



The threat of politically biased election observation

Elections are the key to democracy, and having them monitored by independent international organizations should ensure that democratic standards are respected. But what if international monitors work on behalf of political actors? The work of credible independent monitoring organizations such as the OSCE ODIHR is increasingly undermined by missions whose primary goal is not to monitor and assess the polling, but to cover-up fraud and provide legitimacy to doubtful elections, support particular candidates, and spread mistrust towards democratic institutions.

So be careful whom you trust!

»An organization should not send an international election observation mission to a country under conditions that make it likely that its presence will be interpreted as giving legitimacy to a clearly undemocratic electoral process.« Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers



Indicators for independent election observation

Credible election observation missions provide information on their methodology, funding, and composition ahead of their operation. They must be of sufficient size, observe the entire election process over several weeks, and not be reduced to Election Day observation. Credible election monitoring missions do not observe elections considered illegitimate by the international community.

You might be confronted with politically biased findings if observers:

- Overemphasize Election Day observation
- Assess the voting before the polls are closed and before the publication of the mission statement
- Express a preference towards political forces or a certain outcome.

Observers cannot properly assess elections when they are not members of a long-term observation mission and when they make public statements based only on their own limited observation.



»The main objective of inviting foreign observers [to the Russian Presidential election in Crimea in March 2018] was to give legitimacy to an otherwise illegitimate electoral process, and the Russian media actively spread propagandistic narratives of the invited foreign observers in the Russian and international media space.« Anton Shekhovtsov

How to identify politically biased election observers

Ask observers when you meet them about:

- Their long-term observation methodology
- The size and composition of their mission
- The funders and coordinators of the mission
- Their cooperation with other missions in the field
- Their communication with all election contenders

You might meet **unprofessional or amateur monitors** with no intention of engaging in any form of support for particular election contenders. Credible missions in the field can also be **infiltrated by individuals serving the interest of politicians and governments**. There are also **“zombie” missions** consisting of prominent international figures who assess only particular electoral developments and thus cannot be perceived as a source of credible information.

Politically biased election observers have a clear aim: to white-wash electoral fraud, legitimize manipulated electoral processes, and undermine the findings of credible observation missions.