

US elections showed resilience of democratic institutions in a highly polarized campaign: observers



Pere Joan Pons and Pia Kauma at a polling station in Washington, 5 November 2024

Engagement was high across the political spectrum in yesterday's US elections, underscoring the resilience of the country's democratic institutions. The presidential vote was highly competitive, but the campaign was marked by deep polarization and harsh and confrontational rhetoric, while public trust was undermined by disinformation campaigns and political violence, international observers said in a statement issued in Washington today.

The joint observation mission from the OSCE PA and OSCE/ODIHR found that while the constitution and a number of federal laws provide a broad and sound framework for holding elections in line with democratic standards, the legal framework has remained mostly unchanged at the federal level since the last elections, leaving most previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations unaddressed.

"These elections were a demonstration of the resilience of America's democratic institutions, as public engagement overcame repeated unfounded claims of elections fraud and divisive rhetoric," said Pia Kauma, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers. "Especially in this contentious campaign environment, our observations serve to provide a full picture of the situation."

The elections were organized efficiently and professionally, but threats, harassment, and violence against election administrators were a cause for serious concern and made recruiting

election workers a challenge, as well as making additional security measures necessary. Voter ID remained a controversial issue, with supporters claiming the laws safeguard election integrity and opponents arguing they disproportionately affect various minority groups. Certain segments of the US population remain disenfranchised, despite prior OSCE recommendations. Election day itself was managed professionally in the polling stations visited by observers.

"Disinformation, threats and even cases of political violence have put this country through a stress test, but these elections showed that the democratic processes in the US remain in good health," said OSCE PA Head of Delegation Pere Joan Pons. "With campaign spending at record high levels in what appears to be continuous 'campaign inflation', systems that enable independent groups to circumvent campaign finance regulations must be amended to avoid inequalities."

While campaign finance is regulated by federal laws and court rulings that contain detailed regulations on the funding of candidates, the campaigns for this year's election were marked by record high spending, increasing concerns over unregulated financial contributions and disproportionate advantage for candidates with extensive funding. Civil and political rights were respected throughout the campaign, but it unfolded in a highly polarized environment amidst personal attacks and incidents of election violence including assassination attempts on former President Donald Trump, as well as mutual accusations between the top-running candidates.

The OSCE PA observers worked closely with the OSCE/ODIHR mission, led by Tamás Meszerics. The observation mission totalled 249 observers from 45 countries, made up of 85 ODIHR-deployed experts and long-term observers, and 164 parliamentarians and staff from the OSCE PA. Comprised of parliamentarians from 40 different countries, the OSCE PA mission deployed to states including Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, California, Nevada, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington DC.

Moldova's well-managed run-off offered voters genuine choice despite deficiencies: observers

The efficiently administered 3 November second round of Moldova's presidential election offered voters a choice between genuine political alternatives, international observers said in a statement of preliminary findings and conclusions on Monday. Candidates were able to campaign freely, but the quiet, ten-day campaign was marked by an increase in negative rhetoric from across the political spectrum targeting both contestants, often spread through online social networks. The challenges posed by foreign interference and vote-buying continued to reverberate during the run-off campaign, the statement says.

"The high voter engagement, by women in particular, both in Moldova and abroad, reflects a strong commitment to shaping the country's future," said Lucie Potůčková, the Special Co-ordinator and leader of the OSCE short-term observers, and Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation. "This process was well managed at polling stations and demonstrates that Moldovans across political views can come together and communicate openly and respectfully."

The application of general regulations to the short second-round period resulted in conflicting provisions and ambiguities, limiting the effectiveness of legal remedies and campaign opportunities, while overly burdensome financial reporting requirements, combined with limited disclosure, negatively impacted the transparency of campaign finances for the second round. The incumbent continued to benefit from the misuse of



Lucie Potůčková delivers post-election statement, 4 November 2024

public resources, albeit this was significantly less widespread than in the first round, and from unbalanced media coverage. This did not provide the contestants with equal opportunities, the observers said.

The run-off was held amid continuing investigations into interference from abroad and vote-buying schemes intended to influence the outcomes of the first-round, and the constitutional referendum that was held simultaneously. These investigations included detentions, searches of premises, the seizure of materials, and the issuing of fines. Preparations for the second round were efficient and professional, and the election administration met legal deadlines. The Central Election Commission continued to work in a collegial and transparent manner and held open sessions. The Commission continued its voter education programme between rounds, including through dedicated materials for students and first-time voters.

The OSCE PA team worked closely with colleagues from the OSCE/ODIHR, European Parliament, and PACE.

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