

Observing competitive mayoral elections

With less than 200 votes separating the leading candidates, the June 19th mayoral runoff in Chisinau, Moldova's capital, was reflective of the stark political divide and competitive electoral environment of the past few years.

Observers from Promo-LEX, a leading Moldovan civil society organization, strategically deployed nonpartisan citizen observers to report on the process and results in both the June 5th nationwide local elections and June 19th runoff in Chisinau. Their innovative approach, combining statistical sampling nationwide and comprehensive coverage in three key locations in the first round, and comprehensive coverage of all polling stations in Chisinau for the 2nd round of that city's mayoral election, helped confirm official results in both rounds of the competitive local races.

In the lead up to the elections, Promo-LEX faced a common challenge for observers of local elections. They wanted to be able to comment on the quality of the electoral process across the country while also verifying the results of races in major cities.

To focus on the national trends, they drew a random statistical sample of polling stations and deployed observers to those polling stations, using a methodology known as statistical based observation (SBO) or quick count. The 190 observers deployed nationally reported back on the quality of the process on election day, noting few irregularities in the majority of polling stations but alarmingly high incidents of intimidation and attempts to influence voters (13% and 24% of cases, respectively). Those observers who were not in the three selected municipalities, focused only on the process not on vote tallies.

Vote tallies were more important in the most competitive races, which is why Promo-LEX decided to conduct comprehensive parallel vote tabulations (PVTs) in three metropolitan centers in the first round: Chisinau, Balti and Comrat. PVT observers were deployed to all polling stations in those three cities to collect vote tallies and compare them to official results. Promo-LEX shared their findings with the public in several official press statements.

In both rounds of elections, Promo-LEX observers were able to tabulate the vote totals and project estimates matched the Central Election Commission's figures, including the extremely small margin of victory in Chisinau. As Promo-LEX continues to monitor any potential post-electoral complaints, the organization has filled an important role of providing a nonpartisan assessment of the process, strengthening the public's trust in the electoral process in general, and the votes Count in particular.

Source: Ondem.org