INTERIM REPORT ON COMMUNITY MEDIA ELECTION COVERAGE



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1 Introduction

Community media supplied only 15 of the 1,437 election stories monitored between 4 August and 4 September 2026, about 1% of coverage. This interim report presents the findings of the monitoring of election coverage by community media during the election period. The monitoring was undertaken by Moxii Africa, formerly Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), an organisation dedicated to media accountability, ethical journalism, freedom of expression and democratic participation across Africa.

Community media serve specific localities and language communities and are often the closest source of information for citizens who are poorly served by national outlets. In an election period, they can explain local candidates, voting logistics and community concerns in ways national media rarely do. This report assesses how much election coverage the community media provided, where it came from, what it covered, whose voices it carried and whether it was fair. Where useful, findings are set beside those of the interim report on SABC election coverage, produced from the same monitoring framework.

2 Methodology

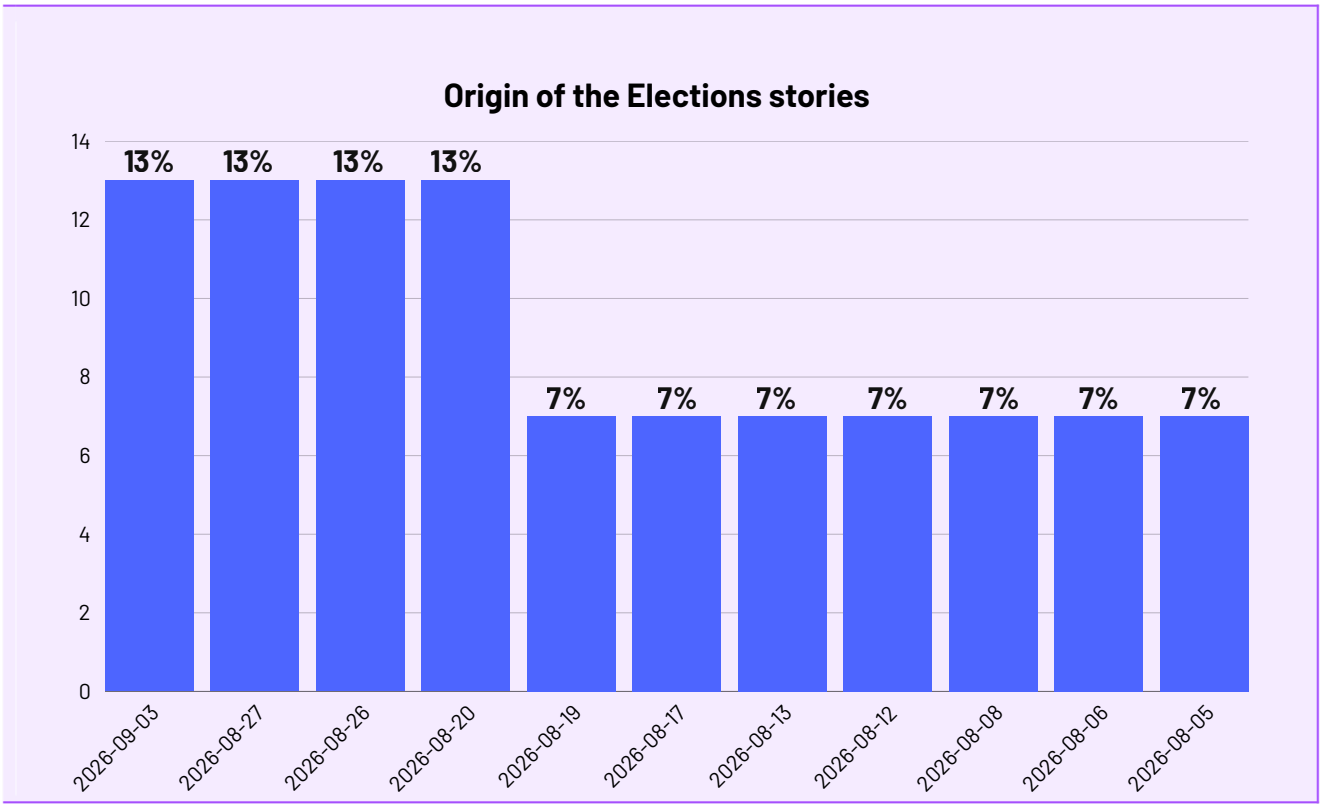
Moxii Africa identified, collected and analysed election-related content from 4 August 2026, when the election date was announced, to 4 September 2026. Each story was coded in "Dexter", Moxii Africa's monitoring tool, against a standard set of indicators: story volume, geographic origin, topics, sources and their affiliation, the gender of sources, and fairness.

In total, 1,437 election stories were captured: 776 from SABC, 646 from other media and 15 from community media. The findings below are drawn from those 15 community media stories. Because the sample is small, a single story moves a percentage by about 7 points, so the figures should be read as indicators of direction rather than precise measures.

3 Findings

3.1 Count of stories per day

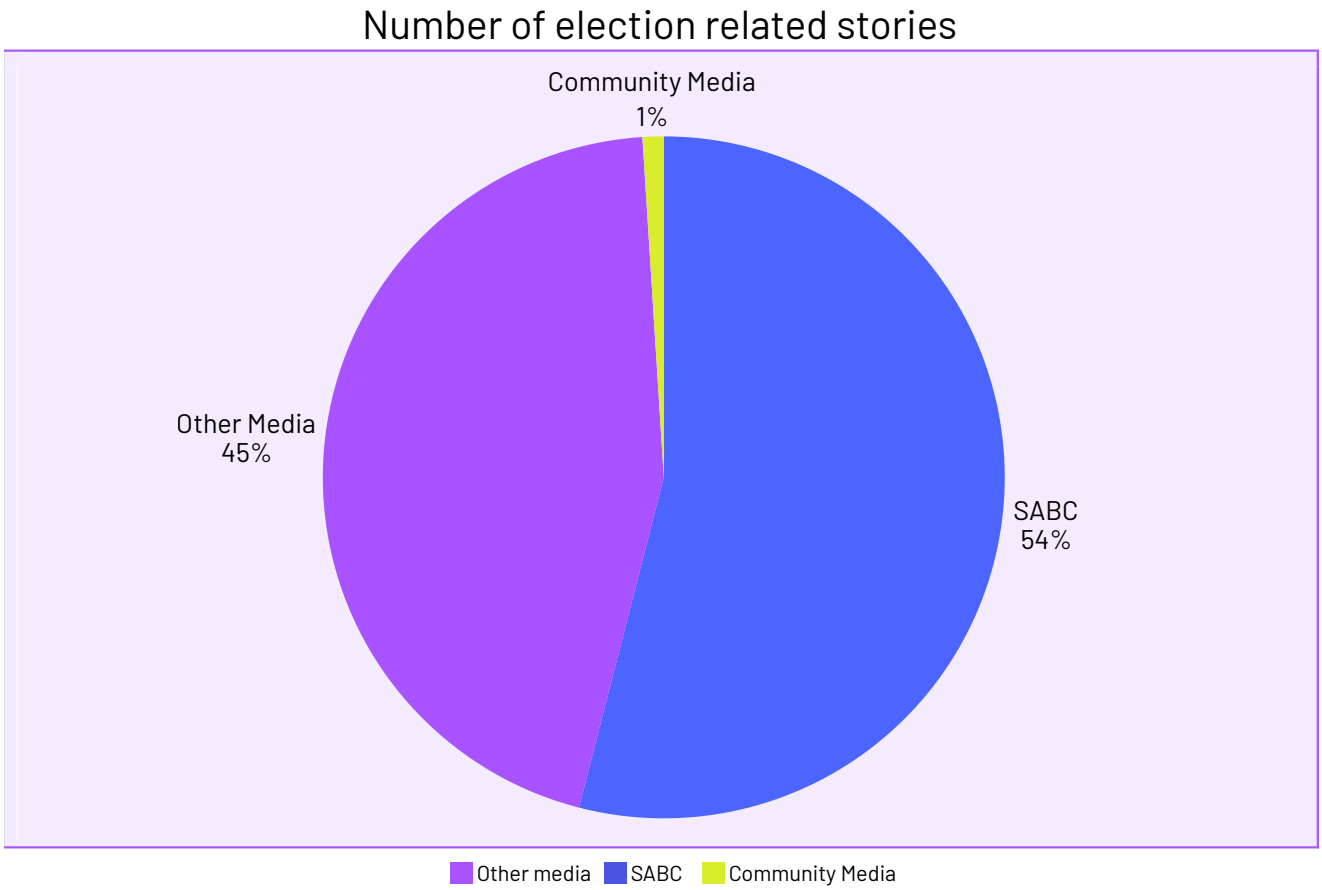
Community media published 15 election stories over the 32-day monitoring period (4 August to 4 September 2026), in only 11 days (34%) and never more than two per day. Seven days had one story (7% of the total each, 47% together) and four days had two (13% each, 53% together). Coverage was thin and broken: two of every three days (21 of 32, or 66%) had no community election story, and the longest silence lasted six days, from 28 August to 2 September, accounting for 19% of the whole period. It picked up late, but only slightly.



The first 16 days (4 to 19 August) produced 7 stories (47%), one a day, while the last 16 days produced 8 stories (53%), with all four two-story days on or after 20 August, suggesting a modest rise as campaigning intensified. Output was concentrated, with four days (13% of the period) producing 53% of all stories while 21 days (66%) produced none. There was also no response to the big moments: SABC's coverage peaked at 62 stories on 7 August, when campaigns launched, and community media published nothing that day. With at most two stories a day (13% of the total), community media could not have kept their audiences informed on local candidates and issues. To be useful in the run-up to an election, community outlets need a regular daily slot for election news, plus shared content from partner newsrooms to fill the quiet days. A larger sample would confirm whether these gaps hold across the whole campaign.

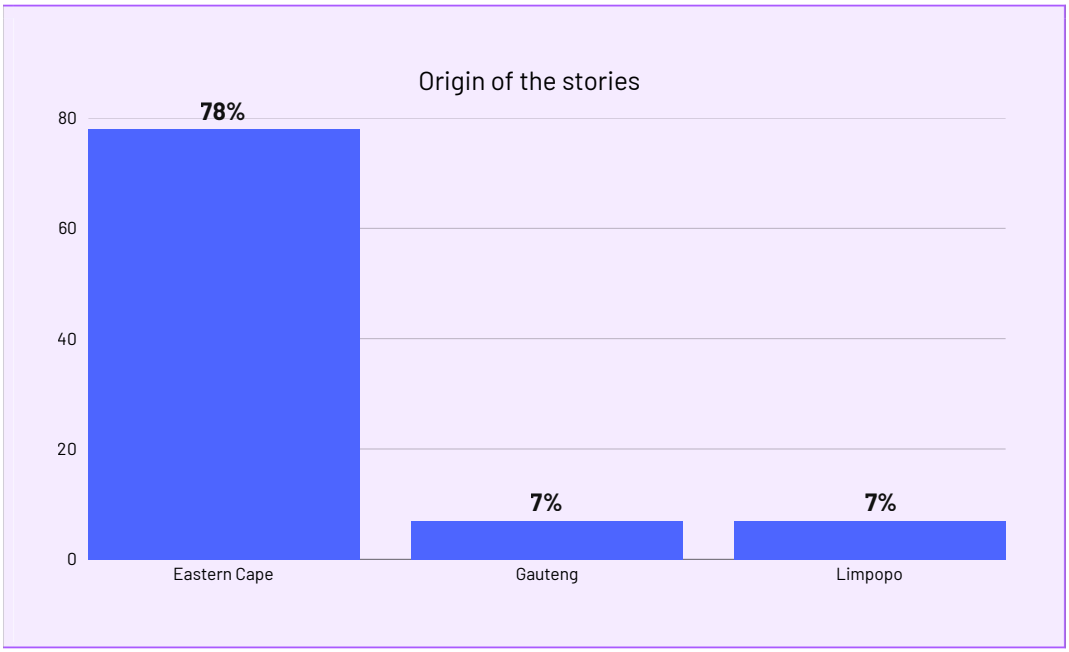
3.2 Number of election-related stories

Community media accounted for 15 of the 1,437 monitored stories (1%), against 776 (54%) for SABC and 646 (45%) for other media.



Election coverage was therefore overwhelmingly carried by national and mainstream outlets. The limited contribution of community media likely reflects small newsrooms, limited resources and a focus on hyper-local issues rather than national electoral developments. Yet this is a local government election, in which community outlets are well placed to inform voters about their own wards and councils. The gap is a missed opportunity.

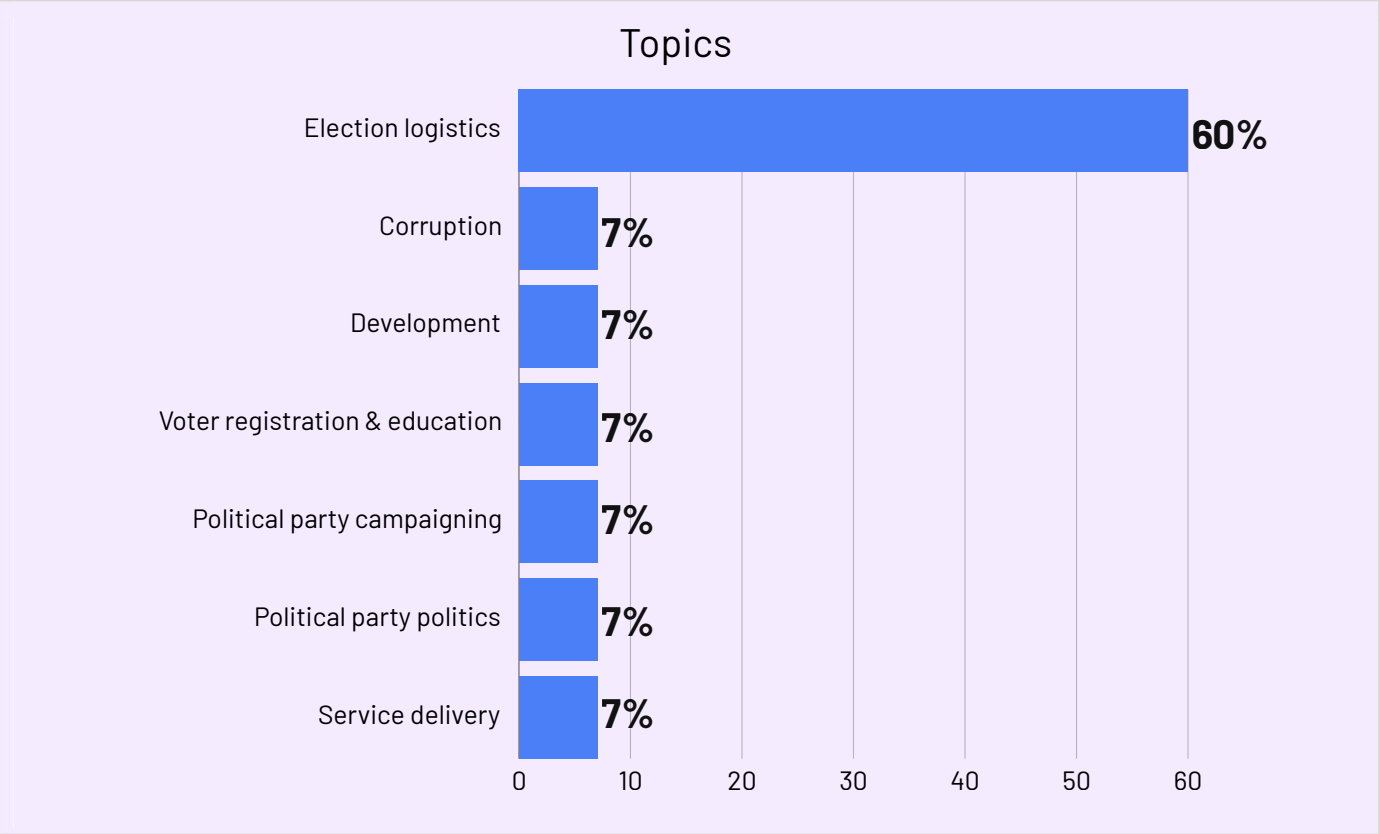
3.3 Origin of the election stories



The Eastern Cape dominated community media coverage, at 78% of stories. Gauteng and Limpopo each accounted for 7%. The data extract shows only these three provinces, and together they account for 91% of the stories. The remaining 9% is spread across provinces not shown in the extract.

This is the reverse of SABC, where Gauteng alone supplied 58% of stories and the Eastern Cape 5%. The community sample, therefore, draws on a narrow set of outlets rather than a countrywide spread, and the provinces where SABC coverage was concentrated, such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, are not among those shown in the community figures.

3.4 Top topics

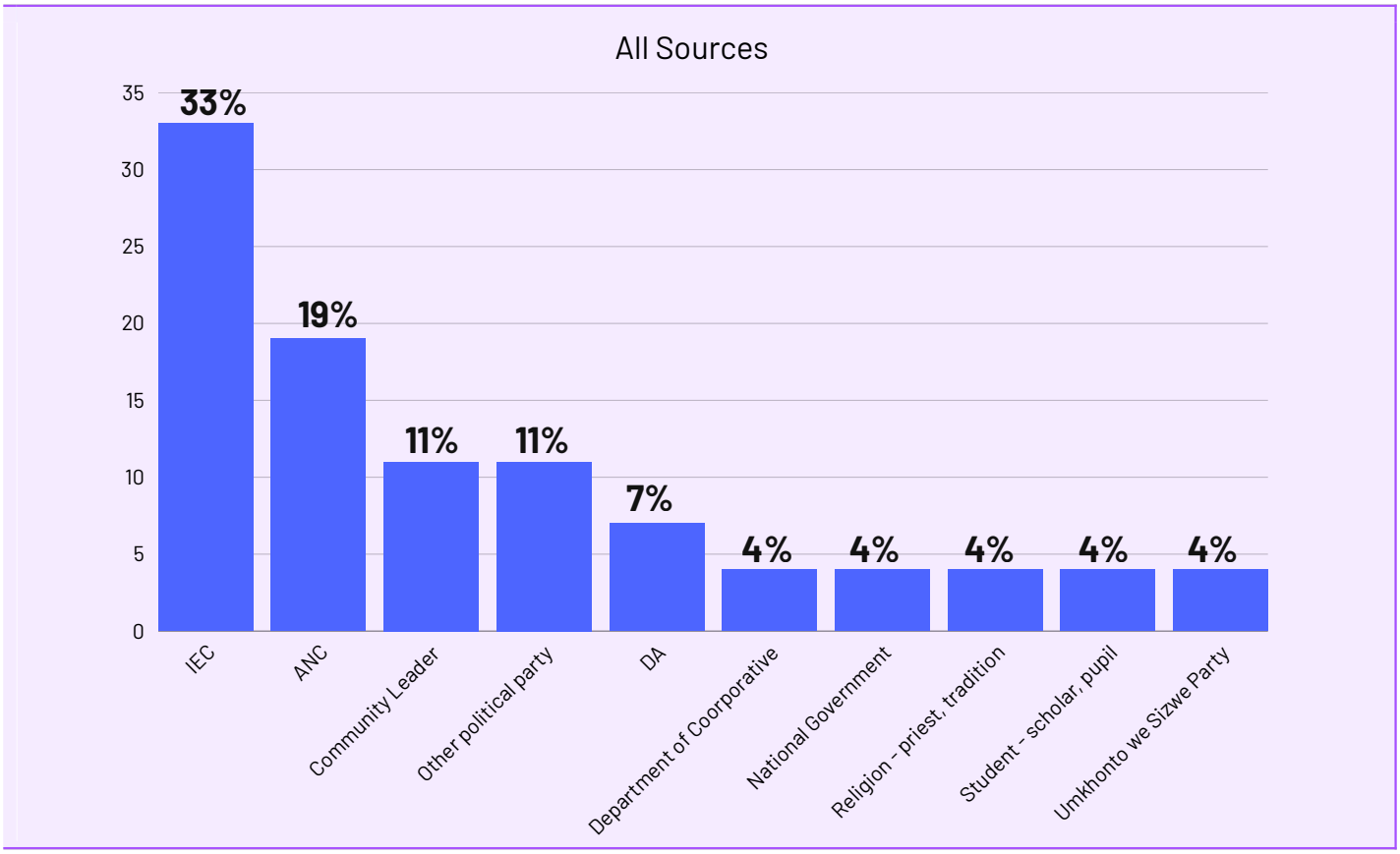


Election logistics made up 60% of community media coverage (9 of 15 stories). Six other topics were covered by one story each (7% each): corruption, development, voter registration and education, political party campaigning, political party politics and service delivery.

Community media were far more focused on how and where to vote than SABC, where logistics accounted for 23% of stories. This is practical, useful information for local voters. However, the coverage had little room for policy. No stories on party manifestos, coalition politics, election funding or political violence appear among the topics, and none on gender-based violence, unemployment or healthcare. Service delivery, the issue most closely tied to local government, appeared in a single story.

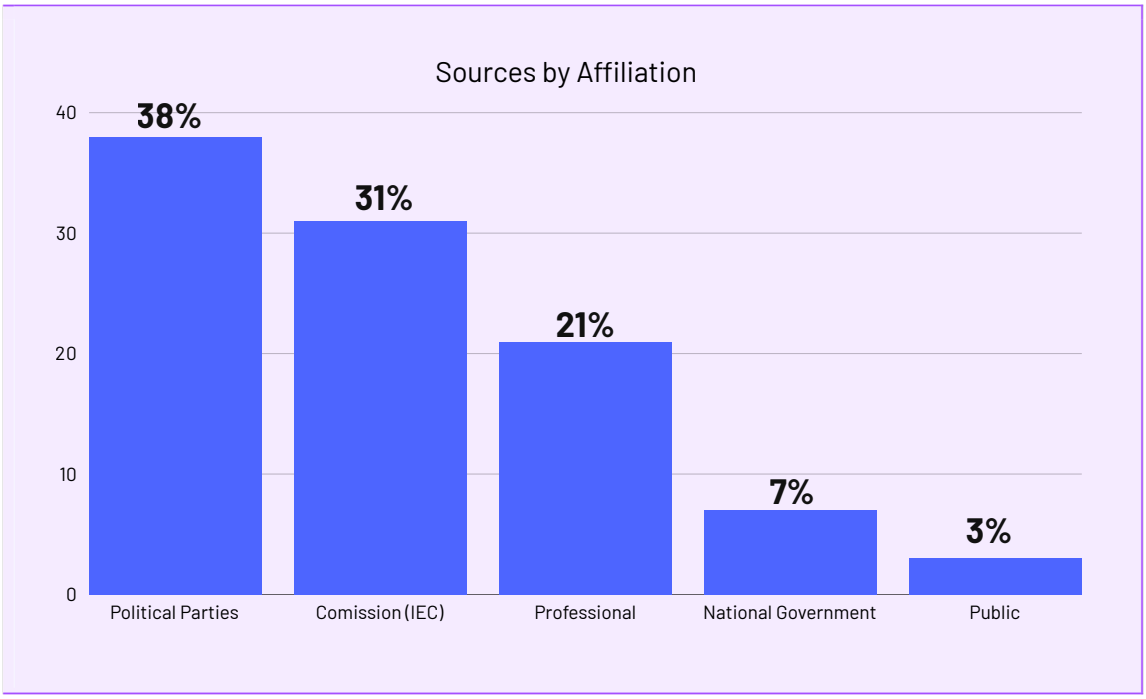
3.5 Top sources

The 27 sources mentioned were led by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), which supplied one-third of the contributions.



The prominence of the IEC aligns with the coverage's focus on logistics. The ANC was the most quoted party at 19%, compared with 24% at the SABC. The MK Party, which accounted for 8% of SABC sources, appeared only once. Notably, community leaders, a religious leader and a student were quoted. Such local voices bring texture to election reporting that party and commission sources alone do not. Expert sources were absent from the top ten.

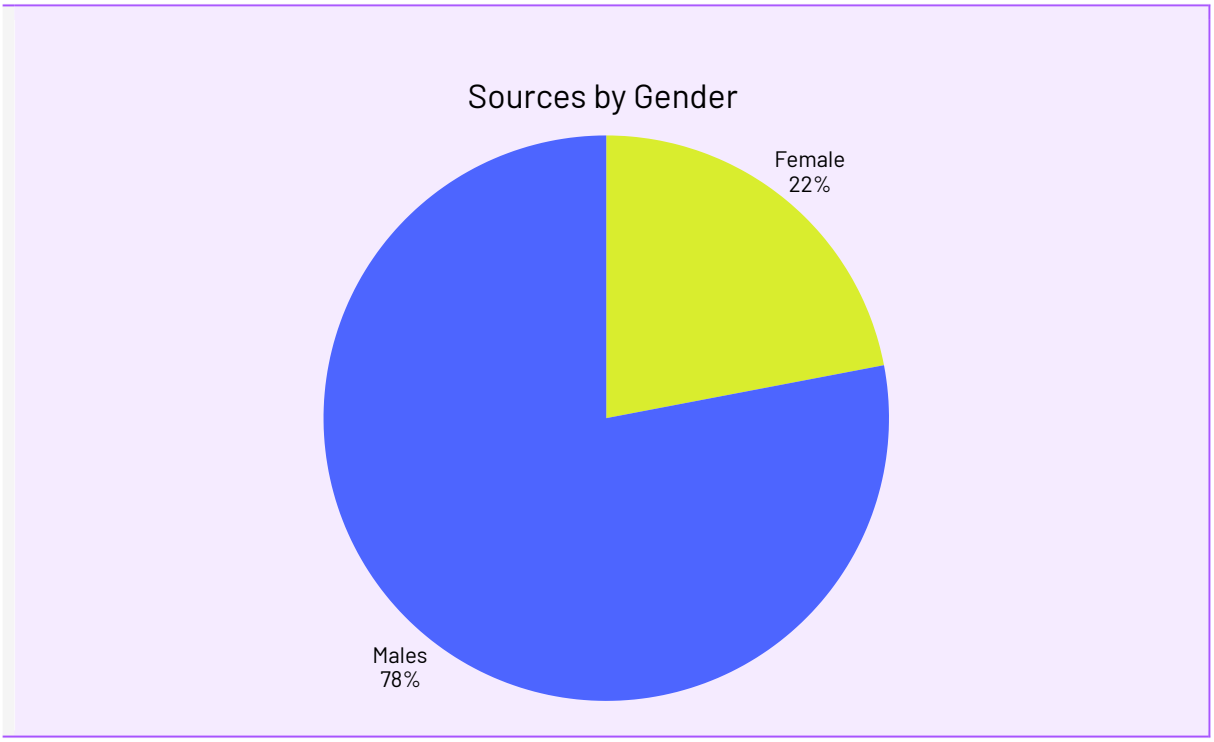
3.6 Sources by affiliation



Political parties supplied 38% of sources, compared with 72% at SABC. Community media drew more broadly on professionals (21%, compared with 3% for experts at the SABC) and the IEC. The balance across affiliations is healthier than at SABC. However, Public appeared only once (3%), and no labour unions or civil society organisations were visible. Local government voters were largely spoken about rather than listened to.

3.7 Sources by Gender

Of the 18 sources whose gender was recorded, 14 were men (78%), and 4 were women (22%). This is slightly better than SABC (82% male, 18% female) but still a clear imbalance, with men outnumbering women by more than three to one.



The difference between the two broadcasters is within the expected range for a sample of 18 sources, so it should not be interpreted as a real improvement. The finding is consistent with the continued dominance of men as party spokespeople and leaders. Community media are close to local women leaders, ward candidates, health workers and business owners, and are well placed to bring them into election reporting. Doing so would also help to address women's concerns about safety and public services, which were largely absent from the topics covered.

3.8 Balance and Fairness in Election Reporting

Community media election coverage recorded 0% bias in the monitoring period. No story was found to favour or disadvantage any party, candidate or stakeholder. This is a positive result in a contested electoral environment and indicates professional, impartial reporting.
It should be read with the small sample in mind. With 15 stories, the absence of bias shows that individual stories were fair. It does not show that all parties had an equal chance of being heard, since party sources were concentrated among the ANC and the DA.

4 Conclusion

Community media played a very small part in election coverage, but what they did publish was fair and practical. With 15 of 1,437 stories (1%), they were far outweighed by SABC (54%) and other media (45%). Coverage was fair, with 0% bias, and centred on election logistics (60%), which directly served local voters.

Several gaps stand out:

- Volume: only 15 stories in 32 days, never more than two a day.
- Geography: the Eastern Cape supplied 78% of stories, with little from elsewhere.
- Issues: one story each on service delivery, corruption and development, and none on manifestos, gender-based violence or healthcare.
- Voices: political parties and the IEC supplied about 69% of sources, citizens 3%, and women 22% of sources whose gender was recorded.

Compared with SABC, community media were less party-driven and more diverse in their sourcing, but far less visible and far less varied in the sources of their stories.

To strengthen community media's contribution before the 4 November election, outlets and their partners could consider:

- Supporting community newsrooms with training, resources and story-sharing arrangements so that more local stories are produced.
- Encouraging coverage of ward-level contests, service delivery and manifesto promises, not only voting logistics.
- Setting targets for women, citizen and expert sources in each story.
- Broadening community stations' participation beyond the Eastern Cape.

This is an interim assessment. The final report should confirm these trends over the full campaign period, with a larger sample.

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) on (011) 788 1278 or email: musar@mma.org.za

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