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

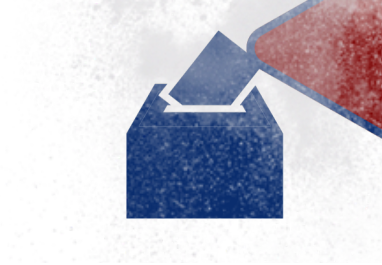
Media Brief 05 –12 October 2026

Written By:
Musa Rikhotso

Designed by:
Kgothatso Baatile Mohale



INTRODUCTION



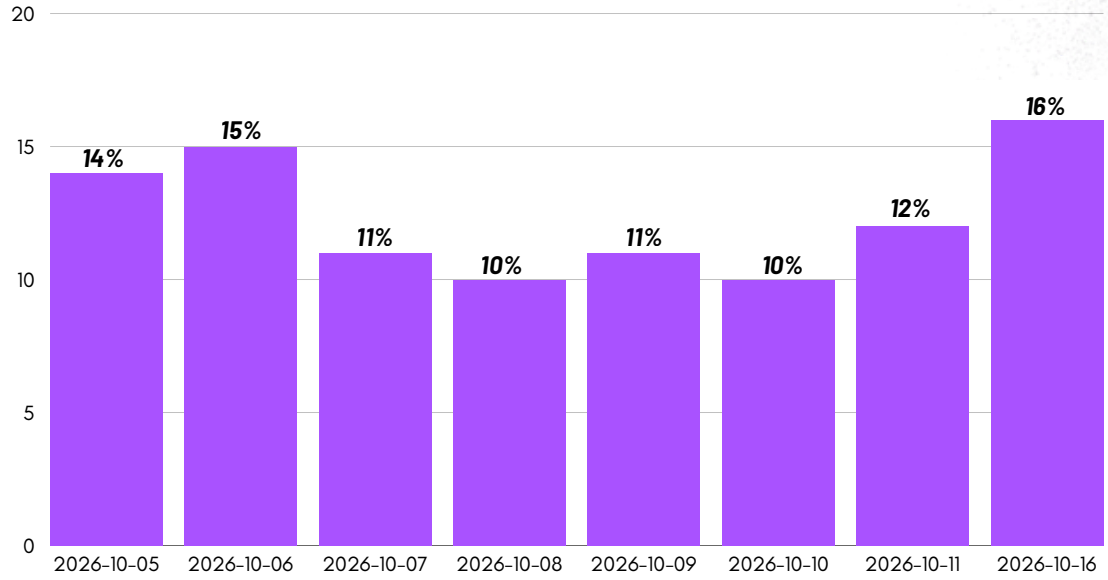
Moxii Africa, formerly known as Media Monitoring Africa, is conducting comprehensive media monitoring ahead of South Africa's 2026 Local Government Elections. Having monitored every democratic election since 1994, the organisation systematically analyses election-related coverage across broadcast, print, and digital media platforms. The project assesses the quality and nature of election reporting, evaluates compliance with relevant regulatory and ethical standards, and examines the extent to which the media environment contributes to free, fair, and informed electoral processes. Through this work, Moxii Africa aims to promote fair, balanced, and responsible election coverage by tracking the representation of political parties, key electoral issues, and diverse democratic voices in the media.

This brief presents findings from the monitoring period of 05 October to 12 October 2026, during which 340 election-related news items were recorded and analysed. This represents a substantial increase from the 231 stories monitored during the previous reporting period. While the earlier reporting cycle coincided with heightened campaign activity, increased party mobilisation, and greater media attention to election-related developments, the findings from this period suggest a moderation in the volume of election coverage.

The findings provide valuable insight into the evolving character of election coverage as the campaign progresses. The analysis examines the issues receiving the greatest media attention, the visibility and prominence afforded to political parties, the range of sources shaping election narratives, and the gender distribution of voices featured in election reporting.

Together, these findings offer an important snapshot of the media landscape and its role in informing the public about the electoral process, political contestation, and the issues likely to influence voter decision-making ahead of the 2026 Local Government Elections.

Figure 1: Daily LGE Stories Article Count

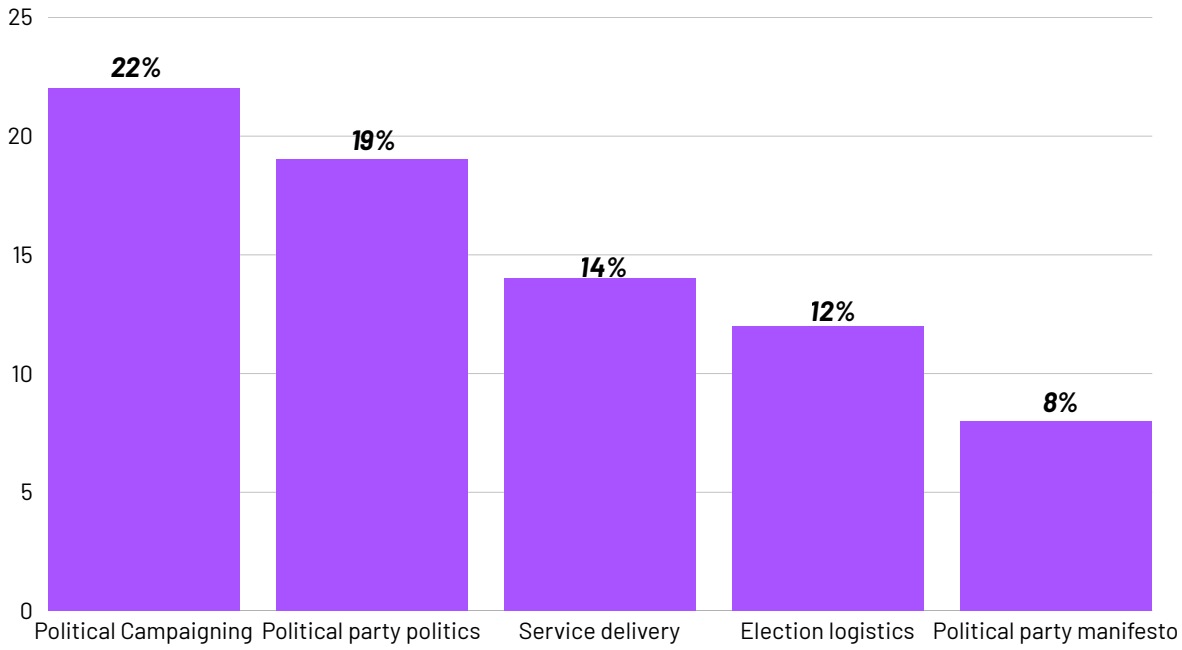


Brief 9 recorded relatively consistent levels of election coverage throughout the monitoring period from 5 to 12 October 2026. The highest level of election reporting was recorded on 12 October (15.6%), followed by 6 October (15.0%) and 5 October (13.5%). Coverage reached its lowest levels on 8 October and 10 October, when election stories accounted for approximately 10.3% of all stories.

In comparison, Brief 8 recorded its highest level of election coverage on 1 and 2 October (15.6%), and its lowest on 30 September (8.7%). Overall, election coverage in Brief 8 remained relatively stable, with daily coverage generally ranging between 11% and 13%. The comparison suggests that election reporting remained stable across both reporting periods, although Brief 9 recorded a slightly more sustained level of coverage. Unlike earlier monitoring periods that were characterised by sharp spikes linked to campaign launches, candidate announcements, and political rallies, coverage during both Brief 8 and Brief 9 appears to have entered a more mature phase.

One possible explanation for the pattern observed between 5 and 12 October is that the election campaign moved closer to its operational phase, with media attention increasingly focused on campaign messaging, voter mobilisation efforts, coalition discussions, and governance-related issues rather than singular campaign events. As the election approaches, election coverage typically becomes a permanent feature of the news agenda, resulting in fewer dramatic peaks but more sustained reporting.

Figure 2: Top five topics

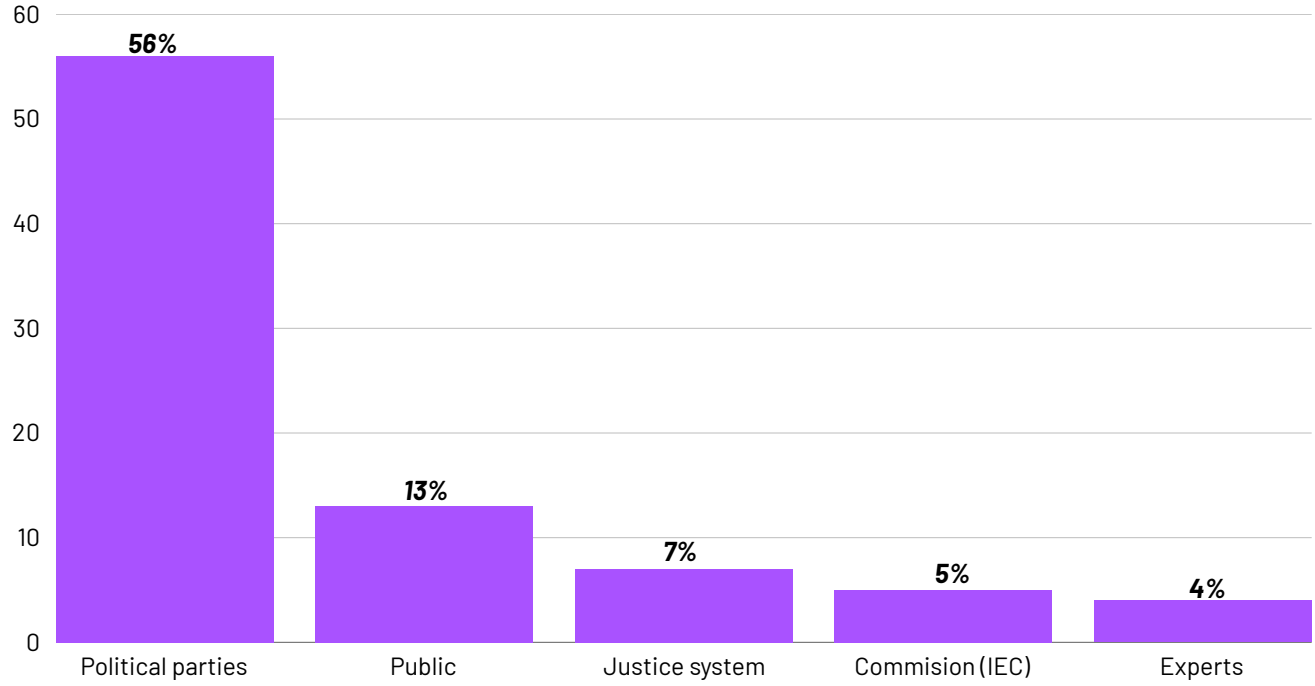


In Brief 8, election reporting appeared to focus increasingly on governance concerns, voter interests, service delivery issues, policy debates, and campaign messaging rather than solely on election events. Coverage reflected a transition from campaign spectacle to greater scrutiny of political promises and governance performance.

Brief 9's stable election coverage suggests that these themes likely continued to dominate reporting. During this period, media outlets may have given greater attention to municipal governance failures, service-delivery promises, coalition scenarios in contested municipalities, and the implementation of party manifestos.

This shift is consistent with trends in South African local government elections. As election day draws closer, media reporting often becomes more issue-driven, analysing which parties are best positioned to address local challenges such as water provision, electricity supply, municipal finances, infrastructure maintenance, housing, and public safety. Consequently, election reporting tends to move beyond campaign activities and focus more directly on voter concerns.

Figure 3: Top five sources by affiliation



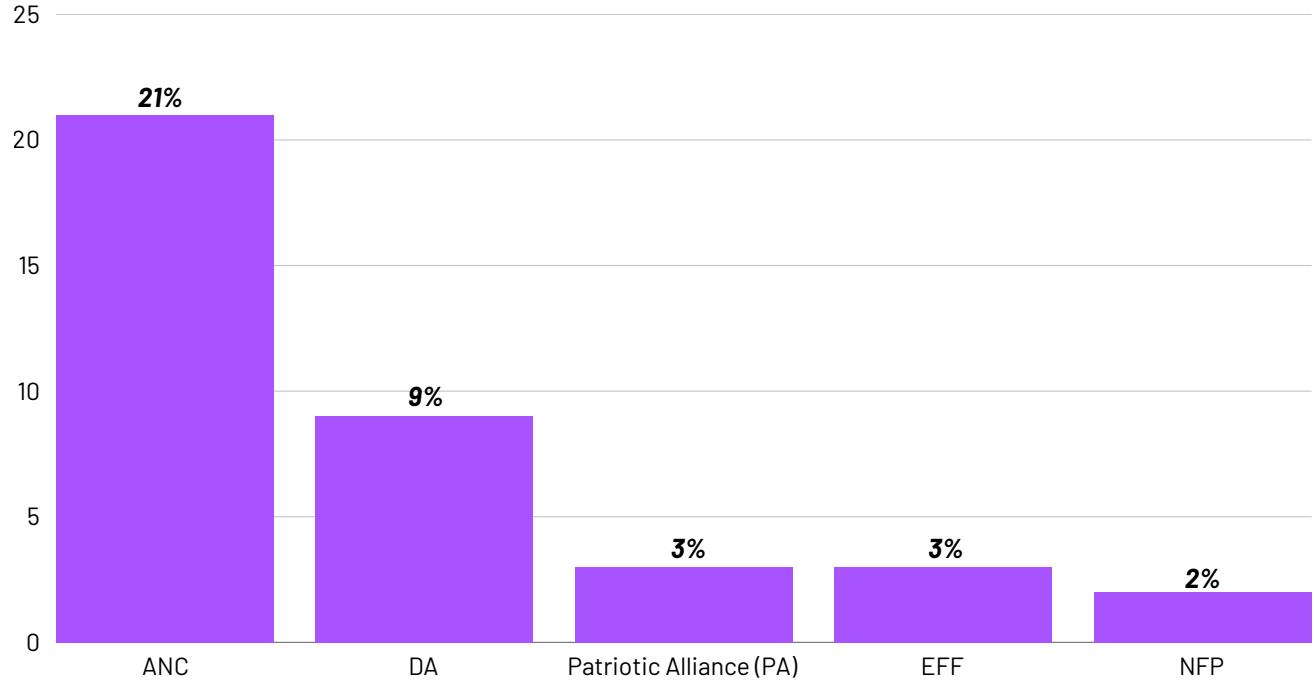
Brief 9 shows an important shift in source diversity. Political parties remained the dominant source category, accounting for approximately 56% of all sources. Public voices constituted approximately 13%, justice system sources 7%, the IEC 5%, and expert voices 4% of sources.

By comparison, Brief 8 was dominated by political party sources, which accounted for approximately 70% of all sources. The IEC accounted for 6%, public sources for 4%, expert voices for 3%, and local government sources for 4%. The decline in political party sources from 70% to 56% is one of the most significant findings in this comparison. At the same time, public voices increased substantially from 4% to 13%, while expert representation also increased. The appearance of justice system sources among the top five affiliations suggests increased reporting on legal, regulatory, accountability, or electoral compliance issues.

This shift may indicate that journalists increasingly sought alternative voices beyond political parties. As election campaigns mature, media organisations often move beyond merely reporting campaign statements and begin evaluating claims, investigating governance issues, and examining legal disputes involving candidates or political parties. As a result, a broader range of sources becomes relevant to election reporting.

The results suggest an improvement in source diversity and a shift towards more balanced election coverage.

Figure 4: Top five parties

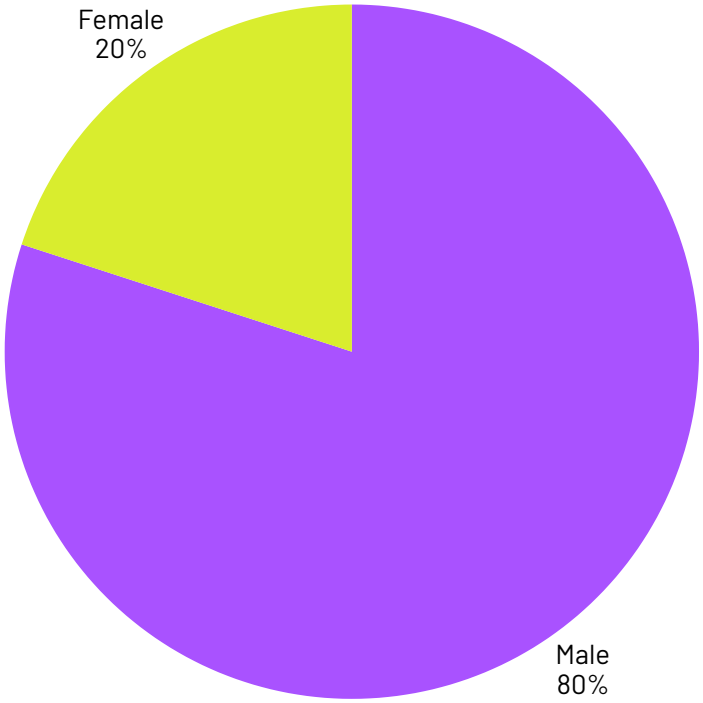


In Brief 8, major parties such as the ANC, DA, EFF and IFP remained the primary focus of election reporting due to their national visibility, campaign resources, and electoral competitiveness.

The continued dominance of political party sources in Brief 9 suggests that these parties likely maintained their visibility in election reporting. However, the decline in overall political party sourcing may indicate that media attention became somewhat less dependent on party-driven narratives and more focused on broader electoral issues.

This development reflects a common trend in election coverage, in which reporting increasingly scrutinises political parties' governance records and policy proposals rather than simply amplifying campaign messaging.

Figure 5: Male vs Female Sources



Brief 9 recorded 122 female sources and 501 male sources. This translates to approximately 20% female representation and 80% male representation. In comparison, Brief 8 recorded 101 female sources and 330 male sources, resulting in approximately 23% female representation and 77% male representation.

While the number of women quoted increased from 101 to 122, the number of male sources increased even more substantially, resulting in a decline in women's proportional representation from 23% to 20%. One possible explanation is the increased focus on political actors and legal institutions during this period. Senior political leadership, party spokesperson positions, and justice-sector leadership structures remain predominantly male, which can contribute to gender imbalances in sourcing. The emergence of justice system sources in Brief 9 may also have reinforced this pattern if journalists relied primarily on senior legal and institutional representatives.

Although women remain underrepresented, the increase in the absolute number of female voices suggests some improvement in inclusion. However, the overall findings indicate that election reporting continues to reflect broader gender inequalities present within South African political and public institutions.

CONCLUSION

The comparison between Brief 9 and Brief 8 suggests that election coverage continued to evolve from campaign-centred reporting towards more substantive and diverse election journalism. While overall election story volume remained relatively stable, significant shifts occurred in source diversity and the range of voices represented.

The most notable finding is the decline in reliance on political party sources, from 70% in Brief 8 to 56% in Brief 9, accompanied by substantial increases in public and expert voices. This suggests that journalists increasingly focused on accountability, governance, legal issues, and public concerns rather than relying predominantly on partisan perspectives.

The period between 5 and 12 October appears to reflect a transition in election reporting. Rather than being driven by campaign events alone, coverage increasingly incorporated election administration, governance performance, public participation, and accountability discussions. This aligns with broader trends in South African local government election reporting, where media attention gradually shifts from campaign activities to evaluating which parties are best positioned to address local governance challenges facing voters.

Although gender representation declined slightly in percentage terms, the overall increase in female voices and broader improvements in source diversity suggest that election reporting became somewhat more inclusive during the Brief 9 monitoring period. Nevertheless, political actors continue to dominate election narratives, and significant opportunities remain to strengthen further the diversity of voices represented in election coverage.

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
email: musar@mma.org.za

Moxii Africa believes in responsible AI usage. During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used a generative AI tool to improve the grammar, clarity, and structural flow of the text. The final text was reviewed by the author(s) and edited as needed. Moxii Africa takes full responsibility for the final content that has been published.