



Factsheet: Online conversations about upcoming Local Government Elections in South Africa

22 October – 29 October 2026

Introduction

South Africans will head to the polls to elect their local government representatives on 4 November 2026. Social media has become an important arena for political contestation, electoral mobilisation and the circulation of harmful media around the electoral processes.

The [Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change](#) (CABC), through its High-Risk Events Monitoring programme has identified several emerging narratives that may contribute to distrust of electoral institutions, heighten hostility towards foreign nationals and undermine confidence in the credibility of election outcomes.

This factsheet covers the period from 22 October until 29 October 2026 and focuses on the narrative surrounding the elections.

Methodology

Social media data collection and macro-level analysis

Social media data for this analysis was collected and analysed using Brandwatch and SentiOne. Content was drawn from multiple online platforms and sources, including Bluesky, Facebook, Facebook Public, Instagram Public, Reddit, review sites, Tumblr, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, blogs, forums and online news. Search queries incorporated keywords and phrases relevant to the 2026 South African Local Government Elections, with the aim of identifying broader online conversations, emerging narratives and patterns of engagement. The analysis examined the prevalence, reach and evolution of election-related discussions across platforms, providing a macro-level understanding of the digital information environment.

High-risk events (HRE) monitoring and analysis

In addition to the broader social media analysis, the CABC implemented a structured High-Risk Events (HRE) monitoring framework to identify and document potentially harmful election-related content. Monitoring focused on X, TikTok and Facebook, examining three categories: mis/disinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence, with xenophobic content tracked as a cross-cutting theme.

Content was assessed against predefined criteria and recorded in a centralised monitoring database, capturing the platform, content type, relevant political actors, reasons for classification, engagement metrics and escalation outcomes. The framework applied a precautionary approach, allowing potentially qualifying content to be logged for further assessment, while distinguishing harmful content from legitimate political criticism, opinion, satire and lawful protest.

A two-tier escalation process was used. Tier 1 involved documenting potentially harmful content and reporting it through the relevant platform-specific mechanisms. Tier 2 applied to serious or time-sensitive threats, including identifiable targets, planned electoral disruption or coordinated violence, which were referred for urgent internal assessment and possible escalation to the appropriate authorities.

This approach enabled the triangulation of macro-level social media trends with incident-level monitoring, providing insight into both the broader electoral information environment and specific instances of potentially harmful online activity.

Overview of conversation

The conversation received more than 15 310 mentions (see Figure 1 below). These mentions were generated by 6 426 unique authors, which means that each author averaged 2 mentions concerning this topic.

The trending topics within the conversation were (1) Illegal immigration; (2) South Africans and (3) upcoming local.

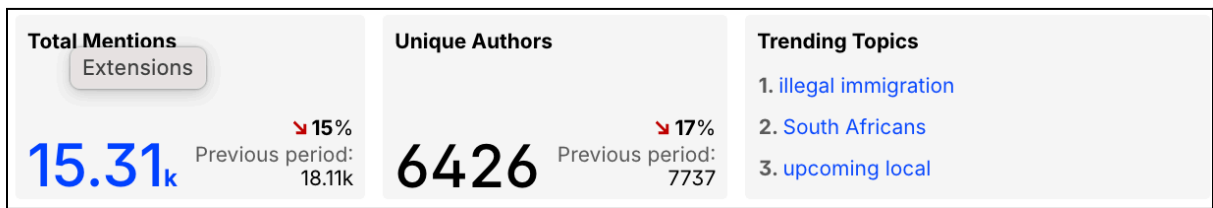


Figure 1: Key insights

- **Illegal immigration:** Illegal immigration remains a trending topic as South Africans head to the polls with users expressing frustration at Government’s policies surrounding immigration and what they deem to be an attempt to silence

protests surrounding immigration. Elements of collective blame were also found within this topic.

- **South Africans:** Varied conversations were found under this topic predominantly critical of governing political parties and noting that South Africans continue to suffer.
- **Upcoming local:** This topic was largely focused on the IEC and preparations surrounding the local elections on 4 November 2026.

Topics

The word cloud in Figure 2 below visualises the most prominent topics in the social media conversation about local government elections. The size of the keyword, hashtag or phrase corresponds to the frequency of appearance - the larger the text, the more often the topic was discussed.

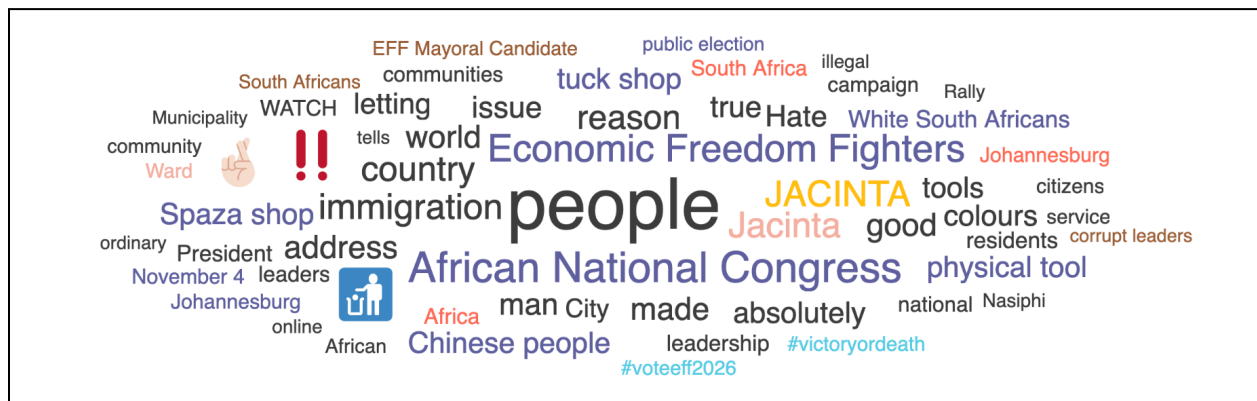


Figure 2: Word Cloud of Local Government Elections

Mentions Over Time

A steady rise is observed from 25 October 2026 as we near the election date with a spike on 26 October 2026 with a mention increase of 1000 posts.

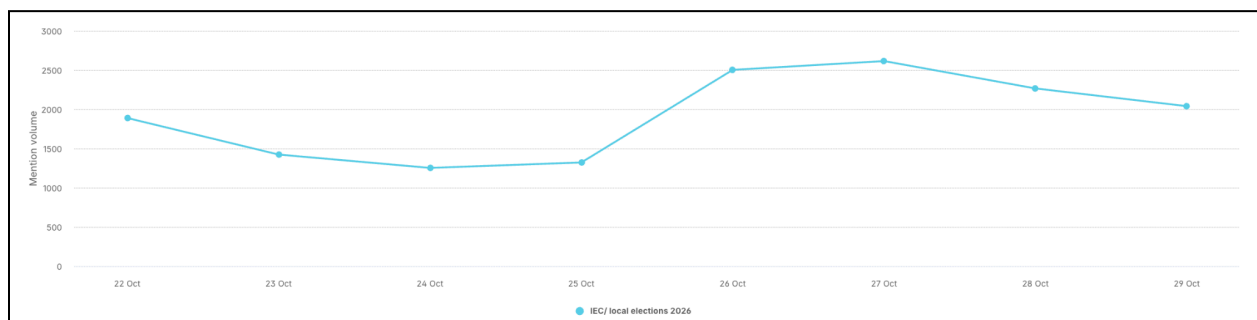


Figure 3: Mentions over Time

Lowest mention volume for “IEC/ local elections 2026” was observed on 24 October, with 1 253 mentions, 1.57 times below the median. This dip coincided with the EFF's campaign in Mpumalanga, where leader Julius Malema focused on unemployment and service delivery, as noted in a mention about him placing “unemployment and poor service delivery at the centre of his party’s election campaign”.

Highest mention volume for “IEC/ local elections 2026” occurred on 27 October, reaching 2 615 mentions, 1.33 times above the median. This peak was driven by debates between the ANC and DA over housing delivery in Cape Town, with the ANC's mayoral candidate claiming a superior track record, stating the party “delivered more housing in that period than the DA has in 20 years”.

Monitoring snapshot

The table below reflects the preliminary findings from the HRE Monitoring Toolkit developed by the CABC.

Indicator	Recorded
Total Entries	79
By Platform	
X/Twitter	77
TikTok	1
Facebook	1
By Category	
Entries tagged Mis/Disinformation	51
Entries tagged Hate Speech	33
Entries tagged Incitement	12

*Categories overlap, meaning a single entry may be recorded under multiple forms of harmful content. These are provisional monitoring classifications rather than independently verified findings or legal determinations.

The log records approximately 546 600 views, 29 600 likes, 4 100 shares and 1 350 comments across entries with available metrics. Note, however, that the monitoring sample is heavily weighted towards X and cannot be considered representative of the broader South African online conversation.

According to our tool, mis- and disinformation is the highest category of harmful content found by the facilitators during the period, with hate speech second and incitement with the lowest number of posts. Below, we shall review some of the prominent narratives found online during the period:

1. Allegations of electoral manipulation and institutional distrust

Several users cast doubt on the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the credibility of results before voting has taken place. One post [claimed that the ANC had already voted on behalf of citizens](#) and presented purported proof of ANC–IEC collusion; the log records 95 500 views. Another user [suggested that a delay in announcing results would allow them to be doctored](#). Other posts [alleged that the IEC was compromised](#) or questioned whether an ANC or DA victory could occur without rigging. These posts demonstrate how suspicion of election administration is being expressed as specific, but unverified, allegations. Such claims can provide a ready-made explanation for unfavourable outcomes, although criticism or distrust alone is not necessarily misinformation.

2. Xenophobia framed as an electoral strategy

A second cluster links foreign nationals to alleged electoral advantage for the ANC and other parties. One user [claimed that the ANC was replacing South Africans with foreign nationals](#) while using a derogatory term for migrants. Another [alleged that Home Affairs was issuing identity documents to foreign nationals in Cape Town](#) (35 000 logged views). A separate post [claimed that migrants would be used to dilute South Africans' votes and rig elections](#). The common thread is an unsubstantiated suggestion that immigration and documentation are tools for manipulating the electorate. This framing risks confusing immigration status with eligibility to vote and reinforcing hostility towards migrant communities.

3. From online allegations to potential polling-station intimidation

Some monitored posts move beyond claims of electoral unfairness to calls for direct action. A user [urged South Africans to gather at voting stations on 4 November to prevent foreign nationals from voting for the ANC and EFF](#) (3 366 logged views). Another [warned of foreign nationals allegedly being mobilised to campaign for a political party](#). These examples do not establish organised intimidation or impending violence. They nevertheless illustrate how unverified claims about migrant participation might be translated into confrontational activity near polling stations. Lawful observation and political mobilisation must be distinguished from threats, discriminatory targeting and interference with voters.

Conclusion

Preliminary monitoring findings show how allegations of electoral fraud and xenophobic narratives can reinforce one another ahead of election day. The clearest risk is not proof of widespread manipulation, but the possibility that unverified claims weaken confidence in electoral processes and encourage hostility towards perceived foreign voters. Further assessment of the logged incidents is required before drawing conclusions about prevalence, coordination or real-world impact.