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

## 30 October – 5 November 2026

### Introduction

Ahead of South Africa's 4 November 2026 local government elections, the Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change (CABC)'s first High-Risk Events factsheet documented allegations of electoral manipulation, claims that political parties were using foreign nationals to gain votes, and calls to confront people perceived as ineligible at polling stations. As special voting and election day unfolded, footage of ballot boxes, vehicles transporting election materials and officials handling ballots gave some of those allegations a new focus. Posts presented these scenes as evidence that votes had already been cast or that the outcome had been decided. In one case, Real411 found that footage shared as evidence of fraud showed a routine procedure for handling special votes.

This fact sheet draws on 120 entries that met CABC's tracking criteria, namely hate speech, incitement to violence and mis- and disinformation, representing 120 distinct links across X, TikTok and Facebook. It examines how posts used election footage to advance rigging claims, how claims of a predetermined result were used to question the value of voting, and how allegations about voter eligibility fed calls for people to intervene at polling stations. The findings describe what circulated in the tracked sample.

### 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 Facebook, Facebook Public and X (formerly Twitter). 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) tracking and analysis

In addition to the broader social media analysis, the CABC implemented a structured High-Risk Events (HRE) tracking framework to identify and document potentially harmful election-related content. Tracking 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 found in posts concerning mis- and disinformation, hate speech as well as incitement to violence.

Content was assessed against predefined criteria and recorded in a centralised tracking database that captured 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 tracking, 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 53 460 mentions (see Figure 1 below). These mentions were generated by 15 230 unique authors, which means that each author averaged 3.5 mentions concerning this topic.

The trending topics within the conversation were (1) voting station; (2) breaking news and (3) cast his vote.




Figure 1: Key insights

- **Voting Station**: MK Party supporters were accused of preventing voters of Somali descent from casting their ballots in Durban. Other voting stations reported disputes over ballot box seals and disruptions. The Electoral Commission confirmed ballot theft in KwaZulu-Natal and reported missing ballots in the Eastern Cape.
- **Breaking News**: Election reports included allegations of vote rigging and repeat voting, alongside reports of extra ballot papers, theft of IEC materials and a presiding officer's dismissal over an attempt to transport ballot boxes in a party-branded vehicle. Arrests were reported for filming and sharing marked ballots and for an alleged attempt to steal IEC materials. Early results and party announcements pointed to gains for ActionSA in Laingsburg, MK in Richmond, the EFF in Moses Kotane and the ANC in the Northern Cape.
- **Cast His Vote:** Election-day coverage included reports of political leaders casting their votes, commenting on the voting process and expressing confidence in their parties' prospects.

**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 30 October 2026 as we near the election date, with the highest volume in the conversation occurring on 5 November 2026.

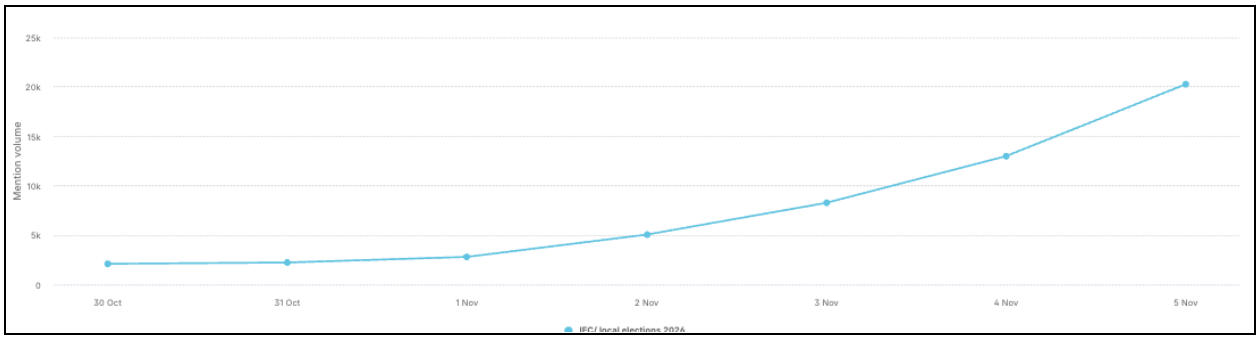


Figure 3: Mentions over Time

**Mentions peaked on 5 November 2026.** We recorded 20 288 mentions, 300% above the daily median. The spike included allegations of vote rigging and disputed vote counts, alongside a widely shared post claiming that Operation Dudula's Zandile Dabula would become ActionSA's MEC for Housing and was already dealing with alleged takeovers of RDP homes by foreign nationals.

**Discussion volume rose over the tracking period.** Posts circulated allegations of repeat voting by officials and so-called "ghost voters." One post claimed that results in two eMalahleni wards were withheld because the vote count exceeded the number of registered voters by 600. This has since been refuted by the IEC.

**30 October 2026 was a low-volume outlier.** Brandwatch recorded 2 115 mentions, with discussion covering campaigning, party pledges and political accusations. One post alleged the use of fabricated intelligence reports and AI-generated images depicting payments from ANC leaders.

**HRE tracking snapshot**

The table below reflects the preliminary findings from the HRE tracking project developed by the CABC.

| **Indicator** | **Recorded** |
|---|---|
| Total Entries | 120 (distinct URLs) |
| By Platform | |
| X/Twitter | 98 |
| TikTok | 15 |
| Facebook | 7 |
| By Category | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Entries tagged Mis/Disinformation | 88 |
| Entries tagged Hate Speech | 30 |
| Entries tagged Incitement | 13 |

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

Across 120 distinct posts that met the tracking criteria, the HRE log recorded approximately 1.24 million views, 288 300 likes, 47 400 shares and 20 800 comments where those metrics were available. X accounted for 98 of the 120 posts, so the sample is heavily weighted towards X and cannot be considered representative of the broader South African online conversation.

Mis- and disinformation was the most frequently recorded category, appearing in 88 posts, followed by hate speech in 30 and incitement to violence in 13. Some posts fell into more than one category. The sections below examine prominent narratives identified during the tracking period.

**1. Allegations of electoral manipulation and voter rigging**

Mis/disinformation was tagged on 88 of 120 entries. The allegations used sealed ballots, ballot transport and footage of officials handling election materials to suggest that votes had already been cast or the outcome had been decided. In one case, the same footage appeared on X and TikTok with an ANC–IEC collusion claim. Real411 found that the X version showed a standard procedure for transferring special votes collected during home visits. The TikTok version had 114 400 recorded views, and the log notes that some commenters said they would abstain from voting. That documents a stated reaction, while actual turnout effects remain unknown.

Some posts claimed the ANC had already voted on behalf of voters. Others alleged the ANC and DA jointly benefited from IEC manipulation, or claimed that the IEC had already decided the results. One post explicitly asked why anyone should stand in a queue if the IEC already had the outcome. The log establishes that the joint ANC–DA allegation circulated in this tracking period.

**2. Incitement to violence**

The tracking team identified thirteen isolated cases of incitement to violence among 120 qualifying posts. The cases varied in target and reach. Some posts celebrated attacks on ANC members, while others encouraged violence against foreign nationals or called for people to force party agents out of polling stations. One video celebrating an attack on ANC members had a recorded reach of 193 800.

Reviewers noted replies endorsing violence on some of these posts. Those replies came from individual discussions, and their prevalence across the wider election conversation remains unknown.

### 3. Synthetic and manipulated media

Alongside genuine footage shared out of context, the tracking team found posts that used AI-generated or edited media to make political messages more believable. An AI-generated video depicted Nelson Mandela delivering a "last message" urging older voters to vote "for change". Another image tagged #ChatGPT showed a city in disrepair and claimed that this was what South Africa would look like under an EFF government. A third video inserted a fabricated ANC campaign graphic reading "We promise more foreigners" into an otherwise accurate guide on how to vote.

### Real411 Rulings

Real411[1] found that footage shared as evidence of ANC–IEC collusion showed the routine transfer of special votes collected during home visits into sealed ballot boxes. It also ruled that posts claiming ballots had already been marked for the ANC or that the ANC and DA benefited from IEC vote rigging were misinformation.

### Conclusion

Mis- and disinformation was the most common form of harmful content in CABC's tracking sample. As voting got underway, posts presented footage of routine election procedures as evidence that ballots had been tampered with or that the result was already decided. In a few cases, AI-generated or edited media made political claims look as though they came from a trusted figure or an official source of voter information.

The six cases of incitement were isolated within the tracked sample, although individual posts could still draw substantial engagement. Some users said they would abstain from voting, while others endorsed violence in replies. These reactions show how some users responded online. The tracking cannot establish whether the posts affected turnout or led to offline harm.

[1] Real411 is a public platform for reporting harmful online content, developed by Moxii Africa (formerly Media Monitoring Africa). For the 2026 local government elections, the Electoral Commission designated Real411 as the reporting channel for suspected disinformation under its electoral disinformation code. Real411's Digital Complaints Committee publishes non-binding findings after review by panels with expertise in law, media and digital technology.