

# The Elections We Want

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With the African Charter for Democracy, Elections and Governance celebrating 10 years of being in force in 2017, expectations regarding the integrity of elections in Africa have increased. While many bemoan the falling voter turnout that has characterized elections globally, as well as in Africa, there is evidence of high levels of engagement from African voters when it comes to elections signaling “change.” Angola, Rwanda, Liberia, Senegal, and The Gambia all had increases in turnout from their previous elections. What these countries have in common is that there have been important democratic shifts. This engagement rivals the cynicism that can easily be felt about democracy on the continent.

Elections in both Kenya and Liberia clearly demonstrate that the days of formulaic elections are over. Citizens and parties are demanding a higher level of electoral integrity than before. The courts have demonstrated that they are in tune with holding election management bodies to a higher standard, as spelt out in law. The unprecedented annulment of the August elections in Kenya centered on the weakness on the transmission and verification of the election results. This also sharply focused attention on the role that technology plays in the results management process. In Liberia, the courts differed with the election management body’s interpretation of the constitutional provisions regarding due process and hearing timelines. They issued a writ of prohibition stopping all preparations for the run-off elections, compelling the completion of petition hearings. The run-off took place in December 2017 only after the petitions had been heard.

Citizens have been critical via social media of the role of international election observers. In Kenya, the observers were heavily criticized that they failed to tackle the allegations regarding election results. Observers have had to assess the technical depth of their observation, as well as educating citizens about their role. This speaks to the heightened expectations that exist around African elections today as citizens demand more.

With major elections coming up in 2018 in Mali, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe, election practitioners will do well to consider measures to increase the integrity and quality of their elections. This involves greater transparency, accountability, professionalism, competence, and engagement with all stakeholders. Meeting these expectations will be an important celebration of the African Charter and the aspirations of voters across the continent.