Project Name: Democracy
Periodic Report 5

18 August - 31 October 2022
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Introduction

This is the fifth democracy periodic report, amongst other papers which have been investigating narratives that are prevalent in online discourses related to democracy in South Africa. Unlike the previous reports which were published in consistent two-week intervals, this report comes after a ten-week hiatus because of the need to do deeper dives into certain narratives within the topic e.g.Phala Phala Farm Gate deep dive report. As such, this paper will account for the missing time period by account for the online narratives relating to public political discourse for the date range between 18 August and 30 October 2022.

Due to the sheer volume of the conversation contained within these ten-weeks, our report will only focus on three of the six thematic areas within this democracy project – the ANC Elective Conference, the Constitution, and Corruption. These areas had the largest number of total mentions during the reporting period.

After thoroughly investigating these focus areas, part of the tone and sentiment within the conversations reveals a very deep-seated frustration amongst South African citizens. This is driven by various issues such as the increasing levels of inequality, poor governance, inadequate service delivery and other related tensions. Essentially there is an acute awareness of a severed social contract in South Africa. Unsurprisingly, mis(dis)information, narrative manipulation and dangerous rhetoric often show up in different areas of these conversations. Hence, when engaging with or attempting to intervene in online public political discourse great care is required. The issues themselves are complex, and this complexity is amplified by the prevalence of mis- and disinformation, narrative manipulation and polarising and divisive rhetoric in these narratives.

Research methodology

The CABC made use of social media analytic tools to collate the information presented in this report. The query upon which the Democracy_2022 dashboard is based makes use of carefully curated keywords to capture as much of the conversation as possible. Keywords such as democracy, inequality, unemployment, social justice, human rights and freedom were used as a broad starting point. Each of the five focus areas have their own dashboards which consist of focus area specific keywords.

Content sources for the various dashboards include Twitter, Facebook, news publications and blogs. It is important to note that currently only South African content is being considered. For Twitter (the main content source) this means that only users who have selected South Africa as their location are being filtered through to the dashboard.

Metric analysis overview

This section will briefly show the overall volume of the democracy conversation on social media.

In the 10-week period between 18 August and 31 October, the democracy conversation based on our dataset, had over 1,22 million mentions as seen in figure 1. These were created by just over 134 000 unique authors. Every unique author therefore accounts for roughly 9 mentions. The number of authors compared to the "mention volume" will be discussed in further detail under the thematic analyses below.
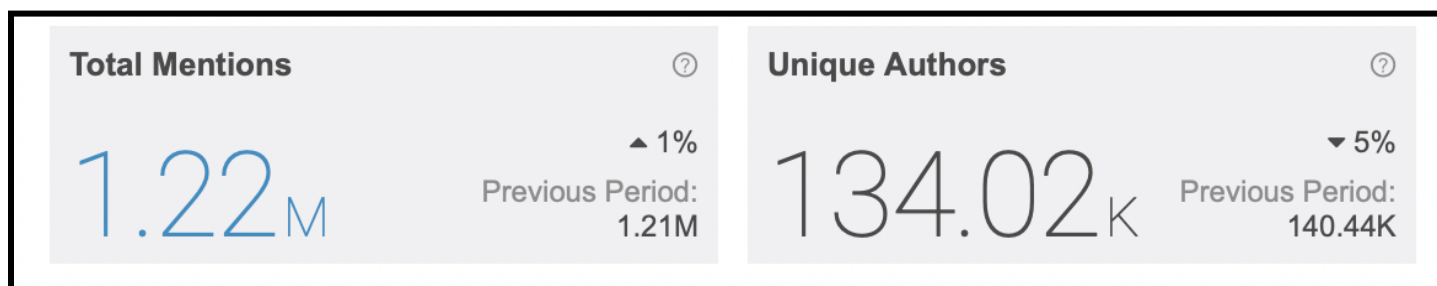
Figure 1: Total mentions and unique authors

The graph below (x-axis in weeks) illustrates the total volume of mentions over time and fluctuations in the democracy conversation in South Africa. This graph is particularly useful because it juxtaposes all key focus areas against each other. It also allows us to see that the ANC elective conference, the Constitution and the topic of corruption had a higher number of mentions than the other focus areas.
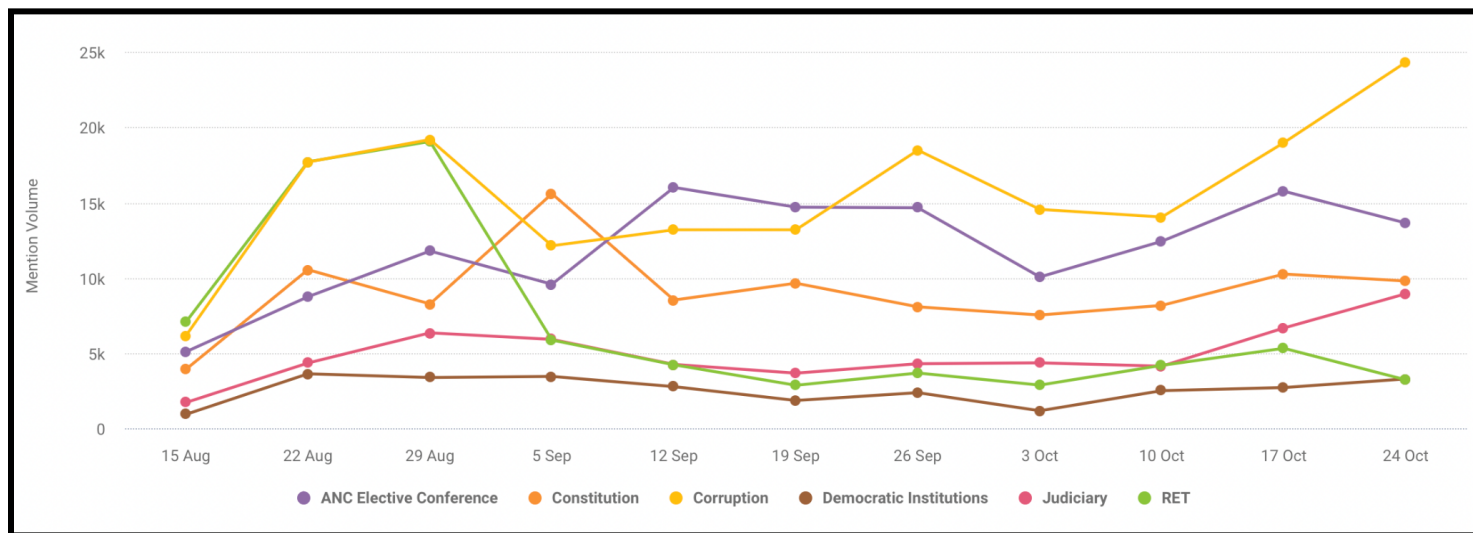

Figure 2: Volume over time with all thematic focus areas

The topic wheel in figure 3 below provides a view into the broad topics and the sub topics across all of the key focus areas. It shows that the main topics are unemployment, corruption and the ruling party, load-shedding and Eskom's electricity crisis, and media freedom; this suggests that there is a focus on grievances that South African citizens may have with service delivery and the general state of the country.

To better understand the types of mentions driving conversation in the Twitter space, table 1 below contains the top ten hashtags from the dataset within the reporting period. Shown next to each are the number of tweets and retweets in which they appeared from our dataset. Where there is a balance of retweets to tweets, like with #electricity, this could imply that each tweet was retweeted at least once. The topic #medscheme on the other hand, shows that a few original tweets (772) were retweeted 6142 times, meaning that each tweet was retweeted around 8 times.
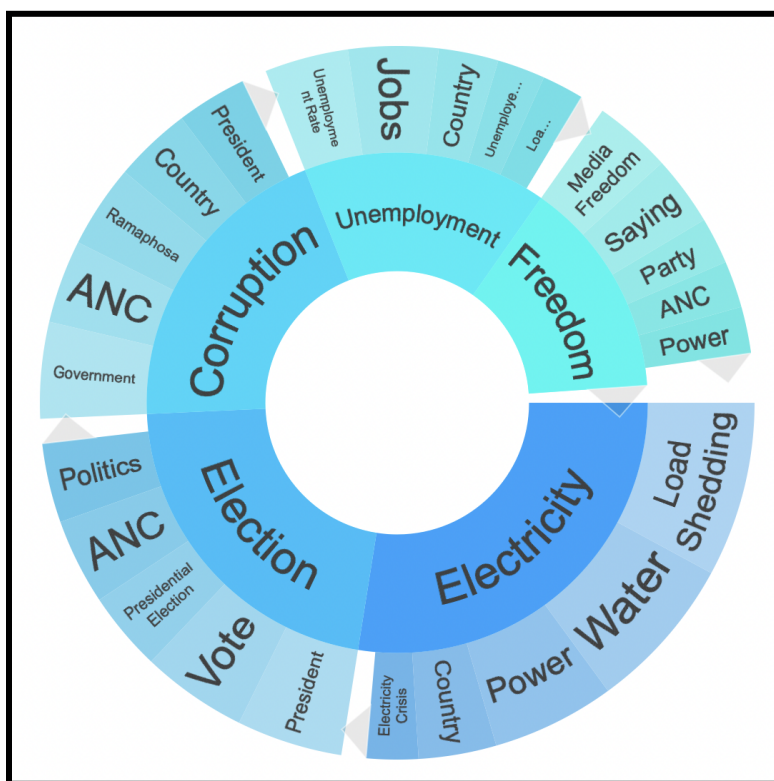
Figure 3: Topics wheel of all thematic focus areas

The 8:1 retweet to tweet ratio is clearly much higher than others seen in the table below and this could imply that an amplification of these hashtags have taken place. Whether this amplification is authentic or inauthentic would still have to be considered but this does present a good opportunity to understand the role that retweet to tweet ratios can play in helping to identify potentially manipulated narratives.

Top hashtags	Tweets	Retweets
#loadshedding	1431	4732
#southafrica	1239	1379
#freedom	1095	1918
#sabcnews	1090	4933
#corruption	985	3402
#eskom	874	1647
#medscheme	772	6142
#electricity	700	773
#free	662	64
#medicalaidracialprofiling	653	4841

Table 1: Top 10 hashtags

The authors during the reporting period with the highest number of mentions are seen in table 2 below. Having the highest number of mentions does not mean that the account is authentically tweeting on topics of interest to the South African public within the democracy dataset. Accounts like @Alima1000, for example, have been picked up in previous reports for displaying inauthentic behaviour such as hashjacking, the subject matter tweeted by the account and frequency of posts. The authenticity of the behaviour is reflected in the purpose for which an account is used. General account holders (as opposed to fake accounts and bots) use hashtags less frequently, as their reason for having an account on Twitter is not necessarily to drive a certain message or agenda online.

Top authors
@Alima1000
@TottenBill
Sharenet Pty
@CV_revamp1512
Meta Time
@Rebeccamokoen20
@godfrey_G
@BenjiSeitlhamo
@DavieFae
@UcheCee

Table 2: Top authors

Over the 10 week analysis period, @Alima1000 had 19 883 mentions. To understand how high this number of mentions is for one account, we considered the other top authors in the dataset. @TottenBill, the account that appeared second among the top 10 authors, had 6 700 mentions - roughly a 3rd of the mentions that account @Alima1000 amassed. Expressing the analysis period as days instead of weeks (70 days) this would mean that @Alima1000 was found in 283 mentions on average per day - a very active account for one that is not verified as an influencer. Another strange characteristic of this account is that the link in the bio, 2Pac.com, takes users with a South African IP address directly to a /US domain. The currency on this domain to purchase Tupac paraphernalia is USD - another irregularity for an account that appears to cover predominantly South African content i.e. if you are trying to attract South African customers, why would you direct them to a site where they can purchase items in US dollar?

Thematic Analysis

This section conducts a dive into the thematic areas/conversations that are driven by the **ANC Elective Conference, Constitution, and Corruption** narratives. This will include various metrics, explanations, and examples that will illustrate the depth and breadth of this conversation.

Thematic Area: ANC Elective Conference

In anticipation of the upcoming December conference where the ANC will elect members to the National Executive Committee, delegates from different regions and factions have been put forward. This has undoubtedly raised heated debates that span internal ANC politics right into broader South African political and socio-economic conversations. The importance of this conversation on Twitter is because the ANC has been the ruling party for the past 26 years. This means that the person elected as leader of the ANC has a very strong chance of becoming the president of the country after the 2024 general election.

Metric/data analysis

With over 133 000 total mentions during the reporting period (figure 4), the ANC Elective Conference in South Africa represents around 10% of the total number of mentions in the broad democracy dataset (1 220 000).
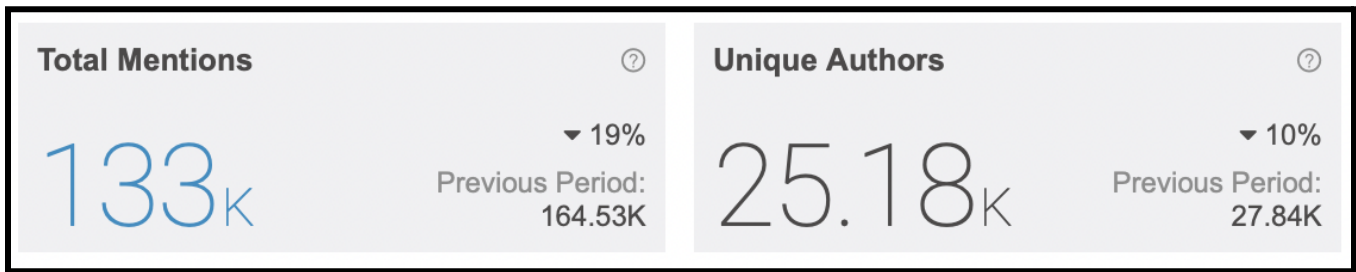

Figure 4: ANC Elective Conference total mentions and unique authors

Figure 5 below represents the number of total mentions when shares and retweets are removed. 59 000 mentions were original posts. This implies that more than 50% of the total ANC elective conference was retweeted or shared content. This number is considered to be a high retweet percentage when compared to retweet volumes assessed on other topics in previous reports. More retweets mean that fewer individuals are partaking in the conversation with their own thoughts. Instead the content containing opinions and thoughts, both manufactured and authentic, are shared. A high retweet percentage can cast doubt on the authenticity of a conversation as it could point to coordination by a group of tweeters to amplify specific content.
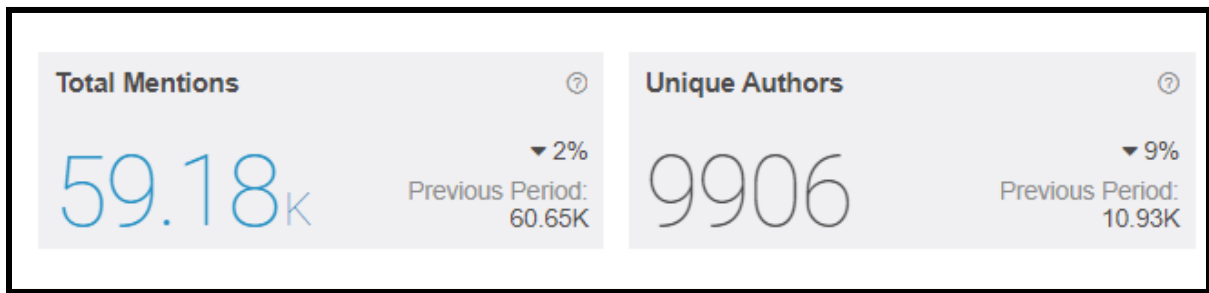

Figure 5: ANC Elective Conference total mentions when shares/retweets are removed

The graph in figure 6 indicates volume over time (x-axis in weeks). Between 12 September and 26 September, there was a noticeable rise in conversation. Noteworthy news topics related to the ANC presidency at this time included reports that Jacob Zuma was showing support for Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma to lead the party. The highest trending post in the ANC elective conference data set on 19 September is shown in figure 7 below. The post that encourages the youth to vote saying that the ANC "cannot still be governing this country come 2024",

received more than 13 000 likes and was retweeted close to 4 000 times. This indicates that a large number of Individual Twitter account holders resonated with this message.
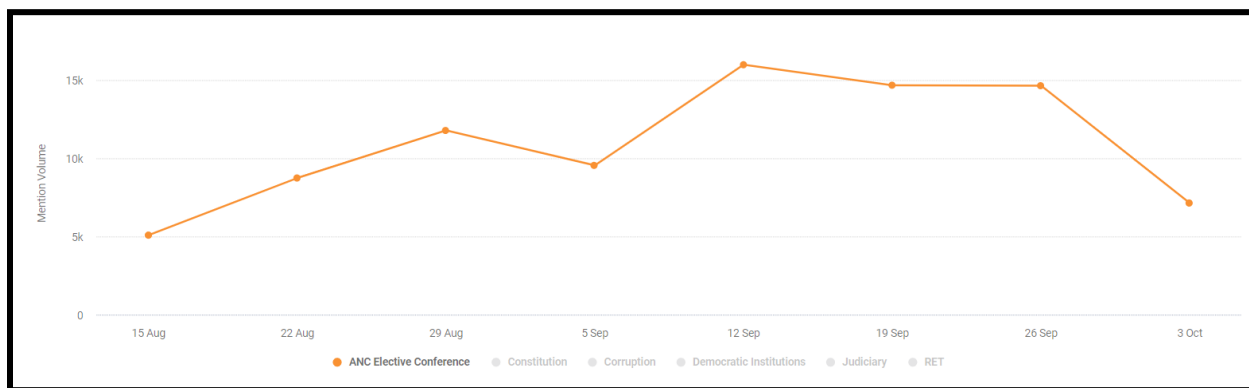

Figure 6: ANC Elective Conference volume over time

Figure 7: Example of a high trending post between 12 and 26 September

The graph in figure 8 represents a view of the trending topics based on present relevance. The keywords seen toward the right of the graph appear in red or dark orange and suggest that these keywords are frequently being used in the conversation. Keywords like "ANC survive" on the other hand are represented in a cooler grey colour, meaning that they are no longer trending in the dataset between the dates stipulated. Given the size and colour of "President Cyril Ramaphosa", these keywords were used a lot and will be explored in greater detail below.

President Cyril Ramaphosa

Within our reporting range on the Elective Conference, the keywords "President Cyril Ramaphosa" appeared the most. The posts that gained the most interest based on retweets and reach were those relating to Ramaphosa's address to the nation on 23 October 2022 where he discussed some recommendations following the completion of the State Capture report. Popular reporter Athi Mtongana received 220 retweets for her post
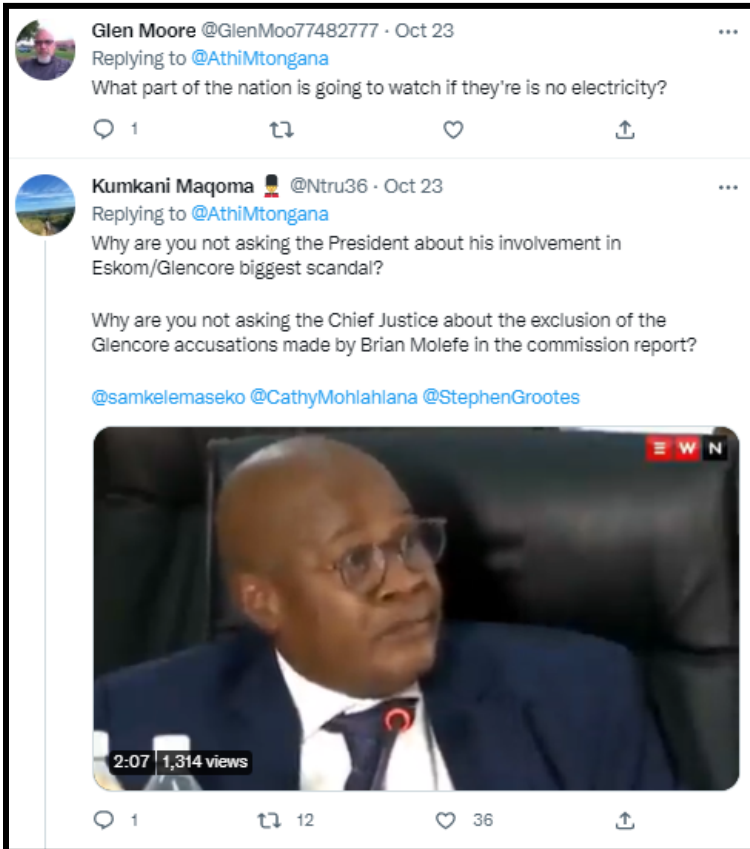
Figure 8: Trending topics word cloud

shown in figure 9 below. Many of the comments to the post criticised the presidency for ongoing load shedding and trouble running the state owned enterprise (SOE), Eskom. A few of these comments have been collated and can be seen in figure 10 below.

Figure 9: A post with high retweets found within the trending topic "Cyril Ramaphosa"

Figure 10: Comments to announcement of President's speech that criticise load shedding and Eskom

The next topic that stood out in the Cyril Ramaphosa conversation from this data set showed support for the president. Firstly, in figure 11 and 12 below we see a supporter of Minister Fikile Mbalula tweet that re-electing Cyril will strengthen the position of Secretary General. We also see a post from the Sunday Times, in which the Northern Cape premier encourages voting for Cyril Ramaphosa.

Figure 11: Post explaining that a vote for Cyril Ramaphosa will strengthen Fikile Mbalula as secretary general.

Figure 12: Twitter account of Sunday Times post about the Northern Cape Premier's support for Ramaphosa

Ahead of the president's address on his recommendations on the state capture report, Paul Mashatile announced that the National Executive Committee of the ANC were fully in support of the president. This was tweeted by SA Breaking News' Twitter page on 23 October 2022.

Another theme that appeared within the mentions of the most trending topic for the period was about the alleged abuse of power by the president and ministers. Firstly on 15 October, Leon Schreiber of the DA claimed that his party would be exposing abuses by the President such as providing free water and electricity to ANC cadres. This post can be seen in figure 13 along with two comments from the public that claim that the only strategy that politicians have appears to be to discredit their opponents where they can.
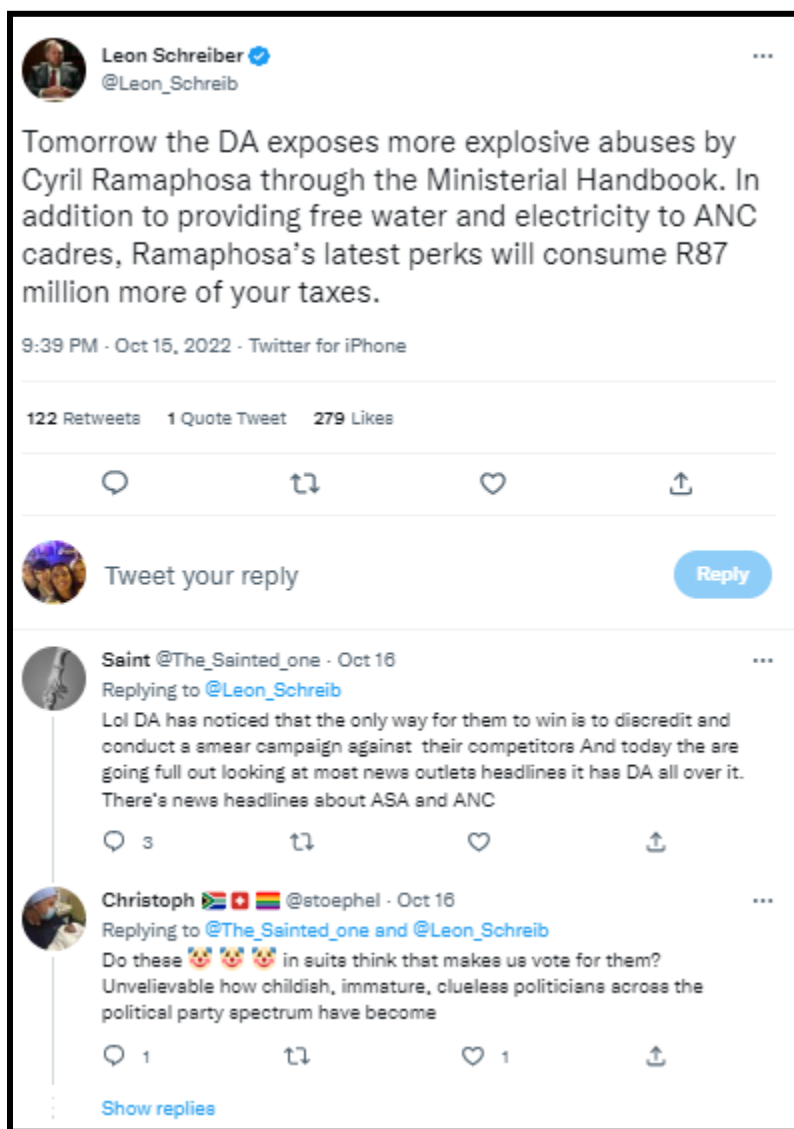
Figure 13: Leon Schreiber's post and comments to the post.

Then, by 20 October 2022 the Democratic Alliance took issue with Cyril Ramaphosa using a National Defence Force helicopter to land at meetings in the Free State. Figure 14 shows the type of content that was shared about the alleged abuse of taxpayers money after the DA lambasted the President. On 22 October, the day before Ramaphosa's address to the nation about recommendations for the state capture report, Ramaphosa came under attack again, this time by former president Jacob Zuma who called the President corrupt because of the Phala Phala Scandal. Former President Thabo Mbeki also allegedly criticised the current sitting president (see figure 15) when he spoke on the same date as Zuma but at a Strategic Dialogue Event, separate to Zuma's address. The post in Figure 15 is problematic because it seems to lump both former presidents Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki into the same boat as though they feel the same way about President Ramaphosa and potentially the allegations of corruption against the President because of the theft at Phala Phala farm.

Figure 14: News post about the DA's claims of an abuse of taxpayers money against the President

Figure 15: Claim that former presidents Zuma and Mbeki were upset with Ramaphosa's leadership.

Watching the video of former President Mbeki's address at the Strategic Dialogue Group Event, President Mbeki doesn't condemn President Ramaphosa about the farm scandal. At around minute 37, he explains that President Ramaphosa must be under a lot of pressure. He further explains that there is an investigation that is underway and the ANC needs to question the relevance of this topic ahead of Nasrec in December. He discusses the possibilities in the event that there is an impeachable case against the president and what impact that might have in the eyes of the public. At his "national address" however, Zuma directly accused the sitting president of treason. Mbeki on the other hand called the people who destroyed SARS treasonous (See examples in figure 16). Regardless of the differing tone and choice of words behind Zuma's address and Mbeki's speech, the ANC in KZN issued a statement saying that while they acknowledge that the organisation is facing challenges, it is strange for former leaders to attack the sitting president and the ANC publicly. The KZN branch of the ANC used the opportunity to show their support for President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Figure 16: Example posts that show parts of Mbeki's speech that was quoted and retweeted hundreds of times.

The statement issued by the ANC branch in KZN was not well received by Zuma Supporters as seen in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Zuma supporters disgruntled by KZN branch response to Zuma's address.

Jacob Zuma

Another topic that trended in the analysed reporting period, and can be seen in the word cloud in figure 8 above, was "Jacob Zuma". Former president, Jacob Zuma, trended because of reports indicating that he will be potentially stepping into one of the top leadership positions in the ANC. See the post containing a news article on the matter in figure 18 below. In response to these reports, Twitter account holders who are in support of Jacob Zuma took the opportunity to tweet their opinion of him once again holding a leadership position in the country (see figure 19).

Figure 18: Zuma reportedly going to step into one of the top ANC positions based on the outcomes of the ANC elective conference.

Figure 19: Supporters of Jacob Zuma get behind the former president in the run up to the December conference.

Conversely, figure 20 shows the frustration of a Twitter account holder who was surprised to see that a person who had managed to avoid court appearances because of their ill health was now able to stand for positions of leadership in the country.
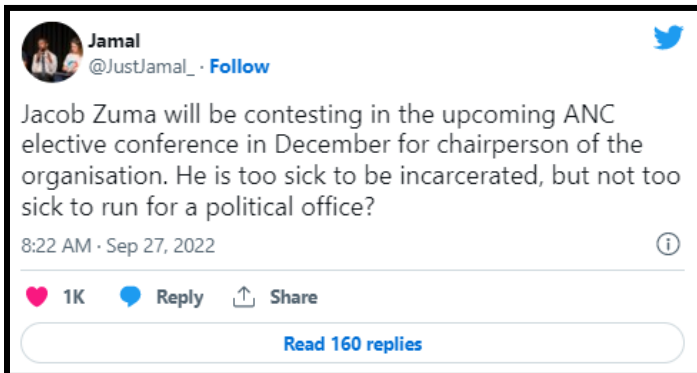

Figure 20: Twitter users who question the ability of the former president to hold any office because of his health concerns.

Along similar lines to questioning the health of the former president, others questioned whether Zuma is an appropriate candidate given his advanced age. The post in figure 21 contains a video of Minister Gwede Mantashe telling a reporter that Zuma is too old to hold any office.
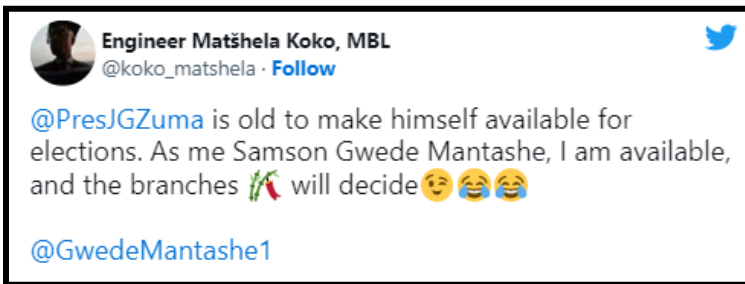

Figure 21: A post that contains a video of Minister Gwede Mantashe expressing his thoughts about Zuma's desire to hold an office in the ANC.

Another twitter user pointed out that the broader leadership within the ANC is occupied by older individuals who do not connect with or represent South Africa's young population. This can be seen in figure 22.
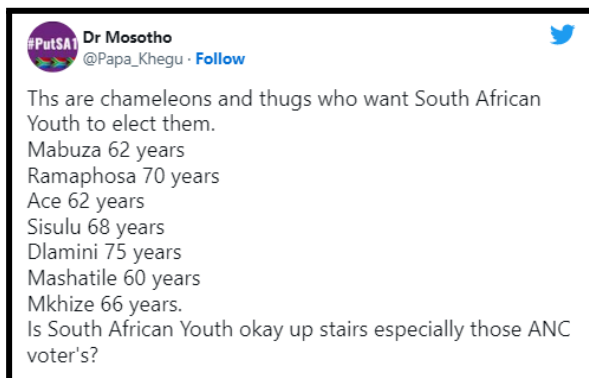

Figure 22: Further reflections on the ages of members of the ANC leadership

In figure 23, Advocate Dali Mpofu points out that electing older leaders, particularly within the ANC, is the norm given its historical leadership figures.

Figure 23: Post explaining that older leaders in the ANC are the norm

Additionally, Jacob Zuma also trended based on reports that he had instructed NEC members in support of him to get behind a campaign to elect Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, his ex-wife, as candidate for ANC president (see figure 24 below).
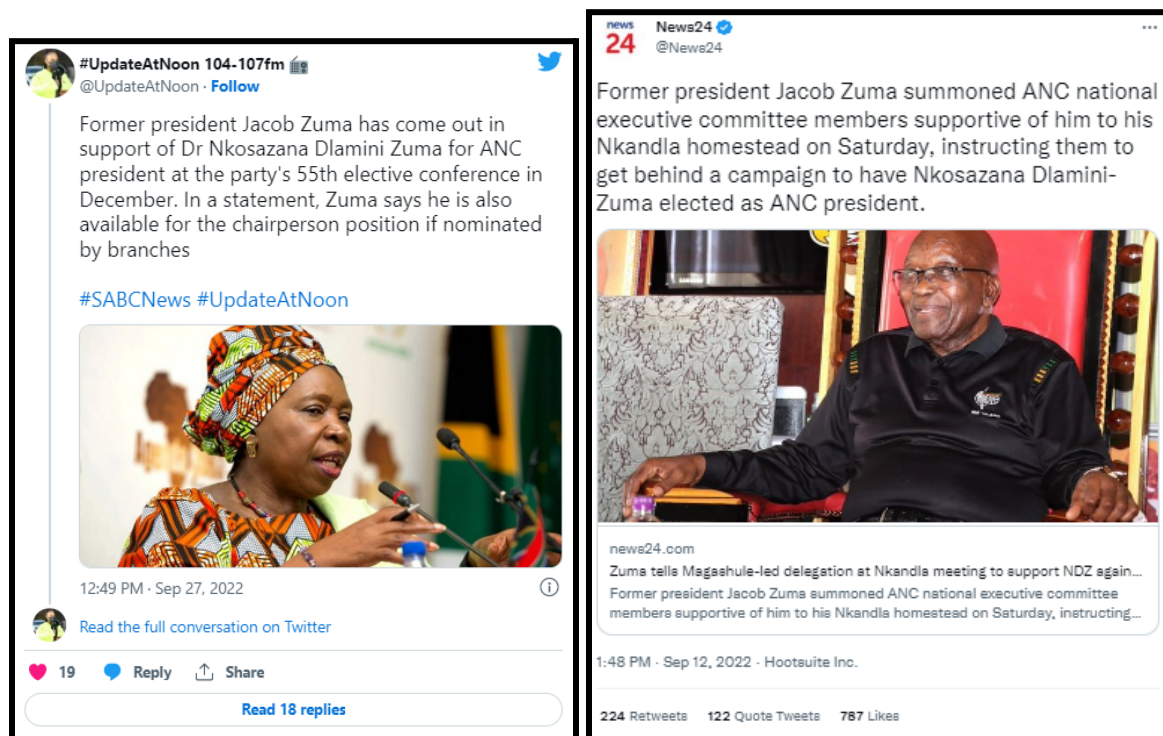

Figure 24: Posts explaining that Jacob Zuma wanted NEC members to get behind his ex-wife's campaign for ANC president.

Figure 25 shows that some of Zuma's supporters disagreed with his endorsement of Dlamini-Zuma. The post suggests that Zuma ought to endorse Ace Magashule instead.
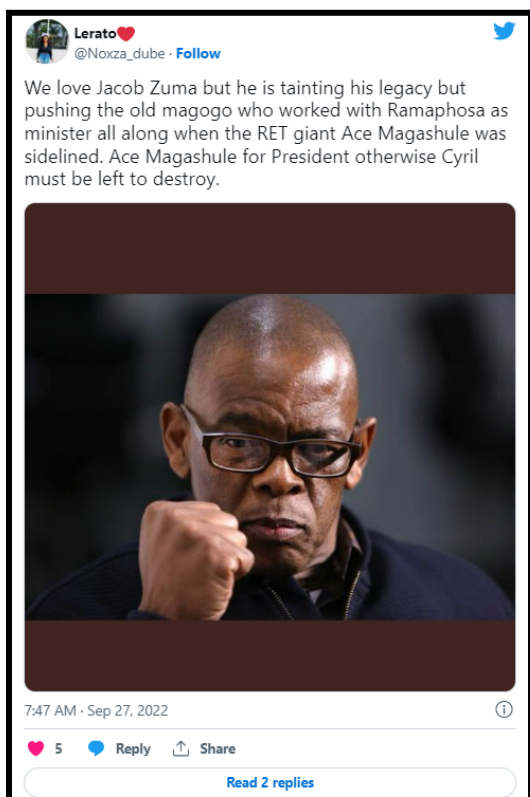
Figure 25: A post which shows that not all Zuma supporters aligned with his call to support Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

Thematic Area: Constitution

The strength and legitimacy of South Africa's Constitution has been the subject of debate particularly in 2022. The constitution has been challenged by Lindiwe Sisulu, the RET faction within the ANC and the EFF who have all claimed that the Constitution doesn't work for the poor. As history has shown however, decisions made by our courts, including the Concourt, have more often than not compelled the government to carry out their Constitutional duties to the poor. In the famous [Grootboom case](#) for example, citizens living in informal dwellings in the Cape sought relief from the government for the provision of adequate housing based on sections 26 and 28 of the Constitution. In their decision, the Concourt ruled that while the provisions of the Constitution didn't contain an immediate right to claim shelter, the state was responsible for the implementation of a programme that included measures that would provide relief for people living in desperate conditions.This section will unpack narratives on social media that focus on the Constitution.

Metric/data Analysis

Conversation about the Constitution represented just under 10% of the mentions in the overall democracy dataset within the reporting period (100 000 mentions, including retweets). Figure 26 shows a volume over time graph of the mentions that are about the Constitution. The highest peaks in the conversation were noted on 24 August, then again between 9 and 10 September, followed by a further peak on 20 September 2022.
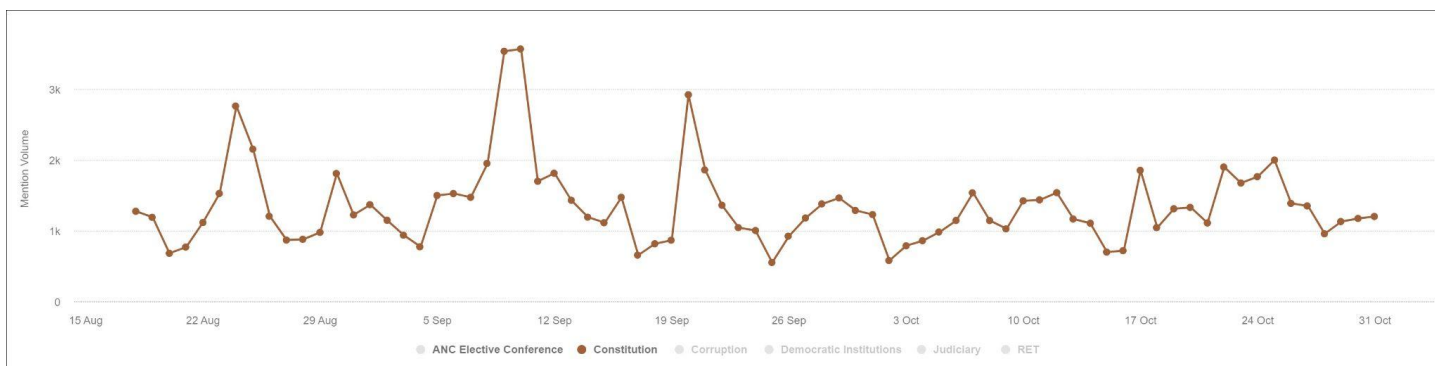
Figure 26: Volume over time breakdown of the Constitution focus area

On 24 August, the Concourt dismissed a second rescission application by Advocate Busisiwe Mkwebhane about the impeachment inquiry. The Concourt went on to find that the application constituted an abuse of power and that Mkwebhane is to personally pay the costs for legal proceedings. Shortly after the decision, Zuma supporter Jimmy Manyi took to Twitter to tell the public that it is "UNLAWFUL" and "ILLEGAL" to request a personal cost order against the Public Protector. This post can be seen in figure 27. In figure 28, some of the responses to Manyi's claim that the Constitutional Court is not above the law can be seen. These posts challenge Manyi's comment that the Concourt is not above the law saying that they are the highest court in the land so, who could be higher?

Figure 27: Jimmy Manyi's response to the Concourt for ordering the Public Protector to personally pay costs
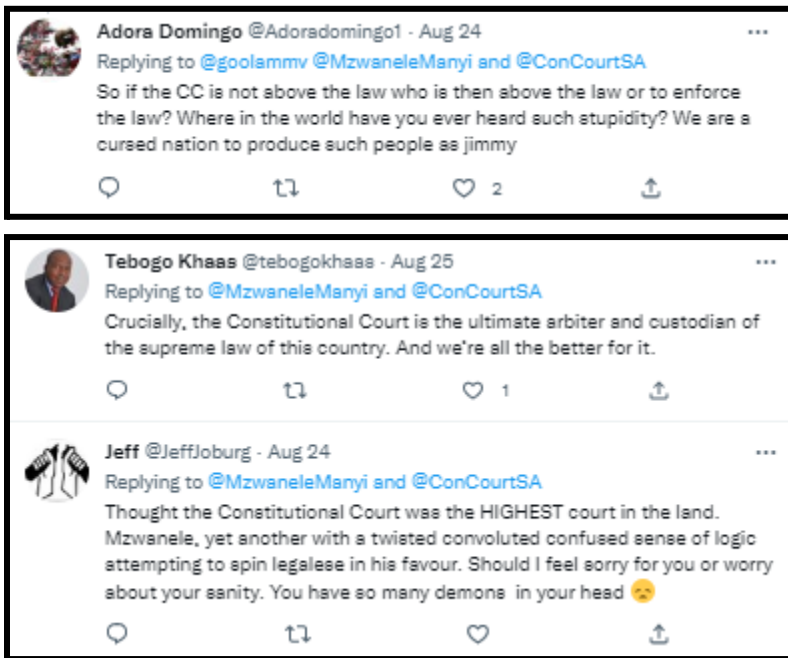
Figure 28: comments that challenged Manyi's post that commented on the authority of the Constitutional Court

The peak on 10 September was driven by a tweet posted by @ZungulaVuyo, leader of a political party called the African Transformation Movement. The African Transformation Movement is a party that was formed as late as 2018 and considers themself a conservative organisation. In 2019, Leader of the ATM claimed wrote to the President asking him to bring back the death penalty. Figure 29 shows that the tweet that was posted by Mr. Zungula was well received with more than 7 000 likes and close to 2 500 retweets. In the post, he calls for a new Constitution to be drafted while alluding that the current Constitution was drafted on the British Magna Carta and not on the will of the People of South Africa. This is contrary to the preamble of the Constitution that explains that the purpose of the document is to lay the foundations in which government is based on the will of the people. The Magna Carta, a document from 1215, speaks about the rights of people who own land for the crown and that the English Church shall be free from the state. This means that the 2 sets of documents are barely comparable, except maybe for their commentary of freedom.

Figure 29: Post that drove conversation around 10 September about the Constitution

On 20 September, #concourt appeared 339 times when the Concourt ruled that the Executive Ethics Code was unconstitutional, unlawful and invalid, giving the President 12 months to remedy parts of the code that were problematic. This ruling is based on a case made by amaBhungane that the code falls short of the dictates of transparency, accountability and openness because not disclosing donations to public officials undermines the Ethics Act.

Narrative Analysis

This section provides insights in the form of actual Twitter posts so that we can fully grasp the context, tone, and sentiments of mentions under the Topic of the Constitution.

Constitution vs lived reality of South Africans

While South Africa's constitution is world-renowned for its inclusivity, justice and fairness, the lived realities of its citizens does not reflect this.

The post below which is labelled figure 30, shares grievances on the limitations of South Africa's constitution on the ground. It is worth noting that the person that created this post is the leader of a centre-right opposition party, as we have explained above, whose political campaign appears to involve attacks on the Constitution.

Vuyo Zungula MP 🇿🇦 ✓
@ZungulaVuyo · Follow

The "best" Constitution in the world yet the citizens of South Africa suffer the most. We are signatories to international treaties & organisations at the expense of citizens. We want to be the most humanitarian country in the world whilst our citizens struggling.

9:21 AM · Aug 24, 2022 ⓘ

♥ 2.4K   💬 Reply   ⬆ Share

Read 129 replies

Figure 30: tweet speaking on South Africa's constitution vs the lived realities of citizens

Furthermore, others blame the government for failing to adhere to its constitutional mandates. The post labelled figure 31 below speaks to this:
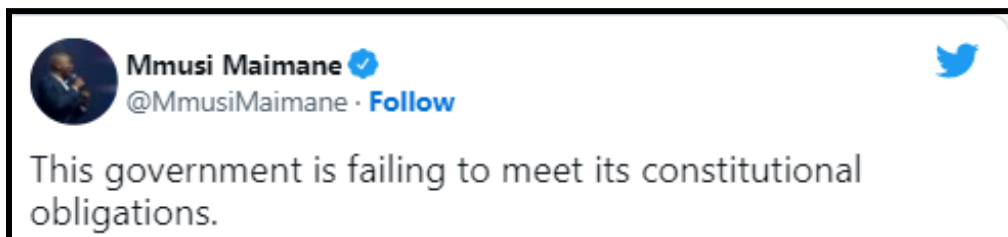

Mmusi Maimane ✓
@MmusiMaimane · Follow

This government is failing to meet its constitutional obligations.

Figure 31: Maimane criticising the government for failing it constitutional mandates

Leaders violating the constitutional laws

Influential accounts like that of Jimmy Manyi have called for powerful government leaders to be held accountable for failing to uphold the law. This post can be seen in figure 32.
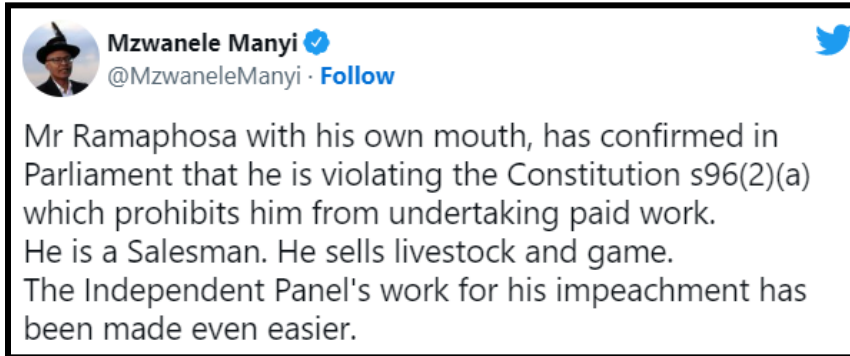

Figure 32: Manyi on Ramaphosa's violations of the constitution

Healthcare denied to foreigners by Limpopo Health MEC

Limpopo's health MEC trended during the reporting period because of controversial remarks she made by telling a patient that Zimbabweans are burdening South Africa's health system.

The post seen in figure 33 calls out the MEC by deeming her actions unconstitutional:

Figure 33: post on the Limpopo's Health MEC's unconstitutional behaviour

The post shown in figure 34 below echoes the sentiment above:

Figure 34: Lawyers for Human Rights denouncing the scapegoating of foreign nationals

Similarly, the first tweet and second tweet indicate that healthcare is a human right that is reflected South Africa's constitution:
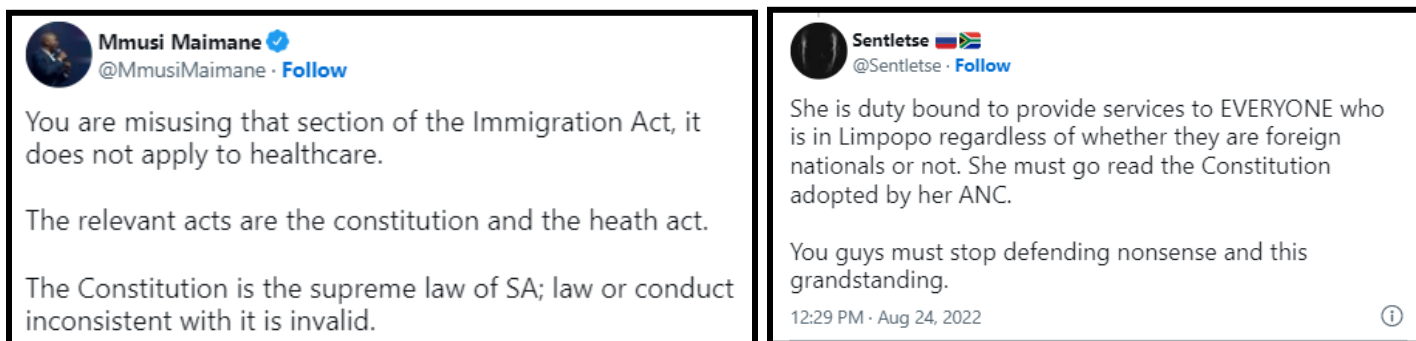
Figure 35: two posts indicating that healthcare is a human right enshrined in the constitution

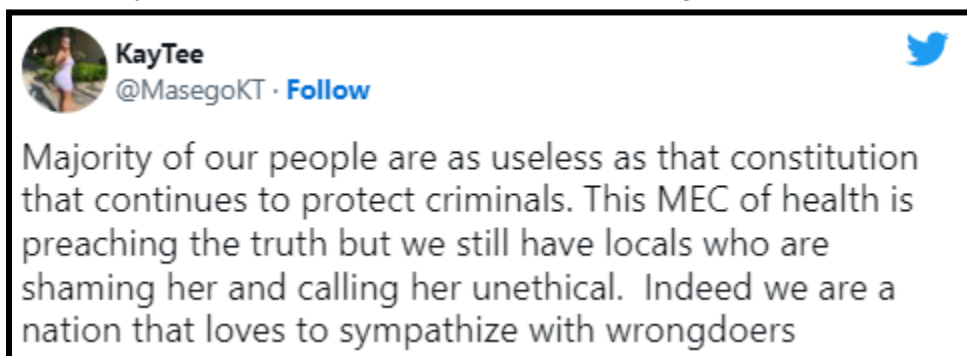Conversely, supporters xenophobic rhetoric encouraged the MEC's comments. See tweet below:

Figure 36: post condoning Limpopo's Health MEC's unconstitutional comments

Thematic Area: Corruption

Corruption, the abuse of power by government officials and State Capture have all been widely discussed topics in South Africa in 2022. During the reporting period Business Leadership SA reported that there was an 85% probability that South Africa will land on a global greylist. Greylisting indicates the level of risk that the rest of the world attaches to companies in South Africa and if imposed, greylisting can lead to economic contraction as some investors will no longer find businesses and individuals in SA to be a safe place to grow their assets. The report explained that the shortcomings in South Africa can be attributed weakness in the criminal justice system and a lack of accountability for crimes like money laundering and the financing of terrorist activities. In this section, we will analyse the social media metrics and conversations on the topic of corruption in South Africa.

Metric/data analysis

Between 18 August and 31 October, this conversation has garnered just over 174 000 mentions from approximately 34 000 unique authors. This can be seen in Figure 37 below.

Figure 37: volume of total mentions, unique authors and retweets during the reporting period.

Based on the retweet and total mentions in figure 37, it appears that there was a retweet percentage of 71% in the mentions related to corruption found in our dataset. As explained in the thematic analysis of the ANC elective conference above, a high retweet percentage is an indication that parts of a conversation may be amplified, with few original posts and many twitter account holders retweeting the same content. This type of behaviour could be authentic for example, when a celebrity, politician or another account holder with a large following tweets something that becomes conversational in the online Twitter space. A high retweet percentage could also be indicative of account holders that are paid to amplify specific content to have it in the eyes of the public. This behaviour is usually attached to a political strategy. Political strategies in India for example have become so reliant on amplification of campaign content through WhatsApp that the online chat application had to implement key checks and balances like limiting the number of people with whom content that has been "forwarded many times" can be shared

As shown in Figure 38, highest peak recorded in this conversation was observed on 24 October, a day after Ramaphosa addressed the nation on the steps the government would take to implement the recommendations of the State Capture report. Peaks and troughs in mentions related to corruption can be seen in figure 38 below.
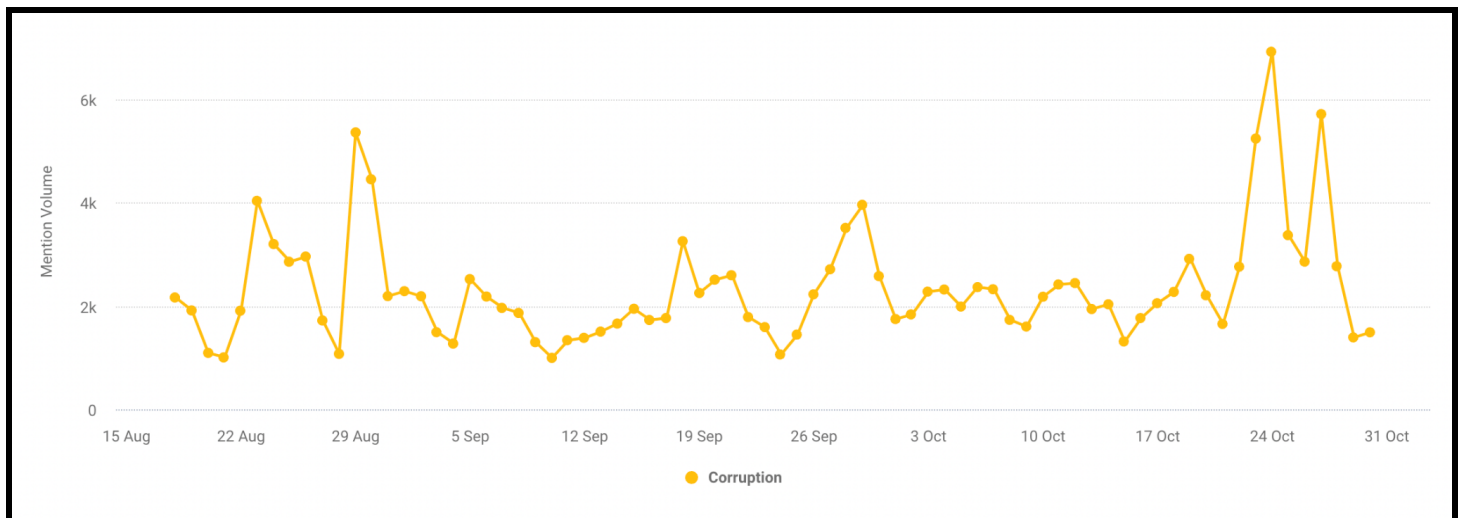

Figure 38: Mention volume over time of content related to the topic of Corruption

Included in the trending topics is the arrest of former Eskom boss Matshela Koko (along with his wife and stepdaughter), the disappearance of R5 billion from the National Skills Fund, the SIU being authorised to probe allegations of corruption and maladministration at NSFAS, and the NPA seizing R75 million of former acting police commissioner Khomotso Phahlane's assets.

Narrative Analysis

Ramaphosa cannot fight corruption

This narrative emerged in three periods of this research. Firstly, when the Presidency announced that Ramaphosa had appointed members of a National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council (NACAC), "which brings together representatives from civil society, including business, who will work alongside the government to prevent and stamp out wrongdoing". The CABC detected responses from Twitter users who accused

Ramaphosa of using the NACAC to [divert](#) attention away from the Phala Phala scandal. Figure 39 represents a tweet that received more than 3 800 likes that was posted in this regard by opposition leader Julius Malema.

Secondly, the arrests of former Transnet executives Brian Molefe and Anoj Singh, and former Eskom boss Matshela Koko on charges of corruption also led some Twitter users to believe that these arrests were meant to take the spotlight away from Ramaphosa and the farmgate robbery. Figure 40 contains a post expressing this sentiment. The post appears to have been created by one of the accounts that use the slogan "Put South Africans First" - a campaign that is being researched in the CABC's project on Xenophobia.

Finally, when Ramaphosa authorised the SIU to investigate allegations of fraud and maladministration at NSFAS, some users questioned:

- Why the President was not authorising the SIU to investigate his farmgate robbery; and
- Whether the SIU investigations would lead to any arrests

Figure 39: Post by opposition leader tweeting of a corrupt image of Cyril Ramaphosa

Figure 40: PSAF account tweets that Koko's arrest is a diversion

Ramaphosa has intensified the fight against corruption

Under this narrative, some users believe that arrest of corruption-implicated officials is a step in the right direction, and Ramaphosa should be credited for ensuring that the implicated are held accountable. This sentiment is expressed in Figures 41 and 42, with the latter further expressing that those attacking Ramphosa are, in one way or another, "tainted" in corruption.

In a 2019 article, JP Landman outlined some of the measures Ramaphosa had put in place to fight corruption. Among them were:

- Reducing the cabinet from 36 to 28 ministers

- Ensuring that corruption-implicated figures are removed from various SOEs including, Eskom and Transnet; and

- Ensuring that some senior officials are removed and replaced at the Hawks and NPA

Addressing the nation on October 23, Ramaphosa also highlighted a number of achievements, including:

- Appointing the SIU Special Tribunal to expedite the recovery of stolen funds - over R8.6 billion has been recovered; and

- Appointing "new leadership at the South African Revenue Service and are rebuilding the institution in line with the recommendations of the Nugent Commission, which were endorsed by the State Capture Commission".

Figure 41: Post commending Ramaphosa and intelligence institutions for crackdown on corruption

Figure 42: Tweet attempting to deter the criticism of Ramaphosa

At least state capture/corruption kept the lights on

This narrative was exacerbated by frequent loadshedding. Users pushing this narrative have criticised the government and Eskom for ongoing power cuts, with some, as in Figure 43, arguing that they support corruption if it means an end to loadshedding. Others, as in Figure 44 and 45, have called against blaming state capture for loadshedding, because we were either "not loadshed this much" or "without loadshedding" during the Zuma years.

While these users blame Ramaphosa for the ongoing blackouts, they do not address the fact that loadshedding, which has progressively gotten worse, is not a new phenomenon.

According to an article by Kyle Cowan, the increasing levels and frequency of loadshedding are a result of "nearly two decades of mismanagement of the country's electricity infrastructure and the delays in the early 2000s to urgently start constructing more capacity".

Eskom's ability to provide consistent power to South African households faced another hurdle this year after workers embarked on a strike demanding wage increases.

While a 7% wage increase was reportedly agreed on, Eskom said the strike had "caused widespread disruption to Eskom's power plants, Eskom is still unable to return some generators to service.

"...The unlawful strike has a serious detrimental impact not only on Eskom, but also on the broader South African public and economy".

Figure 43: Tweet inferring that certain leaders implicated in state capture would have ended load-shedding
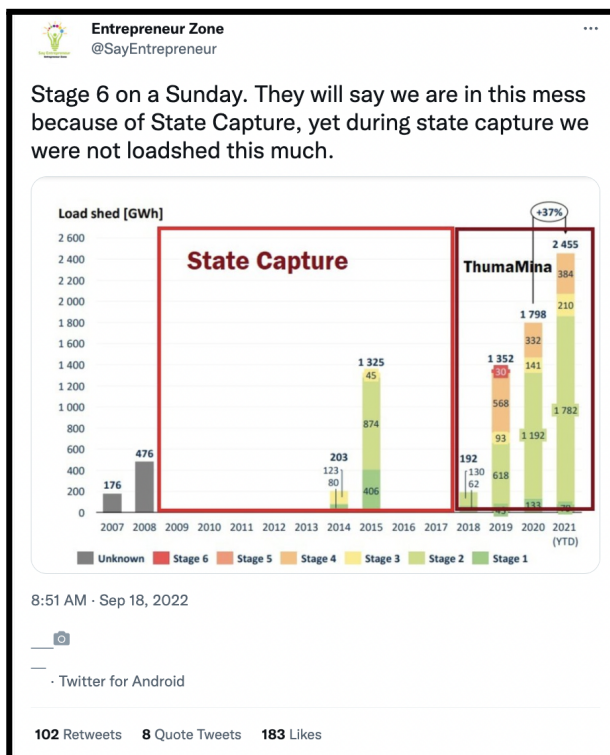

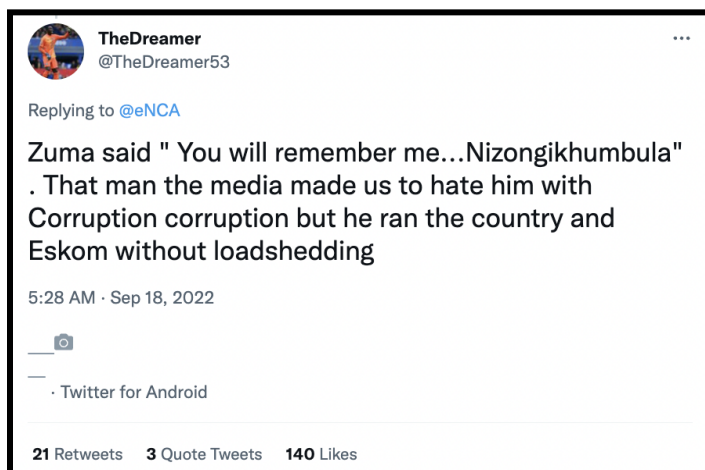*Figure 44: Tweet saying that loadshedding was less severe during state-capture days*

Figure 45: Post inferring that Zuma ran the country better because load-shedding was not as severe

Conclusion

South Africa's online democracy conversation between 18 August and 31 October contains a number of narratives – largely centred around the governing party. Among complaints of service delivery and load shedding – which we have also recorded in previous reports – online South Africans are also looking into the current leadership, with a keen focus on what President Cyril Ramaphosa is doing to tackle corruption. While the arrests of former Transnet and Eskom executives were hailed as a victory, questions around the President's own Phala Phala scandal remain. As the party's 55th National Executive Conference draws close, questions about what the party has or failed to achieve since the 2017 Nasrec conference continue to emerge. The fitness of presidential hopefuls to hold office is also under scrutiny, with some South Africans accusing the party of putting power and factional battles ahead of citizens' interests.