# The Role of Technology in Spreading Democracy

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In the past two decades, the spread of democracy has been one of the most important advances across the African continent.  Since the 2008 launch of the website [Ushahidi](#) (the Swahili word for "testimony" or "witness") which [crowd-sourced and mapped user-generated reports](#) of post-election violence in Kenya, technology has been playing an increasingly critical role in guaranteeing the promise of free and fair elections.  Importantly, these developments are occurring in countries which span the socioeconomic spectrum.

As Malawi prepares for the first tripartite elections in its history, the Malawi Election Information Centre and the Malawi Electoral Commission (with technical assistance from SMAG Media UK and Code for Africa) have made it possible for "prospective voters […] [to verify their](#) [voter registration status](#) using mobile phones" or the Internet.  Two significant aspects of the program are  that the service is free on the country's two mobile networks and the registration details can be received in local languages.  The Malawi Electoral Commission [also is utilizing social media](#) to communicate with electoral stakeholders.

Preparing for its own elections, South Africa is the latest country where Google has launched its elections platform.  The mobile-friendly South African Elections Hub is "[a one-stop](#) [site for voters to access election-related information](#), including party and candidate information, where to vote, real-time election news" and other information.

The mobile revolution in particular has had a significant impact on election monitoring.  The most recent example came in April when Guinea-Bissau held its first election since the coup d'etat that disrupted the elections staged in 2012.  With funding from the European Union, three organizations — OneWorld, OneWorld UK, and the Group of Civil Society Organisations for the Elections — trained approximately 400 "citizen monitors" to report on "acts of violence, suspected fraud or corruption, and any interruptions of the voting process that they witnessed or learned about from trusted sources."  Via coded SMS messages, the monitors sent the information back to a centralized "Situation Room" where it was "decoded, verified automatically and published online."

This "rapid-reaction" platform builds on similar models used in elections held in Sierra Leone, Mali, and Senegal and a similar program will be used in Malawi.  In congratulating Senegal on its peaceful presidential elections, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the program as "perhaps the most sophisticated monitoring program ever deployed in Africa or anywhere else."