

# Polis – Africa: bad news

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The POLIS summer [school](#) turns to Africa and we talk about how journalism can promote economic and political development. Paul Mason's BBC [film](#) shows how the mobile phone is transforming African communications. I argue that it is doing the same for African journalism. A clever project by the [Africanews](#) initiative is giving GPRS mobile phones to a network of journalists who will go out and report with video, stills and text sent direct by phone to a central website that will then sell the material on. It's an exciting time to be an African journalist. But as fast as the technology advances, so does the political reaction. Emails and blogs have kept the news flowing out of Zimbabwe during the recent years of repression and economic disaster. Zim journos are sending out [reports](#) to beat the censors while ex-pats can buy fuel and food vouchers for friends and family online. but now Mugabe has passed a [law](#) allowing his security forces to intercept email and internet traffic. The only hope is that they are so incompetent that it won't be effective.

And in Kenya, traditionally one of the strongest media markets in Africa, is also facing a legal backlash. Kenya's MPs are the best-paid and possibly the most corrupt in Africa. Now in an attempt to stifle media oversight they have passed a [law](#) forcing the media to disclose their sources. It's a classic attempt to gag the people blowing the whistle on corruption. It all reminds us that media freedom can be enhanced by new technology and market forces, but that it always needs to be protected by the law.

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