



Anti-corruption project

Online conversations about corruption in South Africa

1 to 31 January 2023

Release date: 1 March 2023

Introduction

This is the first in a series of Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC) near real-time public social media reports on corruption and state capture in South Africa. The purpose of the report series is to provide ongoing, relevant insights for interventions. The date range for which content was analysed is 1 to 31 January 2023.

Corruption is defined in this report in line with the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act¹. According to the act, the general crime of corruption happens when someone (A) gives (or offers to give) someone in a position of power (B) something to use their power, illegally and unfairly, for the advantage of A (or someone not directly involved).

A key theme in the conversation during January 2023 was loadshedding. The role of corruption and criminal syndicates in leading to and preventing the power crisis from being resolved is topical. The ANC as the ruling party and President Cyril Ramaphosa, who cancelled a trip to Davos to attend to the crisis, were heavily criticised. Corruption within the police, in transport, especially to do with trains, and in the health sector were also topical. Many netizens had a low level of confidence in the ruling party to address various crises and are frustrated by the extent of the government's failure to deliver services.

South Africa dropped down a point in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index report for 2022 despite anti-corruption efforts. Due to the slow pace of the South African Police Service and National Prosecuting Authority compared to when alleged corruption was committed, those who are implicated are able to generate narratives online far faster than what the criminal justice system moves. The battles therefore play out in the court of public opinion far earlier than in the courts. Journalists, activists and whistleblowers find themselves on an increasingly dangerous frontline while the law enforcement institutions that were gutted as a part of the state capture project continue to limp along ineffectively. It is clear that due to the corruption which occurred during the pandemic, a significant number of South Africans contributing to the online conversation do not regard state capture to be a thing of the past and have little trust in the ANC to address the crisis at Eskom if the party were to declare a national state of disaster. Rather many are of the view that it will simply enable further corruption.

Findings summary

Key findings based on the analysis are as follows:

¹ The Act can be found here: <https://www.gov.za/documents/prevention-and-combating-corrupt-activities-act-0>

- A number of tropes in the conversation appear to be manufactured narratives designed to exonerate persons implicated in corruption and instead to valorize them as the actual heroes.
- Those who have played key roles in anti-corruption efforts are faced with a heavy fight back in which they are villainised as being aligned with white monopoly capital, a narrative trope initially introduced in a campaign by now discredited former PR firm, Bell Pottinger.
- During the reporting period, the focus centred on Eskom, the impacts of corruption on its functioning and the political ramifications for the ANC including what effect it will have when it comes to voting in 2024.
- There is a narrative being advanced by a number of the persons who were implicated at the State Capture Commission that there has been suppression of evidence by both former Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, and the Commission.
- A narrative that the NPA is being used as a tool for factionalised political battles by President Cyril Ramaphosa enjoys an extent of support within the conversation.

Research Methodology

To obtain the information that is presented in this report, a Boolean² query was developed. The query consists of keywords that combine the terms 'corrupt' and 'state capture' with the names of South African municipalities, provinces and state owned entities. Names of relevant commissions, tribunals and inquiries were included in the query. For example, the State Capture Commission, Inquiry into Tax Administration and Governance by the South African Revenue Service and the judicial commission of inquiry into the Public Investment Corporation were included. The names of law enforcement agencies were combined with terms that include the legislation under which acts of corruption are prosecuted, as well as 'corrupt' and 'state capture'. After gathering the keywords and constructing the query, it was applied in an online social media listening tool.

The social media listening tool that is used for this research collects data and supports analytics from two sources: Twitter and websites (blogs, digital media publications and forums). The conversation comprises over 90% of the content from Twitter and less than 10% for the combined website categories.

By running the query, a sample of social media content about corruption and state capture in South Africa was obtained for the reporting period. To ensure that query was working well, checks were done by looking at the word cloud and geographical coverage to ensure that it was pulling relevant content. The query returned a sample rate of 100% for the month of January 2023. What this sample rate means is that all of the

² Boolean is the language used to write a query.

conversation that the tool identified based on the keywords was pulled through and forms part of the analysis. When the conversation is particularly large, the extent of content volume will be a sample rather than all the content. In this case the conversation size does not exceed the level at which the tool starts to pull through a percentage rather than 100% of the content.

Conversation volume and trends

The dataset for this report is comprised of a total of 78 thousand mentions³ made by over 25 thousand unique authors over the one month reporting period (see Figure 1). There were over 40 thousand retweets. 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 1: Key insights metrics: 01 - 31 January 2023

The total reach⁴ or “opportunity to see” (OTS) for the conversation was 115.1 million, meaning that is the approximate number of people who saw the content. This is shown in Figure 2.

During the reporting period, a top [news story](#) had to do with South Africa being ranked 78th out of 180 countries in the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) that Transparency International administers (see Figure 2). South Africa fared worse than it did in the prior year’s CPI ranking, dropping down by one point despite its anti-corruption efforts. The theme of the report for 2022 is conflict, peace and security. Transparency International notes that there is a clear connection between violence and corruption, with countries that score lowest in the [Global Peace Index](#) also scoring very low on the CPI. Painting a grim picture, the report indicates that since 2017, 95 percent of countries have made little to no progress.

Other top news stories included an [opinion piece](#) entitled “How Russia outmaneuvered the US in Africa”. And an [article](#) that ran in Business Report with the headline ‘Gimme Hope Jo’anna: Same old song, but sung amid deterioration in SA service delivery’ (depicted in Figure 2). It highlights increasing failures in service delivery and how this is affecting South Africans.

³ Mention: A piece of web-based content that matches the keyword terms defined in your query string or posted to/from a social channel. This could be anything from a news webpage to a comment on a YouTube video.

⁴ Reach is a metric which is designed to estimate how many different individuals are likely to have seen that content.

The top trending topics during January 2023 were: (1) cadre deployment, (2) January 2023 and (3) ANC bigwigs (see Figure 2). Cadre deployment is a practice which the ANC defended when it came under scrutiny at the State Capture Commission. The prevalence of the topic “January 2023” has to do with dates mentioned in content about corruption, which includes dates when corruption cases were heard before the courts and dates of marches against corruption (see examples [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). The topic ‘ANC bigwigs’ is trending in the conversation due to a [tweet](#) by Eyewitness News which provided a link to an [article](#) about Economic Freedom Fighters pursuing a state capture corruption case against Energy and Mineral Resources Minister, Gwede Mantashe. The tweet says “Mantashe is allegedly one of the ANC bigwigs who benefitted from the state's ties with the late businessman Gavin Watson.”

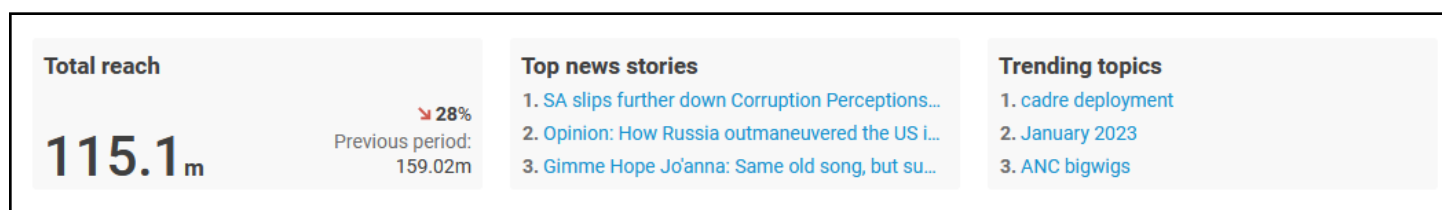


Figure 2: total reach and top news stories and trending topics

Figure 3 shows the days on which there were a high number of retweets. Distinct peaks and troughs can be seen. At a minimum around 500 accounts are retweeting content. In the peaks, the number of accounts retweeting exceeds 2000 accounts. When looking at the initial mention volume by days (see bar graphs in Figure 3), the shape of retweeting behaviour emulates the peaks when accounts are posting a lot of content.

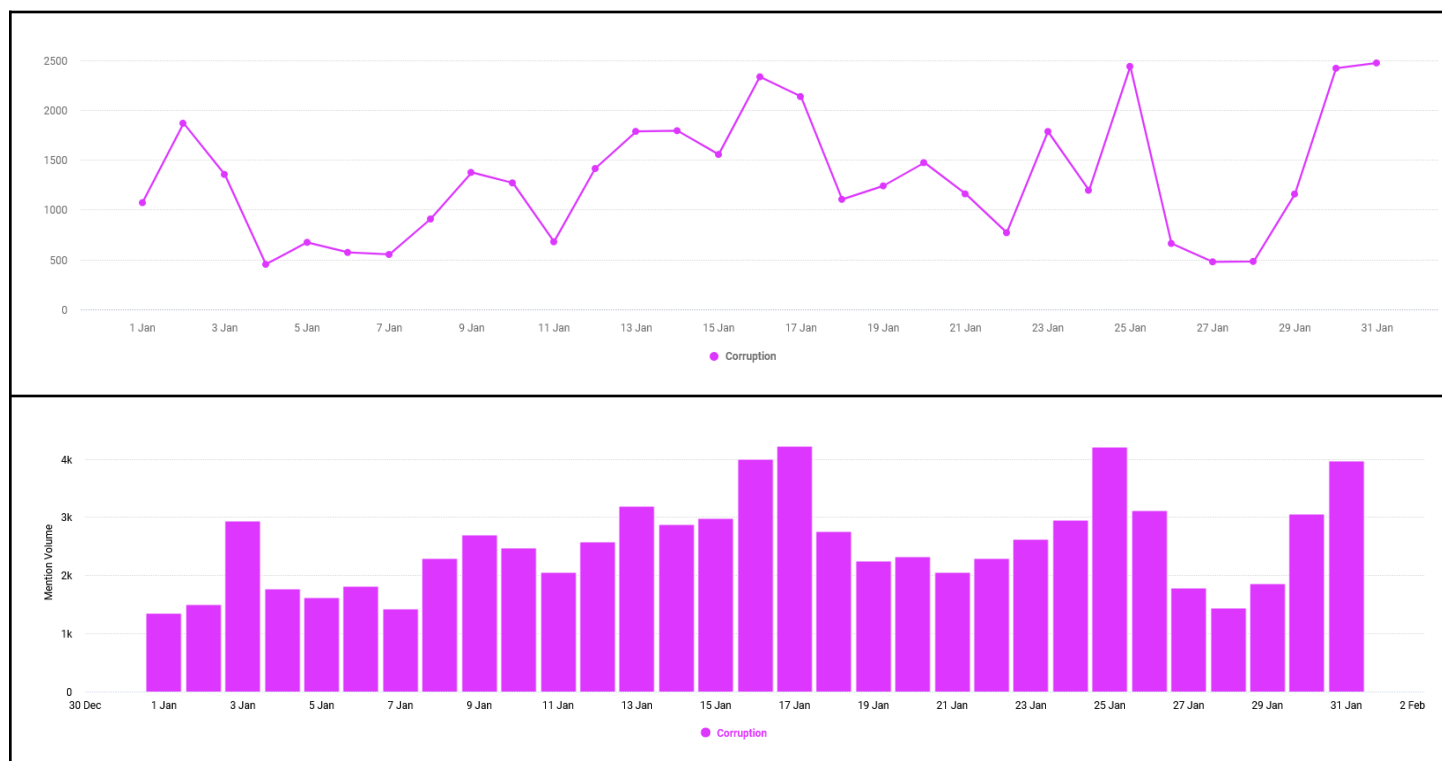


Figure 3: Total retweets by days and mention volume by days

At the four highest peaks, the following tweets (as shown in Figure 4) have a high number of retweets. Some of these tweets may represent narrative manipulation (see tweet labelled 4.1). Further research is recommended to delve into the narratives in the conversation and determine whether specific narratives are being amplified. In this instance (4.1) there is a narrative that the former Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela suppressed evidence and that the State Capture Commission in turn has also deliberately omitted to investigate certain acts of corruption, particularly acts alleged to implicate President Cyril Ramaphosa. This type of narrative formulation is a theme within the conversation (see example tweets [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

The first comment in reply to the tweet labelled 4.2 refers to narrative tropes which were established as a defence of state capture. The term 'white monopoly capital' was introduced by now discredited PR firm, Bell Pottinger. Bell Pottinger developed a campaign that entailed deliberate race baiting. This trope has continued to have currency in the conversation landscape. Referring to key figures who have stood against corruption as the barking dogs of white monopoly capital is a narrative theme that appears regularly.

Police ineffectiveness and allegations of corruption occurring at levels that go right up to the top of SAPS were part of the conversation. Former firearms registry clerk at Free State SAPS, Patricia Mashale, has taken to social media to make her allegations public. Mashale alleges that there are foreign nationals with fake identity documents working at SAPS. The tweets shown in panes 4.3 and 4.5 are made by Mashale who has also used Facebook and appeared on national television to make the allegations known. She says that although police oversight body IPID has done an investigation, the report was suppressed and a fake report circulated instead. In the tweet labelled 4.5 she provides an update that IPID has called her to say that in respect of alleged police trainee corruption, applicants should go to open cases and the dockets will be transferred to IPID. Mashale says that she will continue to monitor the investigation.

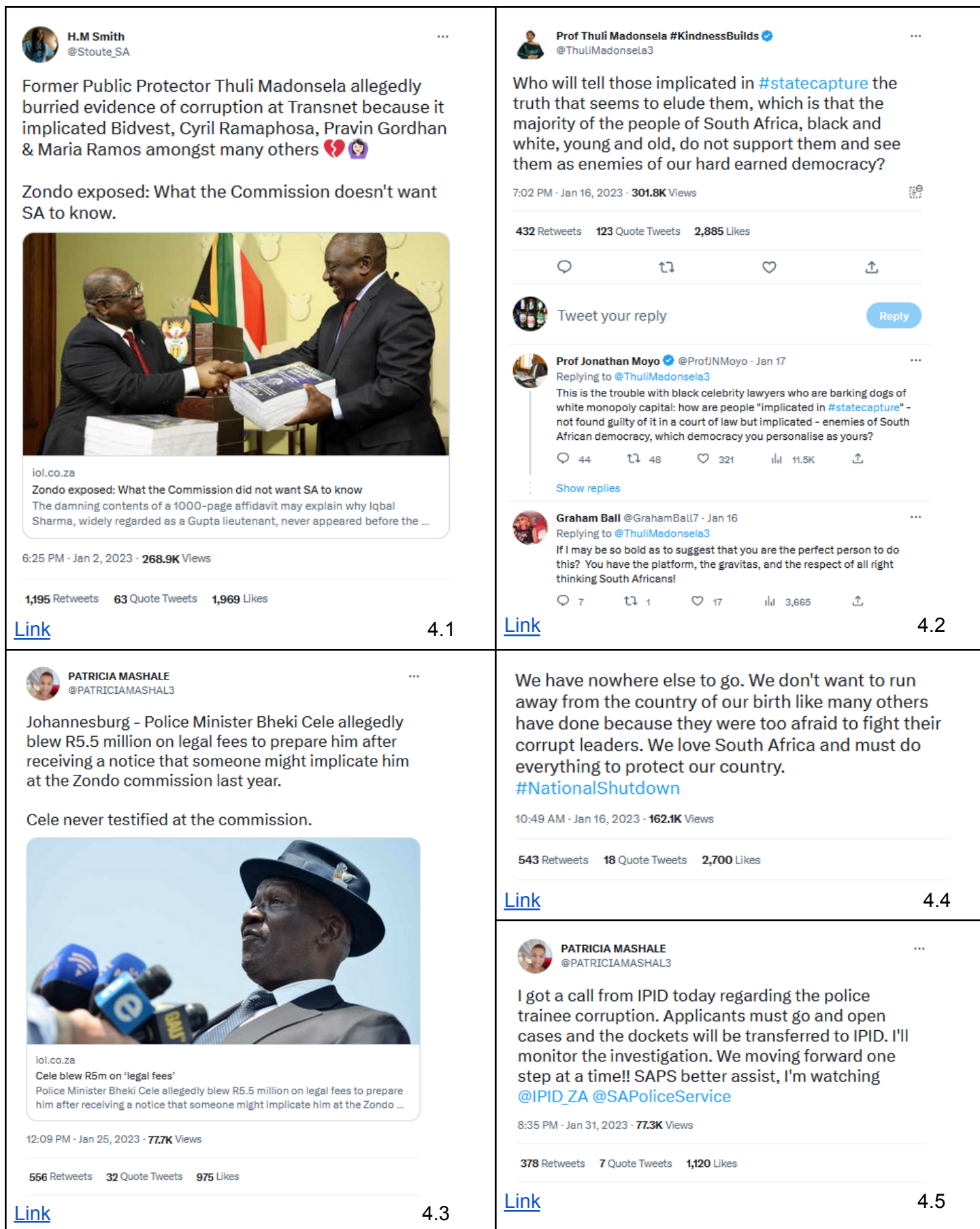


Figure 4: Tweets with a high retweet volume

Themes and subthemes

The key themes in January 2023 related to the electricity crisis, state capture and the role of the ANC in bringing about the electricity crisis and subsequently failing to address it. With ongoing loadshedding at increasingly higher stages, President Cyril Ramaphosa was a key focal point in the conversation. During January and proceeding into February 2023, the latest round of loadshedding has resulted in a number of protests (refer to CABC report on these protests). Key events during the reporting period were De Ruyter’s resignation as Eskom CEO and the revelation that a case of attempted murder had been opened after De Ruyter drank coffee that was allegedly laced with cyanide (refer to report on narrative surrounding the attempted poisoning).

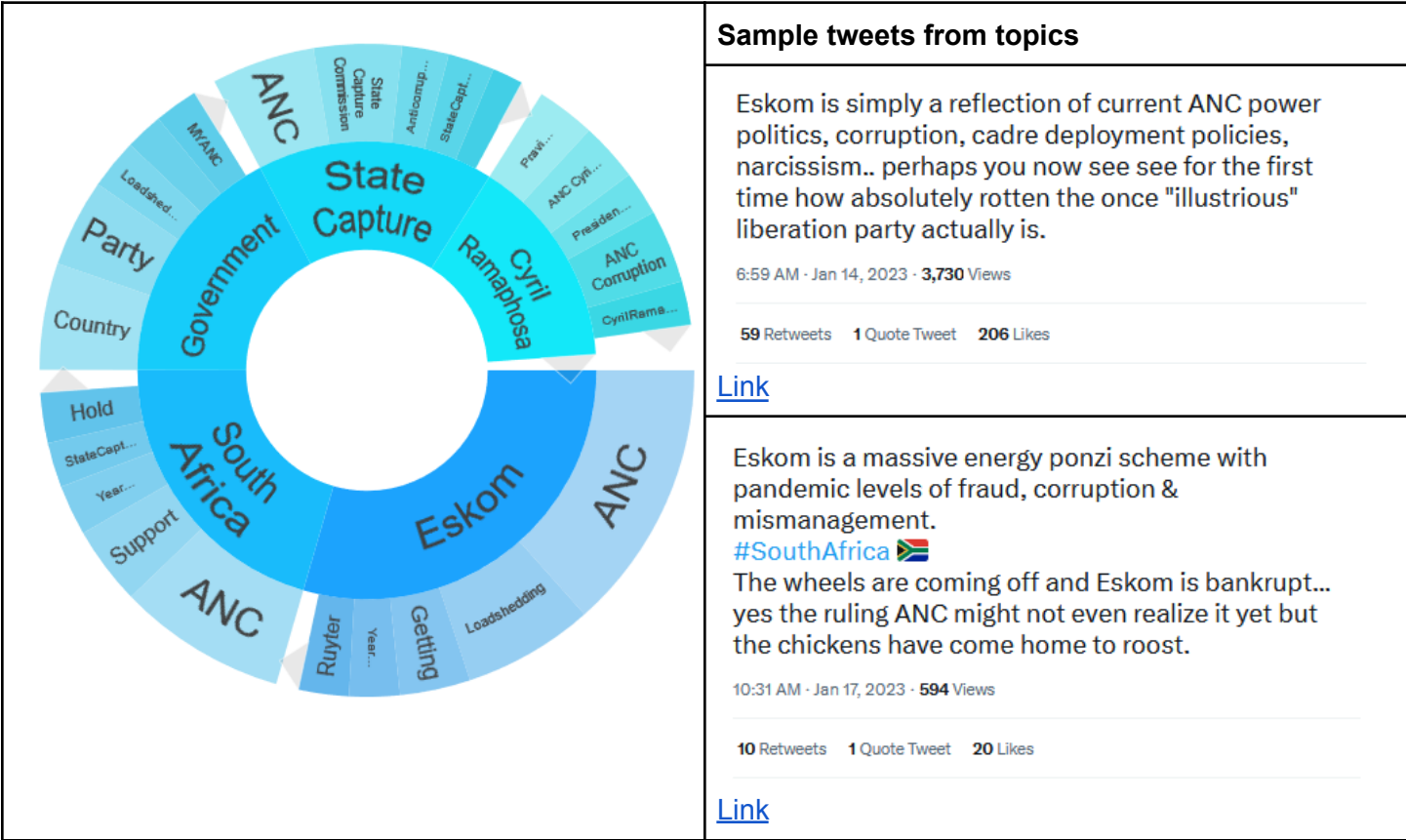


Figure 5: Topics wheel

The word cloud (in Figure 6) shows a similar picture. Trust in the government to address the power crisis appears low. President Ramaphosa’s credibility has been tarnished in recent years. The Domestic Perceptions Research Programme 2021/2022 Annual Review report (African Response & MarkData, 2022), indicates that President Cyril Ramaphosa has lost some reputational support with the level of trust declining from 64% in 2020 to 57% in 2021 - down from a high base of 67% in 2019. Much of the content about the ANC in the online conversation is commentary about the extent of corruption and service delivery failings in a variety of sectors.

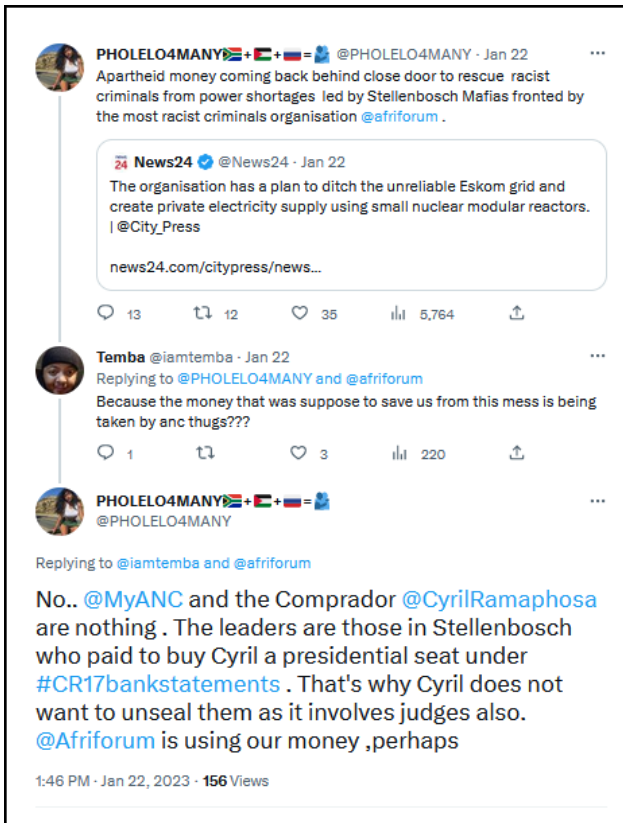


Figure 8: Responses to tweet about AfriForum small modular reactors plan

In terms of the trending topics (see Figure 9), the topics that garnered the most prevalence were ‘corrupt ANC’ and ‘loadshedding’. Coming into the trending cycle were cadre deployment, dates of specific anti-corruption related happenings occurring in January 2023, Luthuli house and specific corruption related cases that are before the courts. Fading topics included Pravin Gordhan, Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, ‘corruption at Transnet’ and ‘evidence of corruption’.



Figure 9: Trending and fading topics

When looking at the top influencers in the conversation, the Twitter handle (@Alima1000) stands out in terms of the extent of content it is tweeting.

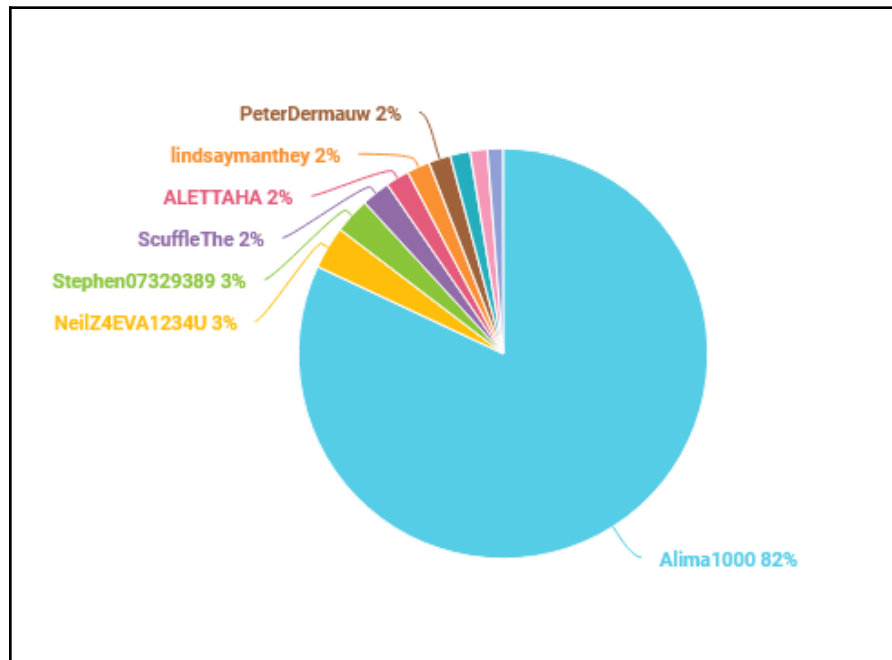


Figure 10: Top influencers

The account @Alima1000 alleges that the Government Employees Medical Scheme is corrupt, racist and incompetent (see example tweet [here](#)). Further tweets by @Alima1000 can be seen in Figure 11 below:

DONalimaG Retweeted

DONalimaG @Alima1000 · Nov 24, 2022

Dr Stan Moloabi (PO of GEMS) is incompetent, constitutional delinquent and suffering from self-loathing.

dropbox.com/s/1fwzdul814ap...

@ProfMed_SA @KeyHealth_sa
@CMScares4u @FedHealthMed @Netcare_Limited "The ANC"
#Section59Investigation
"The EFF" "Constitutional Court"
Balenciaga

The following media includes potentially sensitive content. [Change settings](#) **View**

[Link](#)

Pinned Tweet

DONalimaG @Alima1000 · Jun 16, 2020

THE CONDUCT OF THE ATTORNEYS OF GEMS

The manner in which GM INC conducted litigation is deserving of judicial censure.

dropbox.com/s/j0im3rnhdvfm...

#MedicalAidInquiry #MedicalSchemes #CMScares4u
#Section59Investigation #RacialProfiling #FightRacism #TupacShakur
#tupac #SkeemSaam

The following media includes potentially sensitive content. [Change settings](#) **View**

3 86 18

[Link](#)

Figure 11: Examples of tweets by @Alima1000

A Truthnest [analysis](#) of the @Alima1000 handle scores it 80% for bot indicators⁵ (see Figure 12). There is a high likelihood that the account is operated by a bot. Particularly because of the extent of activity that the account is displaying and the spam being posted from it. At the time of this analysis the account had posted a total of 298,862 tweets and has used the hashtag #MedicalAidRacialProfiling almost 300 times. Dropbox links to court proceedings involving allegations of medical aids engaging in racial profiling have been shared repeatedly. It appears that this account is focused on problematising alleged racial profiling by medical aids (specifically the Government Employees Medical Scheme) and is bot enabled to repeatedly post that content. A high number of the tweets contain mentions of other accounts and hashtags that are not relevant to the content, most likely to get the content noticed through use of [hashjacking](#)⁶ as a tactic.

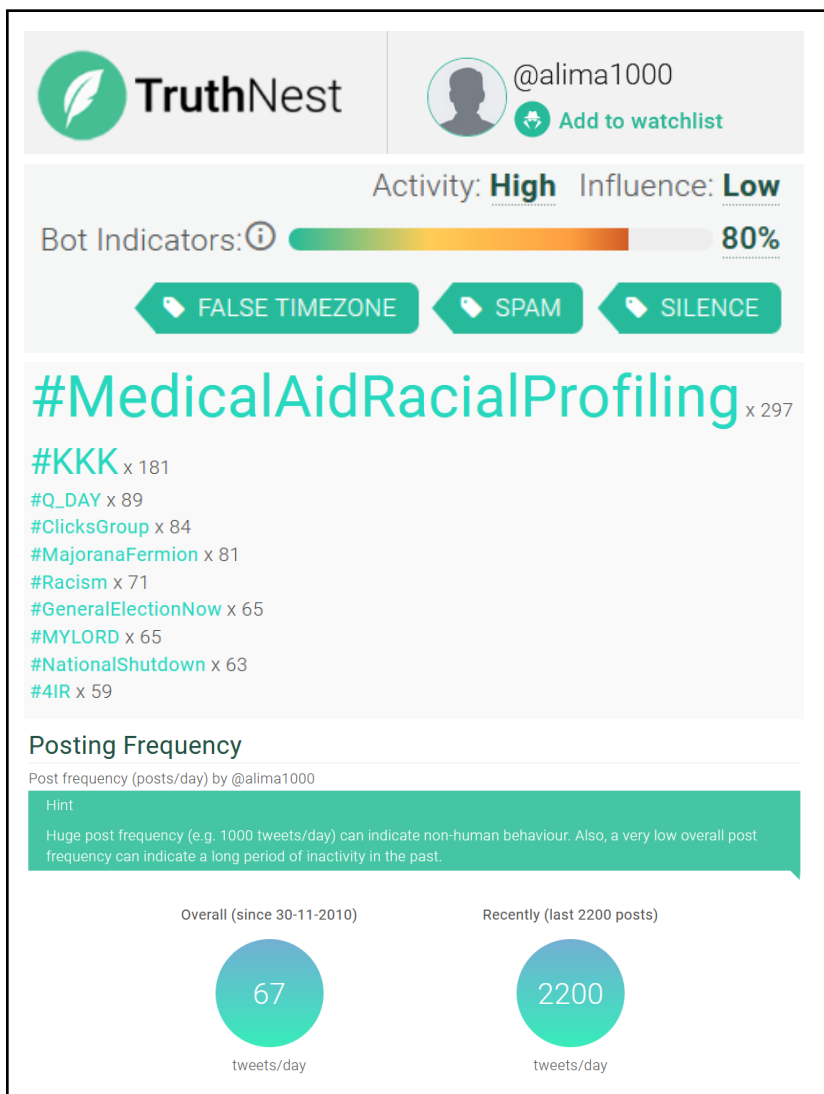


Figure 12: Truthnest analysis of @Alima1000

⁵ The Bot indicators tab shows you the possibility of the account being operated by a bot. For example, a 0% score indicates a very low to zero probability of the account being operated by a bot, while a 100% score indicates a very high probability of the account being operated by a bot. Please take into account that the score is only an indication and that you should also use your personal judgement.

⁶ Hashjacking occurs when a hashtag is hijacked and used for a different purpose than it was originally intended, usually to get the content that the author is posting noticed.


Stand out narratives

Based on analysing the content, narrative formulations were identified. As highlighted in the previous section, corruption at Eskom was a key theme for this reporting period. The themes in the narrative therefore tend to be energy sector related. However, there is also corruption related content about other sectors (such as transport, health and policing). Corruption narratives in South Africa are not confined to energy, but it is a key crisis that is affecting the country and therefore is dominating the discourse. The list below contains the narrative formulations that were frequently repeated in the conversation:

1. **Implicated persons are heroes:** The real state capture has been committed by those who are standing against so-called corruption. Cyril Ramaphosa, Pravin Gordhan, Trevor Manuel, Maria Ramos, Derek Hanekom are aligned with White Monopoly Capital and are the real villains.
2. **White Monopoly Capital** is impeding economic transformation and those who stand against state capture are the lackeys (barking dogs) of WMC.
3. **Evidence is being ignored:** Thuli Madonsela suppressed evidence of corruption and did not investigate it during her term as Public Protector because of who it implicated. Judge Zondo ignored testimonies (of those implicated) and deliberately chose not to investigate Transnet related allegations adequately or look into Glencore's actions sufficiently among other things.
4. **Zuma a hero, Ramaphosa the worst President ever:** Former President Zuma was a far better President than President Cyril Ramaphosa. Zuma is a hero who remains popular with people. He tried to solve the energy crisis, but was blocked by the West. Ramaphosa is the worst President South Africa has ever had. He has not got any credibility to speak about energy as he failed to do anything about it when he was Deputy President. As President, he will not do anything to solve the electricity crisis.
5. **People do not trust Ramaphosa:** Ramaphosa has lost the trust of citizens due to the Phala Phala allegations and CR17 bank statements. People do not want to listen to him anymore. His voice is boring and he sleeps everywhere he goes.
6. **De Ruyter is incompetent and corrupt:** Andre de Ruyter's performance has been very poor while at Eskom. De Ruyter is the spokesperson for the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Programme (REIPPP).
7. **Renewables and privatisation are a sell out:** There has been a deliberate plot to collapse State Owned Entities to be able to sell them off. Privatisation is the wrong route and will be bad for black South Africans. Renewable energy equals privatisation and will not solve South Africa's problems.

8. **Matshela Koko is a hero:** He was able to prevent loadshedding. The performance numbers show he was a far more competent CEO than De Ruyter, but white mediocrity and corruption by white-owned companies is being defended.
9. **Coal is needed for baseload:** South Africa is being duped. European countries are taking South Africa's coal while they tell South Africa to transition to renewables. The coal exports from the Richards' Bay harbour need to be blocked. We need to use the coal that we have to keep our economy going.
10. **The NPA is being used as a political tool:** The NPA is being used as a political tool in factional battles within the ANC. NPA has not produced a charge sheet to charge Brian Molefe. They do not have anything to charge him with and yet they arrested him.

Figure 13 below contains examples of these stand out narratives. It is not an exhaustive set of examples, but rather a sample that typifies the kind of narrative formulations that appear to be being manufactured.

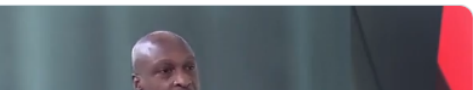


Banele

@Gentlements

...

State capture commission was a farce. Eskom is deliberately sabotaged to collapse it.




9:10 PM · Jan 30, 2023 · **21.6K** Views


127 Retweets

9 Quote Tweets

249 Likes

[Link](#)

 Izwe Lethu Retweeted

 **Phuti Phuthi**
@PhutiPhuthi

...

#ramaphosamustfall Mr
#PhalaPhalaFarmGateCriminal has destroyed SA and
stolen all the money with no service delivery
@CyrilRamaphosa you're the worse president ever.
#CR17BankStatements @MYANC #Loadshedding
crisis because you make money when the power goes
off. [twitter.com/LandNoli/statu...](https://twitter.com/LandNoli/status...)

This Tweet is unavailable.

11:27 AM · Jan 29, 2023 · 608 Views


[Link here](#)

Also see example

SUNDAYINDEPENDENT NEWS POLITICS OPINION

Our darkest hour came after the new dawn

Written by
Mzilikazi Wa Afrika



Published Jan 30, 2023

Johannesburg - Eskom has become a weapon of mass deception and a tool to score cheap political points.

While the ruling party and the opposition are at each other's throats, citizens remain in the dark as direct and latent victims of the monotonous load shedding. In the confusion of it all, an endless blame game has ensued: For instance, President Cyril Ramaphosa would blame his predecessor, Jacob Zuma. Zuma would blame the Gupta brothers and former president Thabo Mbeki.

[Link](#)

 MENU



SIGN IN

SUNDAYINDEPENDENT

NEWS

NPA has no formal charges against Molefe

Published Jan 30, 2023



Written by
Thabo Makwakwa

[Link](#)

Also see example [here](#)

The screenshot shows a Twitter thread. The top tweet is from Sinaye Teleni (@Sinayet), replying to @LandNoli. The text of the tweet is: "If I remember well Brian Molefe made a statement about Ramaphosa being chairperson of war room at the Zondo commission but Zondo ignored that statement instead he praised him". It has 6 retweets and 10 likes. Below this is a tweet from Brandon (@Umatumewabantu) with the text: "The trick is simple: 1. Create a boogeyman (State Capture) 2. Pretend to save ppl from the boogeyman 3. Become the real boogeyman Loadshedding Eskom CEO Paul Mashatile SOEs de Ruyter Cyril Ramaphosa the ANC Phala Phala KZN Midlands SAPS". It has 43 retweets, 3 quote tweets, and 84 likes. Both tweets have a blue "Link" button to the right. The interface includes profile pictures, usernames, handles, timestamps, view counts, and engagement metrics.

13 Izwe Lethu Retweeted

Sinaye Teleni
@Sinayet

Replying to @LandNoli

If I remember well Brian Molefe made a statement about Ramaphosa being chairperson of war room at the Zondo commission but Zondo ignored that statement instead he praised him

6:03 AM · Jan 16, 2023 · 1,315 Views

6 Retweets 10 Likes

[Link](#)

Brandon
@Umatumewabantu

The trick is simple:

1. Create a boogeyman (State Capture)
2. Pretend to save ppl from the boogeyman
3. Become the real boogeyman

Loadshedding Eskom CEO Paul Mashatile SOEs de Ruyter Cyril Ramaphosa the ANC Phala Phala KZN Midlands SAPS

5:47 PM · Jan 9, 2023 · 171K Views

43 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 84 Likes

[Link](#)

A screenshot of a tweet from the user @Umalumewabantu. The tweet text reads: "The trick is simple: 1. Create a boogeyman (State Capture) 2. Pretend to save ppl from the boogeyman 3. Become the real boogeyman". Below the text, it says "Loadshedding Eskom CEO Paul Mashatile SOEs de Ruyter Cyril Ramaphosa the ANC Phala Phala KZN Midlands SAPS". The tweet is dated "5:47 PM · Jan 9, 2023" and has "171K Views". At the bottom, it shows "43 Retweets", "3 Quote Tweets", and "84 Likes". A blue "Link" icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the screenshot.

Figure 13: Examples of content which may entail narrative manipulation

Conclusion

This report, the first in a series of monthly anti-corruption reports, covered the month of January 2023. Due to the effects of loadshedding, it was a key theme in the conversation. The political impasses in the energy landscape and how these links to vested interests and corruption were a feature of the conversation. The conversation contains multiple contested narratives. It appears that there may be narrative manipulation which is being done in a fairly overt manner. Further research is required to confirm this and explain the tactics applied.

A landscape report and network analysis would be beneficial to establish the lay of the land and confirm whether there is narrative manipulation taking place in the conversation. Narratives that require more analysis are those related to evidence that has allegedly been buried and claims that the NPA is being used to settle political scores.