



OBSERVING ELECTIONS

What is the goal of election observation?

International election observation is now common around the world and accepted as an international norm. The overarching goal is to support efforts to strengthen democratic processes and institutions and to support the conduct of elections that meet international standards, are peaceful, and have credible results. On election day, credible and impartial observers can strengthen an electoral process by reassuring voters they can safely and secretly cast their ballots and electoral fraud will be detected.

Election observation:

- Demonstrates the international community's interest and support for elections that meet international standards as reflected in a variety of international public documents and declarations;
- Reinforces the efforts of civil society and domestic monitoring organizations in the electoral process and increases the credibility of their work;
- Provides an impartial assessment of the electoral process and, where relevant, recommends ways to improve the process in future elections;
- Assists election administrators, political parties, and civil society groups in developing tools and skills to peacefully resolve conflicts and discourage violence related to the electoral process; and
- Provides a foundation for peace-building and democratization initiatives in neighboring areas and throughout the world.

What do long-term and short-term election observers do?

Because an election is a political process that unfolds over time, the Center deploys long-term observers to analyze election laws and assess voter registration, election preparations, voter education efforts, and the openness of campaigns. Information is collected through various means, including meetings with election officials, members of political parties, civil society organizations, and representatives of the international community. Carter Center observers also may be asked to focus on specific issues relevant to a particular country, such as political party finance or election-related conflict. Long-term observers are usually deployed in teams of two to various locations throughout a country to maximize geographic coverage.

The Carter Center also may send short-term observers around a country to observe balloting and vote tabulation. These are high-level delegations comprised of former elected officials (sometimes including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn), other eminent persons, scholars, and elections experts. Wherever possible, the Center collaborates with other international and domestic election observers to get the broadest picture of election day.

How does The Carter Center assess an election?

Carter Center election observation missions assess the electoral process against the constitution, election laws, and other pertinent legislation of the host country, as well as the host country's international commitments as outlined in key international and regional treaties.



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Observation missions are conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which were a result of collaboration among The Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), and the U.N. Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD) to promote global consensus among the world's main election observation groups. The resulting Declaration and the Code of Conduct for International Observers was launched in 2005 and has been endorsed by more than 30 observer organizations.

Are there certain criteria for what constitutes a democratic election?

The Center, collaborating with other organizations, is currently spearheading efforts to identify and foster consensus around a single set of international standards for what constitutes a genuinely democratic election. Election observation should be understood in the context of, and closely linked to, broader efforts to promote democracy, with elections as unique opportunities to assess how well a country's political institutions serve its citizens.

What are some of the current challenges of election observation?

Current challenges facing election observation include developing observation techniques suited for automated and e-voting systems, promoting more sustained follow up on the recommendations produced by election observation missions, and ensuring that international democracy assistance has a sustainable impact on democratization processes.