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

Media Brief 7: 19–26 September 2026

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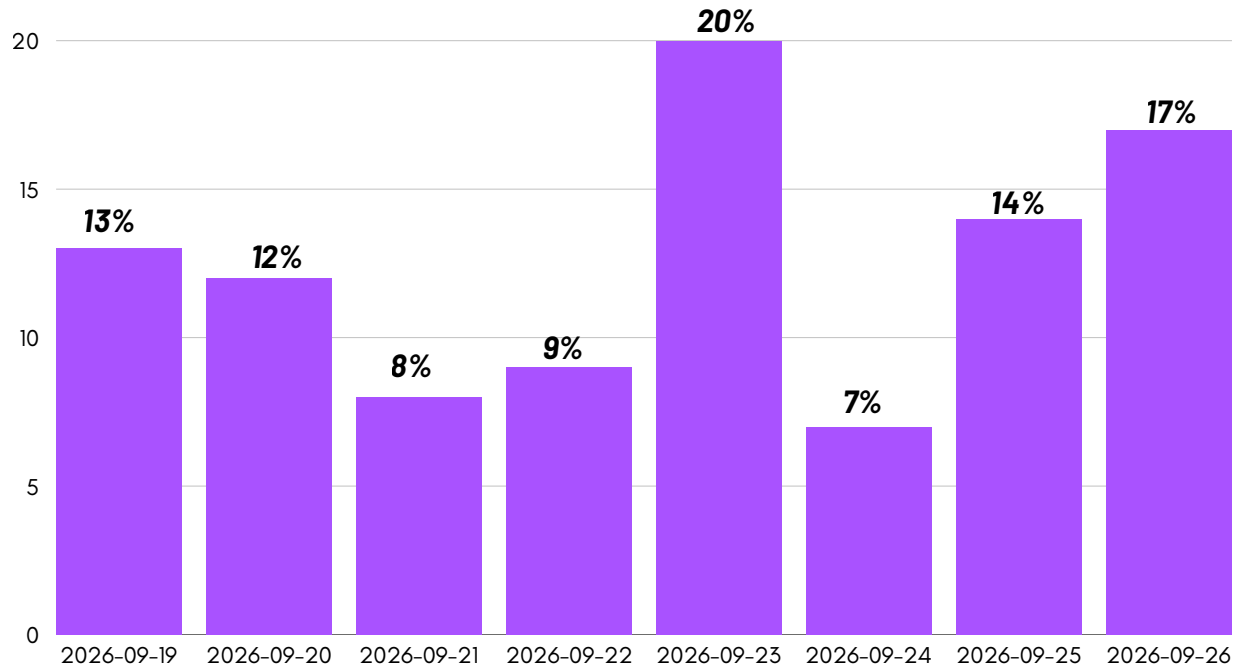
INTRODUCTION

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 19 to 26 September 2026, when 423 election-related news items were recorded and analysed. This was a slight increase of 75 from the 348 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

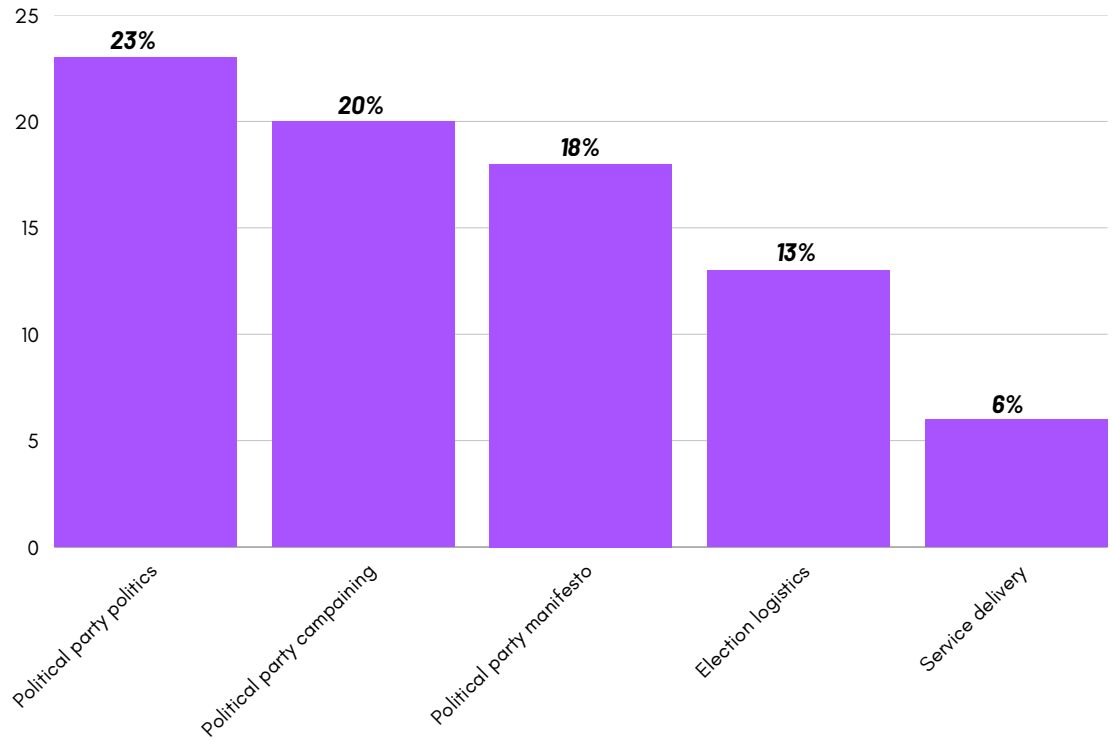


Brief 7 recorded a higher overall level of election coverage, with the most significant peak occurring on 23 September when election stories accounted for approximately 20% of all coverage. Additional spikes were observed on 25 September (14%) and 26 September (17%), indicating periods where election-related developments dominated the news agenda. Coverage reached its lowest point at approximately 7% on 24 September.

By comparison, Brief 6 recorded a lower peak of 18% on 12 September, followed by a secondary peak of 17% on 16 September. Election coverage fell to its lowest point of 4% on 18 September.

The increase in election story volume from Brief 6 to Brief 7 suggests that the election campaign entered a more active phase. This is consistent with local government election reporting trends in South Africa, where media attention typically intensifies as political parties increase campaigning activities, release policy commitments, respond to opponents, and compete more aggressively for voter support. The spikes observed in Brief 7 likely reflect heightened campaign activity, increased political messaging, and growing public interest as the election draws nearer.

Figure 2: Top five topics

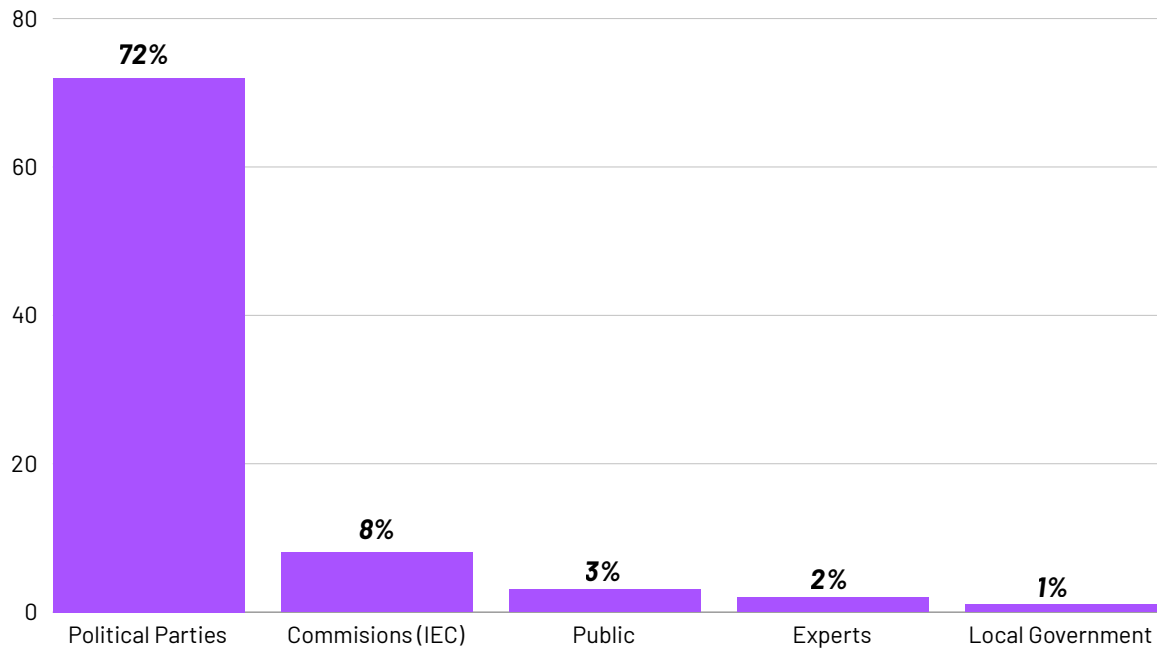


In Brief 7, campaign-related issues appeared to receive greater prominence, reflecting a period in which political competition increasingly shaped media coverage. Stories relating to political campaigning, party activities, candidate visibility, electoral promises, and election preparations appeared to dominate the agenda.

In contrast, Brief 6 was characterised by a stronger focus on election logistics, voter registration and education, political campaigning, manifestos, and justice-related matters. Coverage during this period reflected ongoing preparations for the election and efforts to inform voters about electoral processes.

The shift from procedural election matters in Brief 6 towards more campaign-oriented reporting in Brief 7 reflects a common pattern in South African elections. As election day approaches, media coverage generally moves beyond voter registration and administrative preparations and increasingly focuses on party competition, campaign messaging, coalition prospects, and electoral performance. Political actors become more visible and election reporting becomes more contest-driven.

Figure 3: Top five sources by affiliation



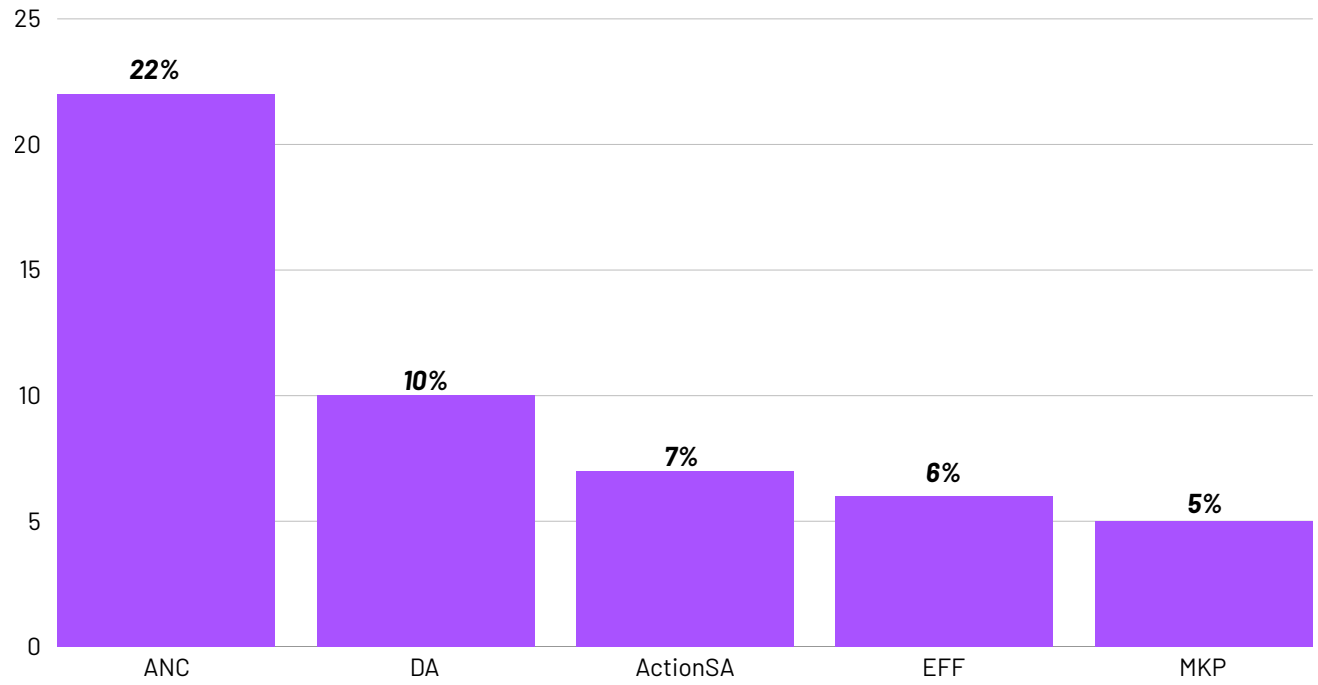
Brief 7 showed an increased reliance on political party sources, which accounted for approximately 72% of all sources cited in election stories. The IEC's representation increased to 8%, while public voices accounted for only 3% of sources. Expert voices declined to approximately 2%, and local government representatives contributed around 1%.

In Brief 6, political parties accounted for 67% of all sources. The IEC represented 3% of sources, while the public contributed 4%. Experts accounted for approximately 3%, and professionals represented around 2%.

The increase in political party sources between the two periods suggests that election reporting became more heavily influenced by political actors themselves. This is a typical feature of election campaigns, as political parties increase media engagements, hold public events, issue statements, and respond to developments involving rival parties.

At the same time, the increase in IEC sources from 3% to 8% may indicate heightened media interest in electoral preparedness and administrative processes as the election approaches. However, the continued dominance of political party voices suggests that election narratives remained largely elite-driven. Public voices, community representatives, and independent experts continued to play a relatively limited role in shaping election coverage.

Figure 4: Top five parties



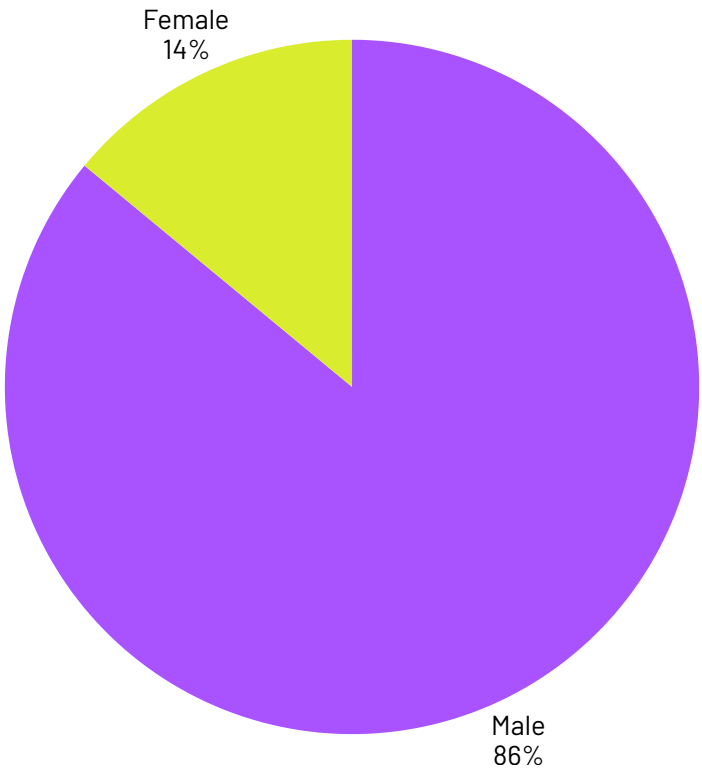
Brief 7 continued to be dominated by major political actors, particularly larger and more established political parties. The ANC remained the most visible political actor, while other major parties, including the DA, EFF and IFP, continued to receive substantial levels of coverage.

Similarly, Brief 6 was also characterised by strong visibility of major political parties, with the ANC maintaining the largest share of election-related coverage.

The consistency between the two monitoring periods suggests that the media continued to focus primarily on parties that are perceived as key electoral contenders. This trend is commonly observed in South African election reporting, where larger parties typically attract more coverage due to their national prominence, political influence, and ability to generate newsworthy events.

While such coverage reflects the realities of electoral competition, it may also limit visibility for smaller political parties and independent candidates who receive fewer opportunities to communicate their positions to voters through mainstream media.

Figure 5: Male vs Female Sources



Brief 7 recorded a further deterioration in gender representation. Women accounted for only 101 sources, while male sources increased significantly to 614. This translated to approximately 14% female representation and 86% male representation.

In Brief 6, women accounted for 106 sources compared to 460 male sources, representing approximately 19% female representation and 81% male representation.

The decline in female representation from 19% to 14% is significant and suggests that women became even less visible as sources during the later stages of the campaign.

One possible explanation is the increased focus on political party activities and campaign events. Political parties often rely on senior leaders, spokespersons and candidates to communicate campaign messages, and these positions continue to be disproportionately occupied by men. As election reporting became increasingly centred on political actors, the gender imbalance within political leadership structures was consequently reflected in media sourcing patterns.

This finding remains concerning given ongoing national discussions around women's political participation, gender equality, and inclusive representation. The continued underrepresentation of women means that important perspectives on governance, service delivery, community development, safety, and social issues may be receiving limited attention within election reporting.

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.

CONTACT US

For any questions, comments, or clarifications, please contact Moxii Africa Formerly Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) from Media Monitoring Africa on (011) 788 1278 or
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