

# Election Monitoring Using the Ushahidi Platform (2011)

## Summary

This guide walks you through some of the best practices and considerations related to the Ushahidi platform as a tool for election monitoring. Note: this guide was written in 2011. Feel free to update it with more current details. Also see [Uchaguzi - Kenyan Elections 2013](#) for a recent use case.

Ushahidi has its roots in election monitoring and has been deployed in a number of countries for that specific purpose. Examples of crowdsourcing (receiving reports from the general public) during elections include: India, Mexico, Afghanistan and Lebanon, all in 2009 and Sudan and Togo in 2010. Data collection using trained election monitors can also be done and Ushahidi was used in this way during the November 2009 elections in Namibia and during the 2010 elections in Burundi.

See some examples of [Election Monitoring](#)

Tips	Challenges
Early Deployment: Deploy the platform early so that you and the population can get comfortable with it.	Mapping Accuracy: Difficulty in obtaining accurate geo-data.
Communications & Messaging: Have a well planned communications and messaging campaign in order to raise awareness.	Data Poisoning: purposeful sending of false or misleading information.
Multi-Source Reporting: Mix election monitoring sources with the greater population's reports.	Verification: How do you deal with it in near real-time? It's critical to have the necessary staff for data management and verification.
Community Partnerships: Try to create partnerships between other organizations so that you can cast a wide net for both awareness and messaging of what the results really mean.	Closing The Feedback Loop: It's important to not only receive information but also share information. For example: Make sure you set up and configure SMS or email alerts.
	Multifaceted Promotional Strategy: A promotional strategy that includes offline, online and mobile. Don't lose sight of the offline part of your plan!

## Getting Started

If you are interested in using Ushahidi for election monitoring, perhaps the most important step you can take is to plan early because disseminating information on your initiative across an entire country will take time. Ideally, start at least 6 months out and start using the platform for something other than election monitoring, such as traffic, crime or corruption monitoring. The key is to have users familiar with the platform so they can see the added value well before the elections take place. This will help you expand buy-in in the lead up to the elections. The next decision you'll need to make is whether you want your project to be open so that anyone can report on election irregularities or whether you will mobilize trusted networks of monitors to do the reporting. You can certainly do both, which we recommend if time and resources allow. The advantage of doing both is that this increases the possibility of triangulating and validating incoming reports. Before turning to sourcing and handling incoming data, you'll need to select the categories you want to use for the monitoring. Here are some examples: fraud, vote tampering, illegal campaigning, removal of observers.

## Incoming Data

You'll want to decide what combination of technologies you'll use to carry out the reporting. There are advantages and disadvantages to each that should be considered including cost, usability, security, and amount and quality of incoming information.

- **Mobile Phones:** Using Ushahidi's smart phone apps makes the reporting free, more secure and automatically geotagged. If you use SMS, you can either set up a number using a service like Clickatell or FrontlineSMS, or approach the country's telecom company to set up a "short code." A short code is a 3 to 4 digit number that can be made free for users who text that number. Note that you'll still need to pay for the service, however. One advantage of using SMS is that you have the opportunity to get a lot more individuals involved in the reporting. One disadvantage is that you'll need to map the events being reported based on the location information provided in the incoming text messages, which can be time consuming. That said, the telco's will have that data and may be willing to share. We're also developing Swift River to automate the geo-location process whenever possible.
- **Email and Web:** Election observers could also report on election irregularities by sending emails to a dedicated email address. These emails should include detailed location information to make the mapping as easy as possible. The same approach can be taken using Twitter and a dedicated hash tag and/or Twitter feed. You can also create customized web forms as part of your Ushahidi instance that will allow people to submit detailed reports including geographic information and categorization.
- **Online Media Monitoring:** Another point worth thinking about is whether you want to complement the on-the-ground monitoring with online media monitoring. The latter comprises reading through official news, social media, Twitter, blogs, Facebook groups, etc., to find relevant election related events that can be mapped. This is a time consuming effort, however. But we do recommend thinking about recruiting volunteers to help comb the news during the elections. This produces a rich set of information when combined with reports coming in from the ground. Keep in mind that you can also map pictures and video footage as well.

## Reporting Strategies

If you're looking to carry out traditional election monitoring at polling stations, you'll want to make sure you have trained and dedicated monitors deployed to these stations in such a way that the data they generate is statistically representative. If you're more interested in crowdsourcing the election monitoring, then you'll want to maximize the number of users who report on election irregularities. Naturally, you can combine both approaches. How you carry out the above steps will necessarily differ if the country in question is democratic versus authoritarian. In the case of the latter, you'll want to take extra precautions to maximize the safety of those who contribute to the election monitoring. This may mean using secure smart phone apps, or code when using SMS. In any case, you'll want to read up on this quick guide and take time to review the guidebooks produced by Tactical Tech.

Also see: [Ushahidi Toolkits](#) and [Security Technical Best Practices](#)