

Moxii Africa's Assessment of Media Performance, Regulatory Compliance and the Enabling Environment for Free and Fair ElectionsLGE26

Media Brief 6: 11–18 September 2026

Written By:

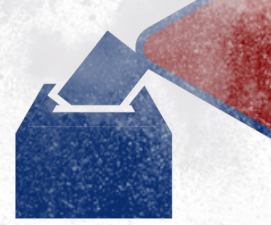
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INTRODUCTION

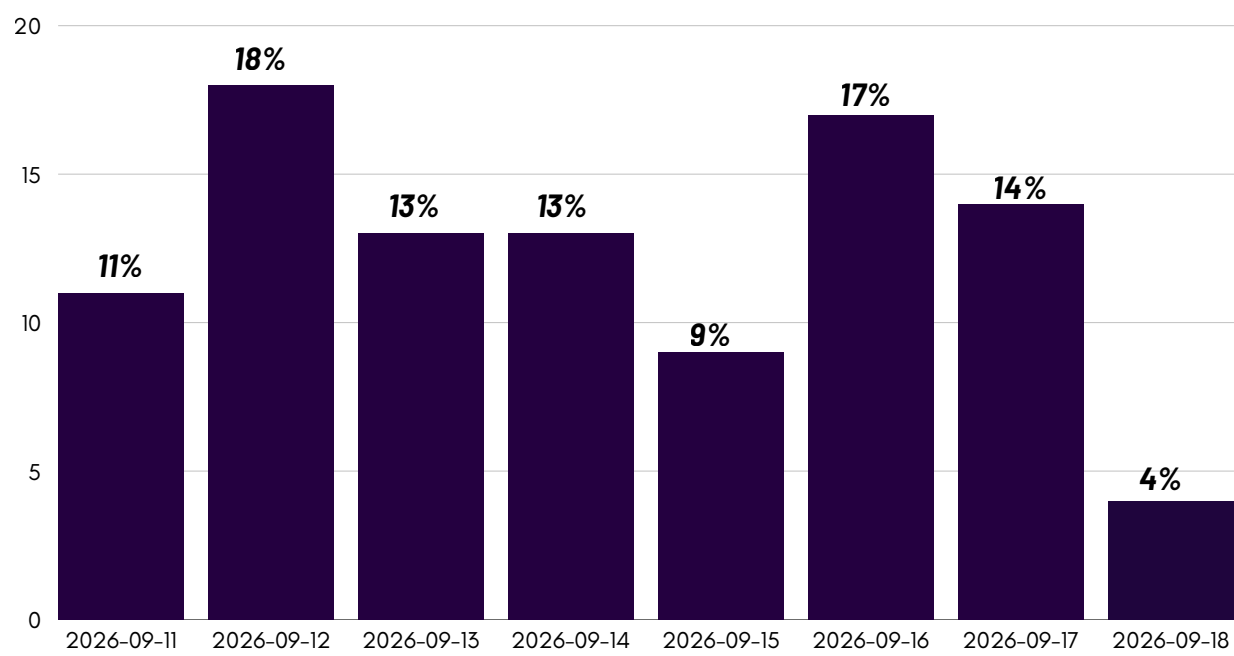


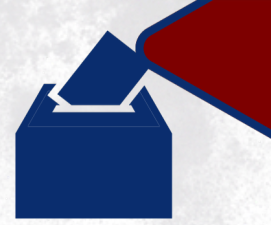
[Moxii Africa](#), formerly known as Media Monitoring Africa, is monitoring media coverage in the lead-up to South Africa’s 2026 Local Government Elections. Having observed every election since 1994, the organisation analyses election-related content across broadcast, print, and digital media platforms. This ongoing initiative evaluates media performance, assesses compliance with relevant regulatory frameworks, and monitors the extent to which the media environment supports free and fair elections. Through this work, Moxii Africa seeks to promote fair, balanced, and responsible election reporting by examining how political parties, key electoral issues, and democratic voices are represented in the news.

This brief presents findings from 11 to 18 September 2026, when 348 election-related news items were recorded and analysed. This was a slight increase of 13 items, or approximately 4%, from the 335 stories recorded in the previous reporting period. The increase coincided with intensified campaigning, greater party mobilisation and growing media attention as the election period progressed; however, the monitoring data alone do not establish which of these developments caused the change.

The findings from this monitoring cycle provide insight into the evolving nature of election coverage across the country. Analysis of the 348 monitored items highlights the key local government issues receiving media attention, assesses the visibility and prominence of political parties in news reporting, and examines the gender distribution of sources contributing to election-related discourse. Together, these findings offer an important snapshot of how the media is shaping public understanding of the electoral process and the issues influencing voters ahead of the 2026 Local Government Elections.

Figure 1: Daily LGE Stories Article Count



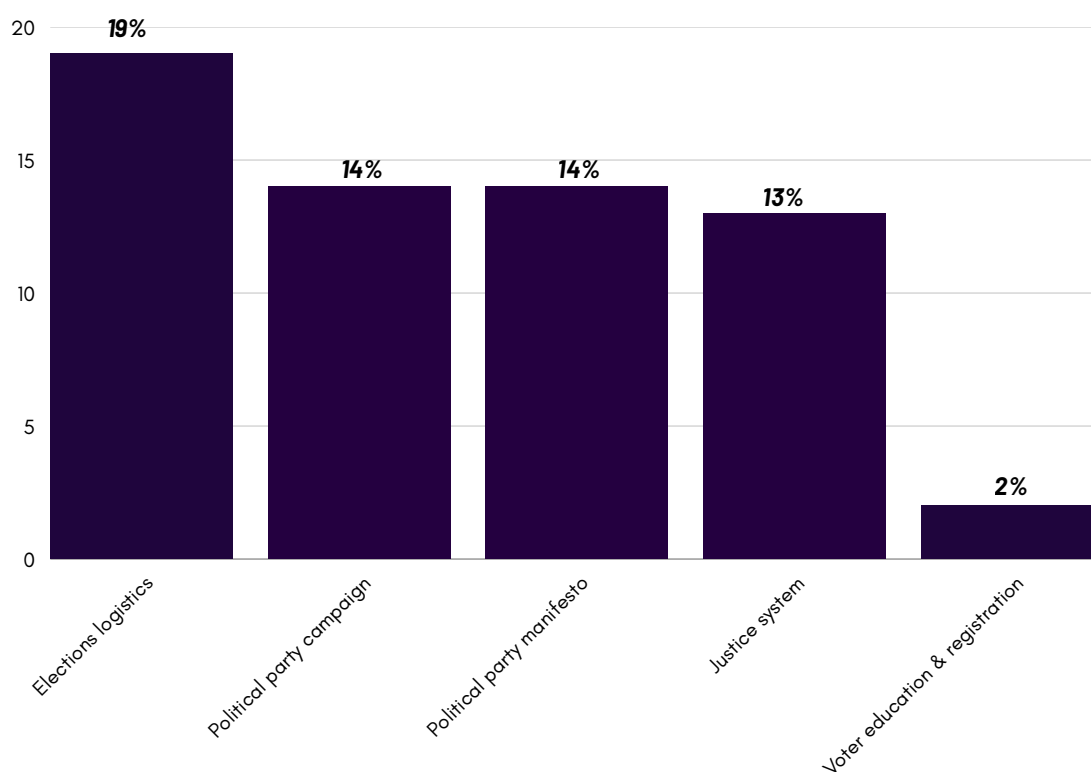


Election reporting in Brief 5 was characterised by notable fluctuations in story volume, reflecting periods when election-related issues dominated the media agenda. Coverage reached its highest point on 5 September, accounting for 21% of all monitored news items. Additional peaks were recorded on 3 September and 8 September, each contributing 14% of coverage. These increases were largely driven by high-profile campaign activities, including party campaign launches, election rallies, mayoral candidate announcements, and other strategic mobilisation efforts undertaken by political parties.

By comparison, Brief 6 recorded a slightly lower but more consistent level of election coverage. The highest level of reporting was observed on 12 September, when election stories constituted 18% of coverage, followed closely by 17% on 17 September. In contrast, coverage declined sharply to its lowest level of 4% on 18 September.

The transition between the two reporting periods shows a change in the distribution of election coverage. Brief 5 contained sharper peaks associated with major campaign events and political announcements, whereas Brief 6 displayed a more sustained pattern of reporting. The reduction in the highest daily share from 21% to 18% is consistent with media attention becoming less concentrated on individual campaign activities.

Figure 2: Top five topics



In Brief 5, political party politics was the most prominent topic, accounting for 20% of all election stories. This was closely followed by election logistics at 19%, political party campaigning at 16%, political party manifestos at 13%, and political violence and intimidation at 7%.

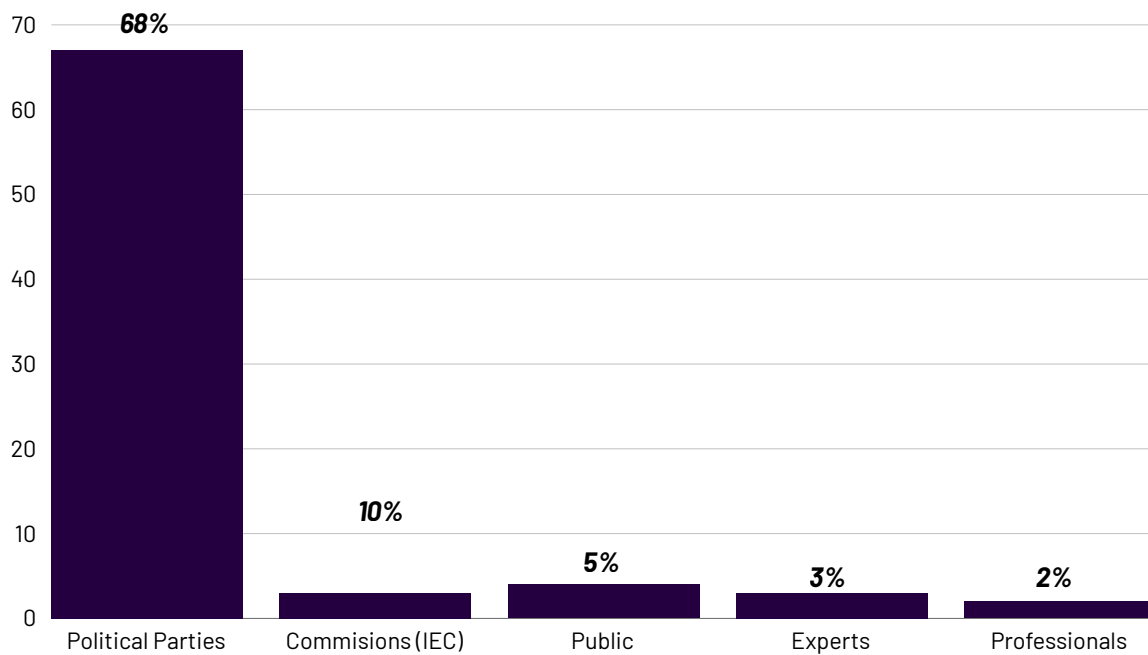
In Brief 6, election logistics emerged as the leading topic at 19%. Political party campaigning and political party manifestos each accounted for 14%, while justice system matters represented 13% of coverage. Voter education and registration also appeared among the top five topics at 12%.

The changes indicate a partial shift from party-centred political reporting towards election management and public participation issues. Political parties continued to feature prominently through campaigning and manifesto coverage, while election logistics became the leading topic and voter education and registration entered the top five. The pattern therefore reflects a broader thematic mix rather than a complete movement away from party-focused reporting.

The disappearance of political violence and intimidation from the list of dominant topics may indicate either a reduction in the reporting of such incidents or a shift in editorial priorities towards stories perceived as more relevant to the approaching election period. At the same time, the emergence of justice system issues points to increasing media interest in legal disputes, candidate eligibility matters, governance accountability concerns, and election-related litigation.

The inclusion of voter education and registration as a major topic is particularly noteworthy. As election dates draw closer, media organisations frequently increase coverage of voter registration processes, voting requirements, and civic participation campaigns. This shift reflects a broader public-interest approach aimed at informing citizens about electoral procedures.

Figure 3: Top five sources by affiliation



The analysis of source affiliation reveals both continuity and notable changes in sourcing patterns. Political parties remained the most dominant source category in both monitoring periods. Their contribution declined only marginally from 68% in Brief 5 to 67% in Brief 6, indicating that election reporting remained overwhelmingly driven by political actors.

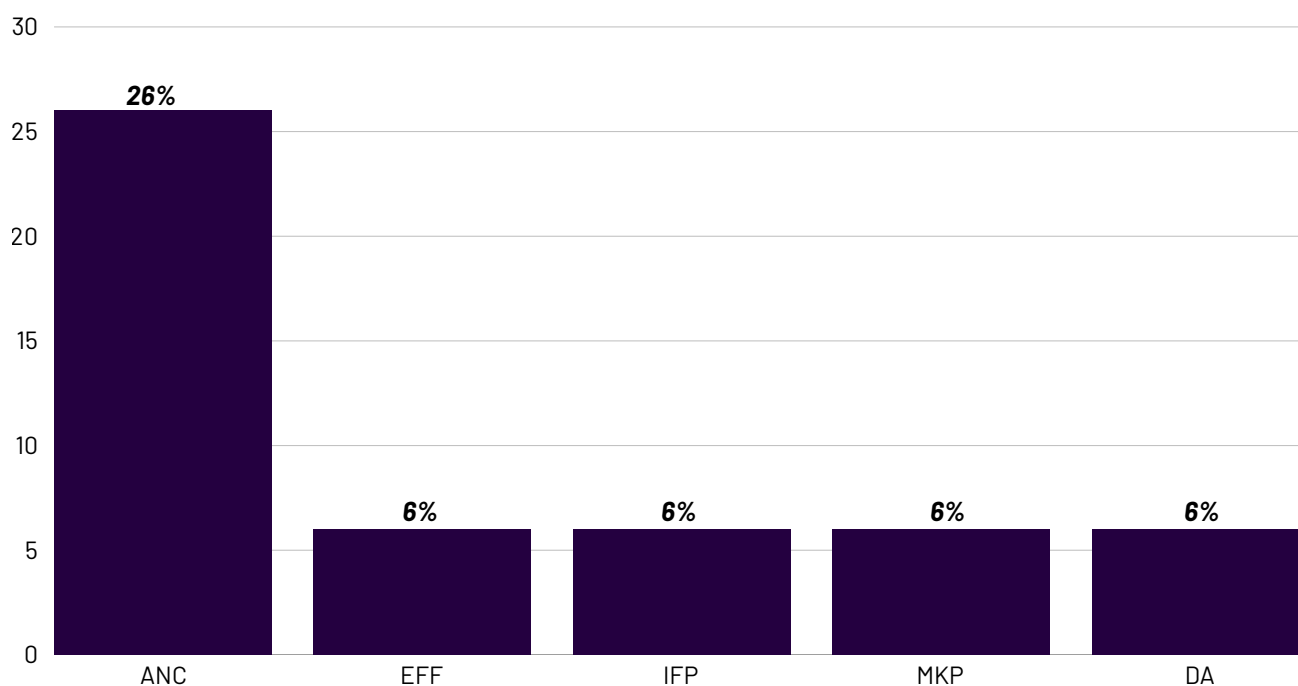
Despite this stability, there were significant shifts in the representation of other source categories. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) declined from 10% of sources in Brief 5 to just 3% in Brief 6. Public sources also experienced a slight reduction from 5% to 4%.

These findings suggest that journalists continued to rely heavily on political elites to frame election-related narratives. While election coverage increasingly focused on logistical and voter-related issues during Brief 6, this did not translate into greater inclusion of diverse voices such as civil society organisations, election experts, community representatives, or ordinary voters.

The decline in IEC representation may be explained by changes in the dominant news agenda. During Brief 5, election logistics featured prominently, requiring journalists to engage extensively with election officials. By Brief 6, media attention may have shifted towards campaign messaging, manifestos, legal disputes, and political strategy discussions, reducing the need for official election administration voices.

The continued lack of substantive public and expert participation in election reporting remains a concern. Diverse sourcing is essential for ensuring balanced and representative election coverage, particularly in local government elections where community-level issues directly affect citizens.

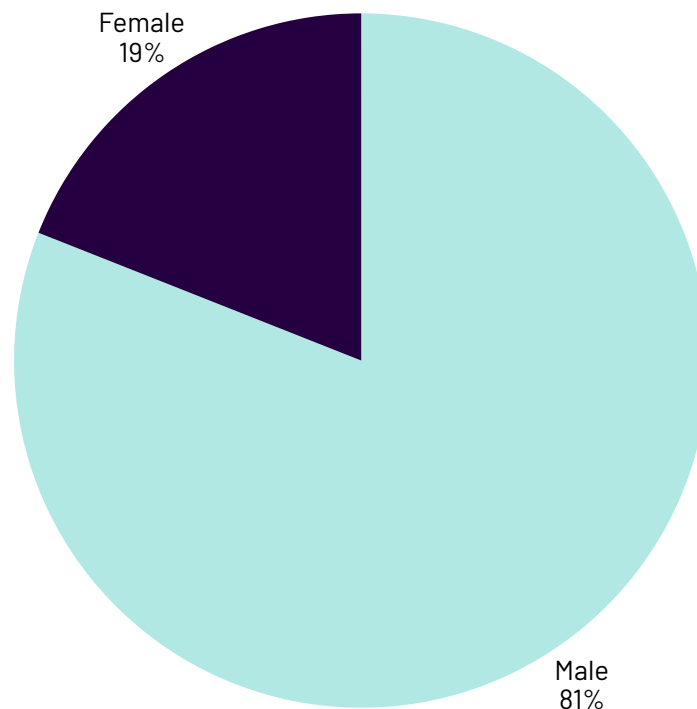
Figure 4: Top five parties



In brief 6, the ANC received 26% support, followed by the EFF, IFP, and DA, each with 6%, while the MKP recorded 5%. In brief 5, the ANC remained the most supported party at 25%, followed by the DA at 6%, ATM and MKP at 5% and 4% respectively, and VF+/FF Plus at 4%. These results indicate that the ANC maintained a relatively stable level of support across both briefs, although there was a slight increase of one percentage point in briefs 6.

Overall, the results suggest a fragmented political landscape in which no party commands overwhelming support. Although the ANC remains the leading party in both briefs, its support level is relatively modest when compared to historical election outcomes, potentially reflecting growing political competition and voter diversification. The variation in the ranking and representation of opposition parties between the two briefs may be influenced by regional differences, demographic characteristics of respondents, or changes in public opinion over time. Consequently, the findings point to a competitive environment where support is dispersed among several political parties rather than being concentrated in a single dominant.

Figure 5: Male vs Female Sources



Gender representation remained one of the most significant concerns across both monitoring periods. In Brief 5, women accounted for just 21% of all sources quoted or referenced in election coverage, compared to 79% for men. Female representation declined further in Brief 6, falling to 19%, while male representation increased to 81%. This downward trend suggests that women continued to be substantially underrepresented in election reporting, despite ongoing national efforts to promote gender equality, women's leadership, and inclusive political participation.

The disparity can be attributed, in part, to the nature of election reporting, which tends to prioritise political leaders, party spokespersons, candidates, and senior government officials. As these positions remain predominantly occupied by men, media coverage often mirrors existing gender imbalances within the political landscape. Consequently, journalists' reliance on official and elite sources can inadvertently reinforce the marginalisation of women's voices in public discourse.

The decline in female representation may also reflect the prominence of stories focused on election administration, justice-related matters, and party campaign activities during the reporting period. Such topics frequently draw on institutional representatives and senior political figures, who are more likely to be male. As a result, women remained largely absent from election narratives, despite their important roles as voters, candidates, activists, and community leaders.

The persistent gender gap highlights a broader structural challenge within political journalism. While election coverage successfully captures the views of political actors and institutions, it often overlooks opportunities to include diverse female perspectives on issues such as local governance, service delivery, public safety, and community development. Without deliberate efforts to broaden the range of sources consulted, election reporting risks continuing to reflect existing inequalities rather than promoting a more inclusive and representative public debate.

CONCLUSION

The comparison between Brief 5 and Brief 6 indicates that election coverage is gradually transitioning from an event-driven campaign phase to a more procedural and governance-focused phase.

While Brief 5 was characterised by peaks linked to campaign launches, rallies, and political party announcements, Brief 6 reflected growing attention to election logistics, voter education, registration processes, and justice-related matters. This evolution aligns with broader local government election reporting trends in South Africa, where media attention increasingly shifts towards electoral administration and citizen participation as elections draw closer.

However, several structural patterns remained unchanged. Political parties continued to dominate media sourcing, the ANC remained the most visible political actor, and women continued to be significantly underrepresented as news sources.

These findings suggest that, although the thematic focus of election reporting is becoming more diverse, there is still a need for greater source diversity and stronger inclusion of women, experts, civil society organisations, and ordinary citizens. Addressing these gaps would contribute to more representative, inclusive, and democratic election coverage during the remainder of the local government election period.

About Moxii Africa's Election Work

Moxii Africa has monitored every democratic election in South Africa since 1994, bringing three decades of independent, evidence-based media monitoring to safeguard information integrity. For #LGE2026, Moxii Africa anchors the **Partnership on Information Integrity in Elections (PIIE)**—working in partnership key stakeholders and with the IEC to safeguard information integrity in elections. Other election work focuses on tracking media coverage, monitoring political party ad spending via [PAdRe](#), and holding candidates accountable.

Explore live media tracking, accountability tools, and election insights at [Moxii Africa's LGE2026 Hub](#) or learn more about the coalition at [PIIE](#).

Important Notice: For official election dates, voter registration details, candidate lists, and official results, please consult only the [Electoral Commission of South Africa \(IEC\)](#).

Report Online Harm: Seen something misleading online? Report disinformation, hate speech, or incitement through [Real411](#), the official platform for reporting digital electoral harms.



For any questions, comments, or clarifications, please contact Moxii Africa Formerly Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) from Media Monitoring Africa on (011) 788 1278 or email: musar@mma.org.za

