering, the Executive Committee of the Open Parliament Network now consists of:

President
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Javier Macaya Danús** (Chile)

First Vice-President - North America
- Senator **Bertha Alicia Caraveo Camarena** (Mexico)

Second Vice-President - North America
- The Honourable **René Cormier**, Senator (Canada)

Vice-President - The Caribbean
- The Honourable **Ranard Eric Henfield**, Senator (The Bahamas)

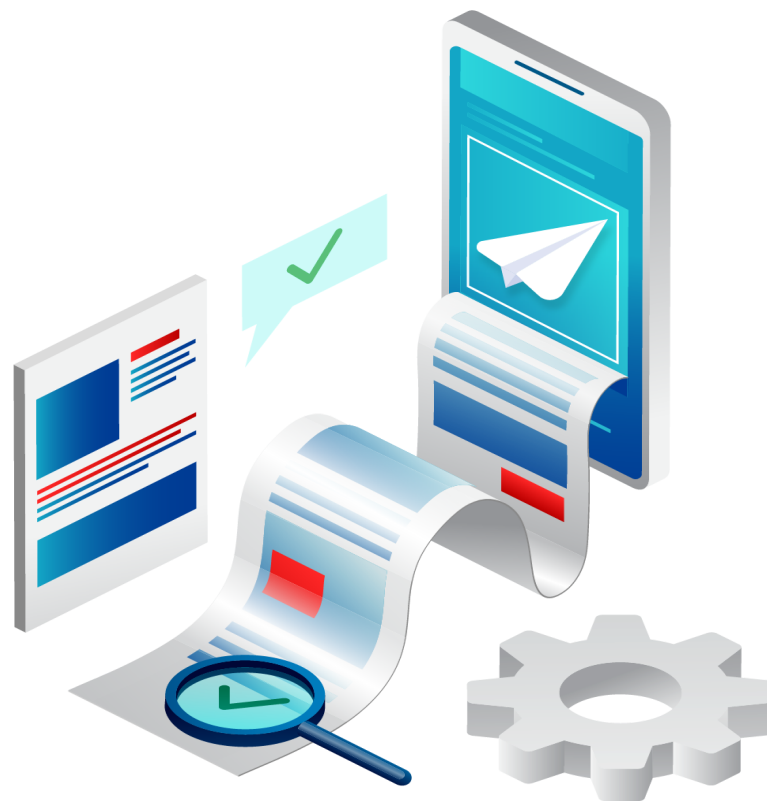First Vice-President - Central America
- Member of the Legislative Assembly **Ana Lucía Delgado Orozco** (Costa Rica)

Second Vice-President - Central America
- Member of the National Assembly **Corina Cano Córdoba** (Panama)

Vice-President - South America
- Member of the National Assembly **Wilma Andrade Muñoz** (Ecuador)

Declaration

The gathering's plenary session (March 26) concluded with a reading of the declaration. Among the commitments adopted by the convened parliamentary delegations are:

- Convene our governments, the media, civil society organizations, social movements, and technology companies to agree on actions to safeguard the integrity and transparency of the electoral processes in our countries, bearing in mind the increasingly sophisticated strategies of digital disinformation and computational propaganda and in adherence to international standards for freedom of expression— a fundamental right in democratic societies.
- Promote international collaboration among the Governments of our region and, particularly among the legislative branch, to enable coordinated responses that include recent advances in cybersecurity and data protection, in light of the globalized and systemic nature of disinformation and the actors and platforms involved.
- Insist on the need to promote debates and establish or designate legislative committees dedicated to addressing the phenomenon of disinformation, raising public awareness of its consequences, and developing policies and legislative measures to counteract these consequences.
- Reaffirm our duty to promote responsible public discourse in our parliaments and in our in-person and virtual public interactions, employing respectful, inclusive, and tolerant communication practices that foster constructive dialogue and recognize the value of political plurality in our societies.

The complete agendas (March 15, 19, 26), press release, video-recording playlist, the podcast of the key note address and presentations from this activity can be accessed on the ParlAmericas website.

PARTICIPATING PARLIAMENTS

Antigua and Barbuda

Argentina

Barbados

Belize

Bolivia

Brazil

Canada

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Dominica

Ecuador

Grenada

Guatemala

Guyana

Honduras

Jamaica

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

Uruguay

Suriname

The Bahamas

Trinidad and Tobago

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Canada

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This gathering was made possible with the generous support of the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada and the Parliament of Canada.

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ParlAmericas

ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY** in the **INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM**

ParlAmericas mainstreams **GENDER EQUALITY** by advocating for women's political empowerment and the application of a gender lens in legislative work

ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

ParlAmericas is composed of the **35 NATIONAL LEGISLATURES** of the countries of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean

ParlAmericas fosters **OPEN PARLIAMENTS** by advancing the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity

ParlAmericas organizes consultations and builds **MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS** with young leaders and civil society organizations

ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **GOOD PRACTICES** and promotes **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE** in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals

ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE**

ParlAmericas is headquartered in **OTTAWA, CANADA**

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