

THE
CARTER CENTER



Democratic Republic of the Congo

Frequently Asked Questions About Carter Center Election Observation Missions

December 2023

How many elections has The Carter Center observed?

The Center has observed more than 115 elections in 40 countries, including the United States, since 1989. In addition, the Center has sent smaller teams of experts to assess key aspects of several other elections around the world.

How big is a typical election observation mission?

Sizes vary but typically a Carter Center delegation ranges from 40 to 120 accredited observers, including Carter Center staff.

What is The Carter Center's status in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

The Carter Center has been operating in DRC since 2006. It has permanent offices in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi where it implements programs in democracy and human rights promotion. The Center is registered as an international non-governmental organization (INGO) in DRC and operates under a framework agreement with the Congolese government. The Carter Center was invited to observe the Dec. 20, 2023, elections by the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Center's international election observation mission was launched in September 2023.

What do international observers do?

An election observation mission is more than just watching people vote on election day. According to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, international election observation is: the systematic, comprehensive, and accurate gathering of information concerning the laws, processes, and institutions related to the conduct of elections and other factors concerning the overall electoral environment; the impartial and professional analysis of such information; and the drawing of conclusions about the character of electoral processes based on the highest standards for accuracy of information and impartiality of analysis.

Well before election day observation, the Center puts together a core team of experts and deploys long-term observers throughout the country to analyze election laws, election administration, the conduct of campaign rules, election dispute processes, and whether fundamental freedoms associated with voting and civic participation are upheld, including for women and marginalized populations. The observers work in teams, meeting hundreds of political party representatives, election officials, journalists, and members of civil society. The

mission observes candidate registration, election technical preparations, political rallies, and the work of the media, including social media. The mission remains in the country after election day to observe the final tabulation and publication of results as well as any electoral disputes and their resolution. The goal is to assemble a comprehensive and accurate assessment of the entire electoral process.

What sort of standards do observers use when assessing an election?

Carter Center observers assess the electoral process against a country's own election laws as well as regional and international obligations and standards as outlined in relevant treaties, conventions, and inter-governmental political agreements. In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, these include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the African Charter on Human and People Rights, as well as interpretative documents.

Do international observers interfere with the election process, and do they have any authority to certify elections or overrule election results?

No. Election observers follow a strict code of conduct that prohibits them from interfering in any part of the electoral process. They are present to observe and to report on what they witnessed. They only issue their assessment of the process, including what went well and what could be improved.

How can having international observers present be helpful?

Election observation is about providing transparency and objective information and analysis about election processes. Observers can help facilitate peaceful, democratic, and credible elections, and offer recommendations for improvement. Observation missions commend the parts of electoral processes that function well, highlight areas that fall short of standards or legal requirements, and give constructive recommendations for improving them. Their reports can give information that might bolster the legitimacy of successful electoral processes and increase public confidence in them. Also, the presence of observers can sometimes ease citizens' fears of election-related intimidation and violence. Observer reports also can attract attention to poorly conducted elections, and possibly deter politically motivated misconduct while encouraging greater transparency.

What sort of principles and guidelines do credible international election observers follow?

The Carter Center conducts its work in strict accordance with recognized international and regional principles and guidelines for election observation, including the Declaration of Principles for International Observation endorsed at the United Nations in 2005. These guidelines require all mission members to be neutral and non-biased in their work, to respect the laws and regulations of the host country, and not to interfere in the electoral process.

How will you let the public know what observers found?

The Carter Center typically issues preliminary findings two or three days after election day and shares those findings on cartercenter.org and with the media, including on social media. Months later, a final report with recommendations for further improvement of the electoral process will be completed and shared with stakeholders.