



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

(print version)

Press release

US elections showed all fundamentals of a democratic vote, but electoral reform efforts should continue

WASHINGTON, 5 November 2008 - Yesterday's elections in the United States demonstrated the essential principles of a pluralistic democracy characterized by transparency and the respect for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, but efforts to enhance public confidence in the election process should continue, the observer mission deployed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) concluded in a statement released today.

Voters were able to make informed choices in a competitive and vigorously fought election. Free and pluralistic media and extensive campaign activities provided voters with a wealth of information about the candidates, their platforms and the election process. These elections generally met OSCE commitments. But the observers also said that the concerns that arose during previous elections have not been fully addressed in some states.

"We have seen an election that displayed all the fundamentals of a genuinely democratic vote," said Ambassador Audrey Glover, the Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission.

"At the same time, the controversies during the campaign over persisting allegations of election irregularities showed that electoral reform efforts must continue to address remaining shortcomings and allow voters to fully regain confidence in the election system."

Allegations relating to fraudulent voter registration, disenfranchisement of voters, and the malfunctioning of voting systems featured prominently in the public debate. They were widely covered and investigated by the media and legal action was taken in some states to address them.

The observers noted that the highly decentralized legal framework for the elections and widely varying state election laws have led to a lack of uniformity among states in the way the elections were organized. The interpretation and implementation of federal laws lacked consistency.

The observers also noted that overall the elections were professionally administered. Occasional long waiting lines and minor technical problems with voting machines had little impact on the efficiency of the process on election day. However, the secrecy of the vote was not sufficiently protected at some polling stations due to the way in which ballots were scanned, and some states do not guarantee the secrecy of early in-person and absentee by-mail voting.

The OSCE/ODIHR was invited by the US government to observe the 4 November elections. As a participating State of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the

United States has committed itself to adhere to OSCE election standards and invite international observers.

The OSCE/ODIHR observer mission began work on 10 October and consists of 60 international experts and long-term observers from 20 OSCE participating States. In line with standard practice for limited election observation missions, election day procedures were not monitored in a systematic and comprehensive manner, but observers visited polling stations in a number of states.

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