Factsheet 3 Online conversations after South Africa's local government elections

6–11 November 2026

Introduction

The Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) declared the results of the 4 November local government elections on 8 November. The IEC reported 52% national turnout, up from 45.9% in 2021. Online arguments over what the result meant continued after the declaration. Some users treated unexpected support for the Democratic Alliance (DA) as evidence that votes had been manipulated. In the Gauteng metros, a second dispute took shape around whether a party that finished first had a mandate to govern when it still needed other parties' support.

Race and nationality connected these debates. Some posts assumed that communities would vote as racial blocs. Others framed migration as a test of whether parties represented South Africans. The strongest examples of violent language attached threats to either the alleged theft of the election or a prospective coalition.

Methodology

The Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change (CABC) tracked discussion from 6 to 11 November, spanning the final stages of counting, the declaration and the opening coalition talks. On X (formerly Twitter), we examined the dashboard totals, reviewed recent and high traction content, and dug into conversations related to rigging, nationality and threats. We reviewed TikTok posts dated within the same period and checked factual claims against the IEC and published reporting.

TikTok examples provide additional context and are analysed separately. The review could identify unsupported claims and threatening language. It did not measure the prevalence of harmful content, establish intent to deceive or verify offline outcomes.

Overview of the conversation

We recorded 49 354 mentions from approximately 12 810 unique authors. Compared with the previous week, mentions fell by 4% and unique authors by 14%.



Figure 1. Key Insights for 6–11 November 2026.

“South Africans”, “local government elections” and “Herman Mashaba” were the leading trending phrases. The topic cloud also surfaced “recount” alongside party names and terms referring to racial identity.



Figure 2. Topic Cloud for 6–11 November 2026.

Seen below, mentions peaked on 6 November while counting and objections were still in progress. We recorded 19 713 mentions that day and 15 118 on 7 November. Together they accounted for about 71% of the window’s volume. By 8 November, the day of the declaration, volume had dropped to 7 020. The 11 November figure was captured before the day ended.

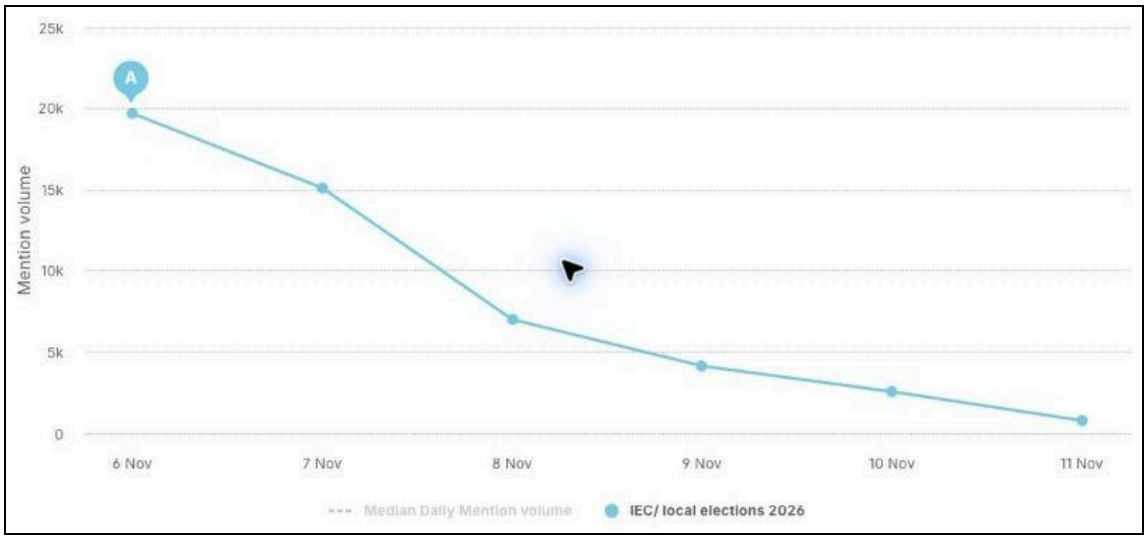


Figure 3. Mentions Volume for 6–11 November 2026.

Mis- and disinformation

Unexpected results became evidence of fraud

During the count and after the declaration, some users presented the outcome itself as evidence of interference. On 6 November, one post claimed that Black voters had not voted for the DA and called for the IEC to be investigated. On 9 November, another post compared the party's support with the white share of the population and inferred rigging. A third example treated the DA leading in townships where the author believed it had not campaigned as evidence of manipulation.

These arguments substituted assumptions about who would support a party for evidence about how votes were counted. A distinction must be drawn between what the results show about an area and what they tell us about the people who live there. The published totals show where a party performed strongly. They cannot establish how individual voters in that area voted by race. This reasoning makes the claim difficult to dislodge. Any result that conflicts with the assumed voting pattern can be offered as further evidence of fraud. A discrepancy between a signed result slip and the published tally would provide a specific claim that could be checked.

A recount and a rerun address different problems

The IEC's 7 November briefing reported 197 objections as of 15:00, with two upheld at that point and recounts ordered in five wards. Separately, SABC News reported that a recount broke an initial tie between the EFF and DA in Buffalo City Ward 15. The declaration also announced a revote in one Siyancuma voting district after ballots were destroyed before counting. In each case, it is possible to identify where the dispute arose, what happened and what was done in response. A recount checks ballots that have already been cast. A revote asks voters to cast their ballots again.

A petition circulated on X called for a rerun of the election, and the petition was still being shared on 11 November. It carried a much broader claim than the documented disputes and treated every recount, objection or correction as proof of systematic rigging removes the distinction between the problem identified and the scale of the remedy it warrants.

The largest share was described as a majority

A 9 November TikTok caption said the ANC had won a majority and cited 3 246 council seats. At the declaration, the IEC reported 30.89% of the national vote and 3 164 council seats for the ANC. The party led nationally. That lead did not amount to a national majority of votes or seats, and control was determined council by council.

Hate speech

Race and nationality as tests of belonging

The assumptions about race found in rigging allegations also appeared in coalition debate. A reposted reply praised Mashaba for avoiding a coalition with white people, casting exclusion by race as a political virtue. Another post shared by several accounts portrayed migrants as a group intent on taking over South Africa and harming its citizens, and presented the EFF's election result as a rejection of the party's alleged role in that threat.

The language also reached discussion of local services and who should be able to live in particular communities. An X reply interpreted support for a politician as support for removing foreigners from poorer communities and called for asylum seekers to be placed in camps. A TikTok creator used election-related hashtags to express concern about xenophobia. These posts show that belonging was itself contested in the election conversation.

Criticism of a party's record on race, and debate about immigration enforcement, belong to ordinary political discussion. The examples above become exclusionary where they assign guilt, danger or political entitlement to entire groups on the basis of race or nationality.

Incitement and threats

One claim shared by several accounts coupled a rigging allegation with language welcoming the prospect of the country burning. A reposted message about Tshwane predicted that the city would burn after claiming the result was rigged. A 10 November reply addressed to Mashaba went further by threatening arson if the ANC and EFF were brought into a coalition. The first two examples attached violent language to rejection of the count. The third used a conditional threat to pressure a politician over a decision that had yet to be made.

Rerun demands also appeared in SABC coverage of a protest in Evaton on 6 November. Reporting on a protest or asking for a recount is distinct from threatening violence. The examples establish that threats and approving references to violence circulated online. They provide no evidence that the posts organised a protest or led to physical harm.

Coalitions and the meaning of winning

Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni emerged as focal points because no party secured an outright majority in those metros. In Johannesburg, Reuters reported that the DA took about 35% of the vote, ahead of the ANC on about 20%, with ActionSA third on about 16%. The DA's lead and ActionSA's leverage were both products of the same result.

On X, an open letter reposted by several accounts portrayed the Gauteng results as voters punishing the ANC and EFF and called on Mashaba to respect that reading of the outcome. Another post called coverage describing the DA as the winner misinformation because the party lacked an outright majority. Under the Municipal Structures Act, councillors elect the mayor. In this regard, coming first in the election and securing the votes to elect a mayor are two separate steps. Where a party has fewer than half the seats, its candidate still needs sufficient support in council to be elected. The IEC's TikTok explainer covered the intermediate step of how votes translate into council seats.

Mashaba's position was more specific than a simple refusal to work with the DA. The Sunday Times reported that he proposed that both he and Helen Zille step aside as candidates and that ActionSA could support a replacement DA nominee. One reply argued that replacing Zille would itself betray DA voters who had turned out for her. A vote could therefore be read as a mandate for a party, a named candidate or an alliance, depending on who was making the argument.

Coalition bargaining also carried questions about what municipalities would deliver. Polity asked whether service delivery would improve, while Brett Herron used TikTok to argue that the Cape Town housing crisis would persist beyond election day. These examples show how discussion moved from who had won to what parties would be accountable for once councils were formed.

Conclusion

The declaration resolved the official count. Online, some users continued to dispute whether the outcome reflected how communities could plausibly have voted, while others argued over who could claim a mandate in a hung council. A recurring theme of betrayal linked several harmful examples. Unexpected votes were cast as fraudulent to deny some groups a legitimate place in politics, and to threaten consequences for a prospective coalition.