

## **Observation of US elections - Q&As**

### **Will there be international observers to monitor the 4 November general elections in the United States?**

Yes. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will observe the elections. There will be election experts and long-term observers deployed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and short-term observers deployed by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

### **How come a European organization observes elections in the US?**

The US is a member of the OSCE and has agreed to implement the same standards as any other member states. All OSCE member states have agreed to invite international observers to monitor their elections. This is why we have received an invitation from the US government to come to the US for the upcoming elections.

### **The US is one of the oldest democracies in the world. It does not need foreign observers to tell it how to conduct democratic elections, does it?**

The US indeed has a long-standing tradition of democratic elections. But no system is perfect, and past elections have shown that there are issues that can be improved. The OSCE/ODIHR is one of the leading election observation institutions in the world, with over ten years of experience in monitoring elections and more than 150 elections observed. On the basis of its experience and expertise, the OSCE/ODIHR can identify existing shortcomings and make recommendations on how to address them.

### **On what basis will the US elections be judged?**

The basis for our assessment will be the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, which contains a catalogue of election-related commitments. The US, as any other OSCE participating State, is bound by these commitments.

### **How many observers will be deployed to monitor the elections?**

A team of 13 election experts is based in Washington DC. In addition, 48 long-term observers will be based in teams of two across the country. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will deploy a short-term observation mission for election day.

### **What will the observers focus on?**

The OSCE/ODIHR, with its long-term observers, will focus on the overall framework for these elections. This includes state legal frameworks, election reform issues, the election campaign and the media, electronic voting, and other issues such as voter registration, voter identification, and voting rights.

The OSCE/ODIHR will not monitor election day procedures in a comprehensive and systematic manner, although observers will visit polling stations around the country on election day. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will focus on election day proceedings.

The purpose of the OSCE/ODIHR limited election observation mission is not only to assess the elections, but also to look at examples of best practices that could be useful for other countries.

**How do you decide where the observers will be deployed?**

The OSCE/ODIHR aims to ensure balanced coverage in its election observation. Observers will be deployed to a variety of states including those where problems have been identified or are expected; to states selected at random; to so-called ‘battleground states’; and states where either Democrats or Republicans are considered to have a stronghold. Each observer team will cover between one and three states.

**Is it true that some of the observers come from countries that are in the process of transition to democracy? What qualifies them to judge elections in a long-standing democracy such as the United States?**

The OSCE includes a broad variety of participating States, some are long-standing democracies, others are in still transition. All OSCE/ODIHR observers – except the election experts in the core team in Washington – are seconded by participating States, i.e. they are selected and paid by their governments. This is standard practice. The national diversity of election monitors protects the election observation mission from being dominated by observers from one country, or one group of countries. But it is important to stress that observers do not represent their respective governments. They are thoroughly briefed by the OSCE/ODIHR and are obliged to follow the OSCE/ODIHR’s election observation methodology and the OSCE/ODIHR code of conduct for election observers.

**Did the OSCE observe previous elections in the US?**

Yes, the OSCE/ODIHR observed the 2006 mid-term congressional elections, the 2004 presidential elections and the 2002 general elections.

**What was your conclusion on the last presidential election?**

In its final report for the 2004 elections, the OSCE/ODIHR concluded that the elections “mostly met the OSCE commitments. They were conducted in an environment that reflects a long-standing democratic tradition, including institutions governed by the rule of law, free and generally professional media, and a civil society intensively engaged in the election process. There was exceptional public interest in the two leading presidential candidates and the issues raised by their respective campaigns, as well as in the election process itself. However, a number of issues were identified, particularly in the context of the ongoing electoral reform process, which merit further consideration.”