# Working for Democracy:

## National Shutdown Deep Dive Report

Report date range: 1 Feb - 21 March 2023

Release date: 30 March 2023

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**Disclaimer:**

The CABC, Daily Maverick and City Press are currently involved in legal proceedings initiated by Sphithiphithi Evaluator (@_AfricanSoil), Thabo Makwakwa (@ThaboMakwakwa), Modibe Modiba (@mmodiba10) and Izwe Lethu (@LandNoli) who seek to review and set aside two reports: Online RET Network Analysis; and The Dirty Dozen & the Amplification of Incendiary Content during the Outbreak of Unrest in South Africa in July 2021. These proceedings are opposed and the CABC, Daily Maverick and City Press seek to have them set aside with costs.

# Introduction

Our country's ongoing energy crisis and subsequent rolling blackouts have become a daily, yet dreaded, reality for all South Africans. In addition to disrupting normal household activities, loadshedding has forced some businesses to either close down, or incur unforeseen costs - looking for ways to keep the lights on and continue operations. Having spent more than 200 days of 2022 in loadshedding, questions remain as to whether these crises can be averted while we learn of planned sabotage and criminal cartels operating along the coal supply chain. Most importantly, we also ask when will load shedding end? Despite not having answers yet, South Africans seem to have varying opinions on how we got to this stage, and who should be held accountable.

At the centre of accountability is Eskom and the government. As a result of the entity being state owned, accountability also lies with the government. President Ramaphosa was positioned as having said that he had no legal duty to end loadshedding. The Presidency's communication team highlighted that it was deliberately mischievous of some actors to lift that out of the court papers without context and say that the President is taking no accountability. If he were to ignore where the Constitutional mandate sits, that would be problematic. The law says that Municipalities have a duty to provide water and electricity to people and does not provide for the President to interfere with the functions of the municipalities. Eskom as a State Owned Entity has a board and the board is the accounting officer (which means it is accountable for the financial decisions).

At the start of this year, the CABC released a report looking into protest action and rallies that took place in South Africa in January and early February. The reason behind the protests and rallies was to prompt the government and Eskom to solve our energy crisis and not raise tariffs on electricity.  Our report highlighted instances of opportunistic scapegoating for political gain used to blur the main reason for the calls to shut down (Eskom tariff hike and continued load shedding) with calls for Cyril Ramaphosa to step down. Please view a copy of the January shutdown report here for more details.

This report is a continuation of the report mentioned above, and it takes an indepth look at the Economic Freedom Fighters'[2] protest that the party referred to as a National Shutdown. This protest took place on 20 March 2023, the day before a public holiday with deep historical significance for South Africans - a day that commemorates the lives of those lost and those who put their bodies on the street to protest against pass laws, which the Apartheid government would use to restrict movement of black people in urban areas[3]. The choice of date for the EFF's planned protest was of interest and only as we got closer to the National Shutdown and monitored the conversation on the day did we realise that the choice of date can be considered a tactic to

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[2] The EFF, headed by Julius Malema, is an official opposition party to the African National Congress (ANC) that is headed by President Cyril Ramaphosa.
[3] 21 March in South Africa commemorates the Sharpeville Massacre and is known as 'Human Rights' day.

claim a minor victory. It suggests that the political opportunism of the EFF should not be undermined as simply a flop or a failure as we head toward the 2024 National elections.

During the reporting period (01 Feb 2023 - 21 March 2023), a noticeable increase in content associated with the hashtags #NationalShutdown and the EFF are what prompted the writing of this report. Not only do we want to understand and help South Africans understand the voices in the conversation and what they were saying, we also want to understand at what point the narrative shifted to one of violence. The orchestration of the call to mobilisation that the EFF used, gave rise to concerns that the protest may result in violence or pose a threat to the state of Constitutional democracy in South Africa.

In the aftermath of the July 2021 unrest, especially in KwaZulu-Natal where race baiting led to the loss of innocent lives by armed citizens who took the law into their own hands, the South African government was compelled to take serious steps to avert any crisis that had the potential to destabilise a flailing economy that has recently been greylisted by the Financial Action Task Force for having unaddressed weaknesses in our measures for  the prevention of money laundering and terror financing. In order to mitigate against further destabilisation, Ministers in the Security Cluster deployed the army, increased law enforcement visibility and worked with private security companies to ease the nervousness of a nation freshly bitten. Load shedding, which we have experienced in the metropoles everyday since the start of 2023 (until the weekend of 18 March 2023), was also halted, showing citizens that our institutions that are considered to be lacking in performance are able to organise rapidly to alay our concerns, begging the question, why have such measures not been taken sooner? We will explore such questions as we delve into an overview of key metrics, a narrative analysis and an author analysis below.

**Research Methodology**

The CABC made use of social media analytics tools to obtain the content analysed in this report. Rather than using the standard keyword based approach we allowed the query to filter in everything from Twitter with the location set to South Africa. Because of the sheer volume of tweets that takes place on a daily basis and because we chose to broadly look at Twitter, the sample rate that was returned was roughly 3%. This sample rate does not impact the number of mentions, unique authors, retweets and reach i.e. some of the key metrics that we analyse to understand a conversation more deeply. This means that the overall numbers we report on reflect the entirety of the conversation that we were able to collect in our dataset, not just the 3% that were returned as samples. The low sample rate impacts the examples of mentions that are returned in our dataset. However, this is easy to work around as once we understand a sample of the conversation, desktop research can be used to help find more examples.

A limitation of restricting conversation to South African accounts is that some social media users misrepresent their location or do not select a location on sign up so their tweets, comments and other interactions may be left out. To address the limitation we focussed our dataset by using keyword-based categories and then expanded these categories by tagging mentions around 3 key topics: the ANC leadership, service delivery and civil unrest.

The categories and tags that were created and applied to the broad dataset have been included in Appendix A.

Desktop research on Twitter, and open source social media analytics tools like Truthnest and InVid were also used for this report, particularly in helping us analyse information about the authors or creators of Tweets.

Importantly, notes were collected as researchers at the CABC watched media briefings from The ANC, SAFTU and The EFF to be able to compare with narratives that we found on Twitter.

## Overview

The conversation around the National shutdown returned by our data-set contained over 800k mentions from more than 160 000 unique authors between 1 February and 21 March 2023 (see Figure 1). The first mentions of the EFF's National Shutdown, however, were recorded around January 29, following the party's press briefing.

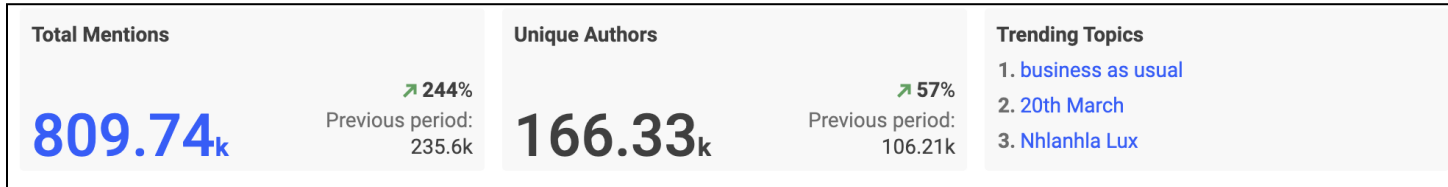| Total Mentions | | Unique Authors | | Trending Topics |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **809.74**k | ↗ **244%** Previous period: 235.6k | **166.33**k | ↗ **57%** Previous period: 106.21k | 1. business as usual<br>2. 20th March<br>3. Nhlanhla Lux |

*Figure 1: All mentions in the dataset during the reporting period*

Among the trending topics were "business as usual" (related to tweets that reported whether it was business as usual depending on the shutdown activities in certain areas), "20th March" (shared mostly by accounts proclaiming the date to be that of the National Shutdown) and "Nhlanhla Lux" (who condemned the shutdown and accused the EFF of bombing his home in Soweto on the day of the shutdown).

The top three trending topics are determined by what the social media listening tool refers to as "bursts". Bursts are calculated by dividing the selected date range into two equal parts and comparing the increase in volume of that topic across the two halves. For example, If there were 50 mentions of a topic in the first half and 75 in the second, that's an increase of 50% and therefore the topic would have a burst value of 50. What this implies is that the items that appear in first, second and third place under "trending topics" are not

necessarily the most prominent in the dataset. This is why we use additional metrics to analyse a topic so that we can truly understand the most prominent and relevant content for the issue on which we are reporting.

If, for example, we change the date range to a week before the protest and include the day after the protest, we see that the third trending topic in our data set changes to "peaceful protest". Within the peaceful protest topic, a post by @MbuyseniNdlozi, shown in Figure 2 below, received more than 1 million views. It contains a video that Ndlozi claims shows peaceful protestors in Braamfontein on the evening of 19 March 2023. However, comments to the post seen in Figure 3 suggest that protesters in the video, dressed in red, were not marching peacefully as they carried weapons with them and may have been provoking security services on the ground.
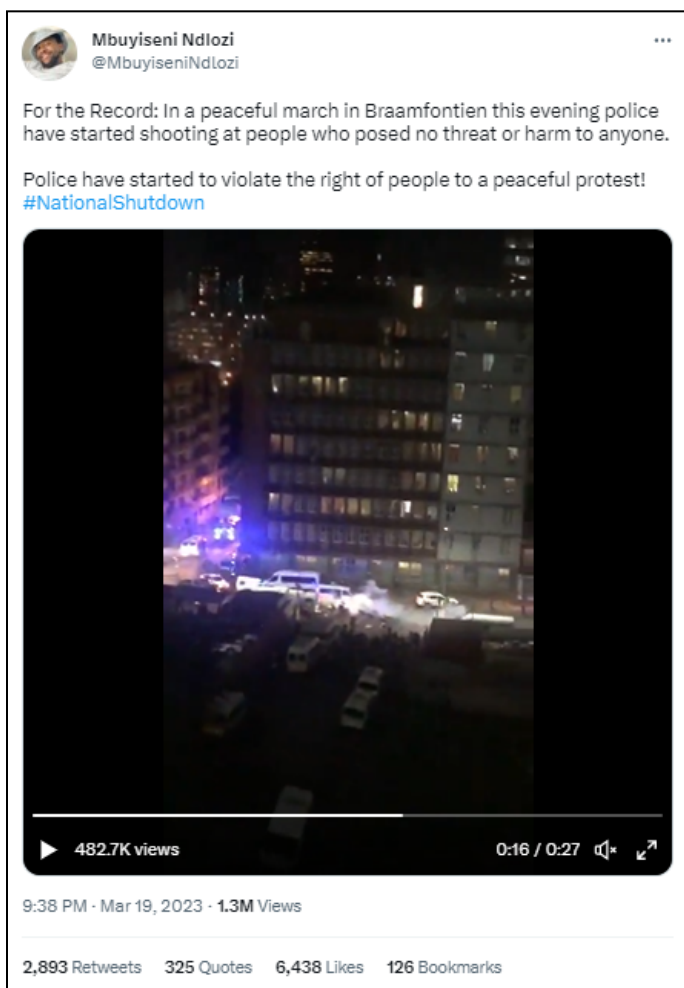


*Figure 2: A tweet from 19 March 2023, claiming that the protest was peaceful*

*Figure 3: Responses to @mbyusenindlozi's post about a peaceful protest on the night of 19 March 2023*

In what was meant to be an EFF protest march in Cape Town, video footage was shared of a small group of people who marched from Observatory to the Cape Town CBD at 12am. Although it is not shown in the footage of this post, @AndiswaMadikazi claims that protesters in Cape Town were met with stun grenades and AK47s. A screenshot of this post can be found in Figure 4 below.
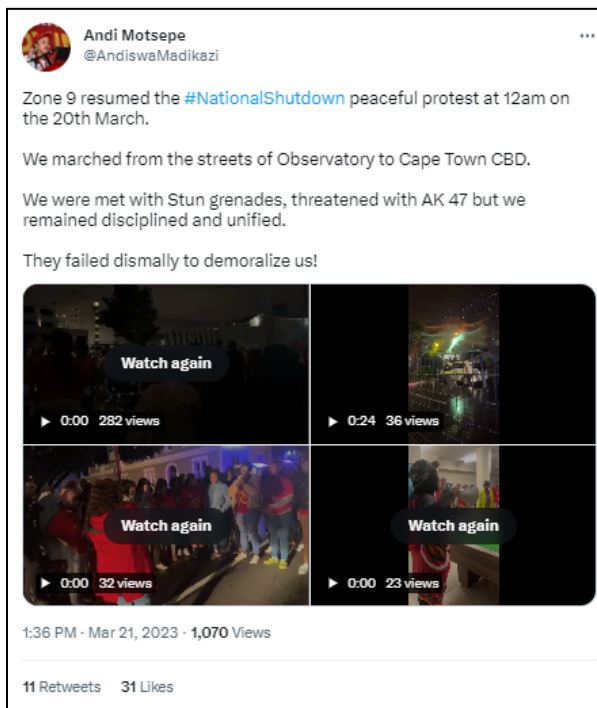


*Figure 4: A post claiming that people protesting in Cape Town were met with stun grenades and AK47s in the early hours of the morning*

As shown in Figure 5, the highest peak, recorded on the day of the shutdown, accounted for more than 190 000 mentions. The second-highest peak, with 24 215 mentions, was recorded on February 9, when President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the State of the Nation Address, wherein he announced that the government would appoint a Minister of Electricity to tackle the country's ongoing load shedding crisis.
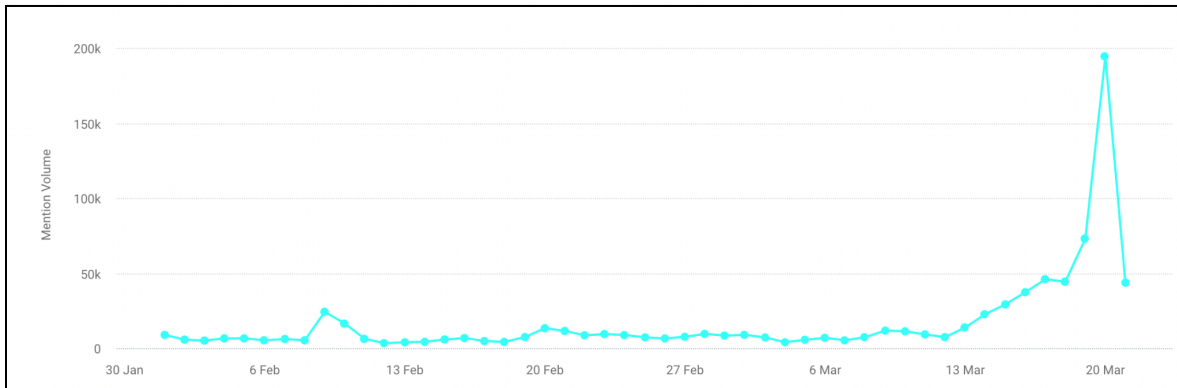


*Figure 5: National Shutdown and strikes conversation over time*

#SONA2023 was the fifth most popular hashtag used in this conversation, preceded by #effturns10, #EFFnationalshutdown, #ramaphosamustgo and #nationalshutdown (see figure 6).



*Figure 6: Top hashtags used with the 'National Shutdown and strikes' conversation*

The most retweeted post within our dataset was from the @Julius_S_Malema account on 20 March, thanking South Africans for "a peaceful yet vibrant #EFFNational Shutdown". The second most retweeted post was a deleted tweet stating that there was a coordinated effort to discredit the EFF's National Shutdown. A closer look at the top 10 most retweeted content reveals a theme of support for the National Shutdown, and criticism towards the ANC and how it has responded to the shutdown *(refer to Figure 7).*
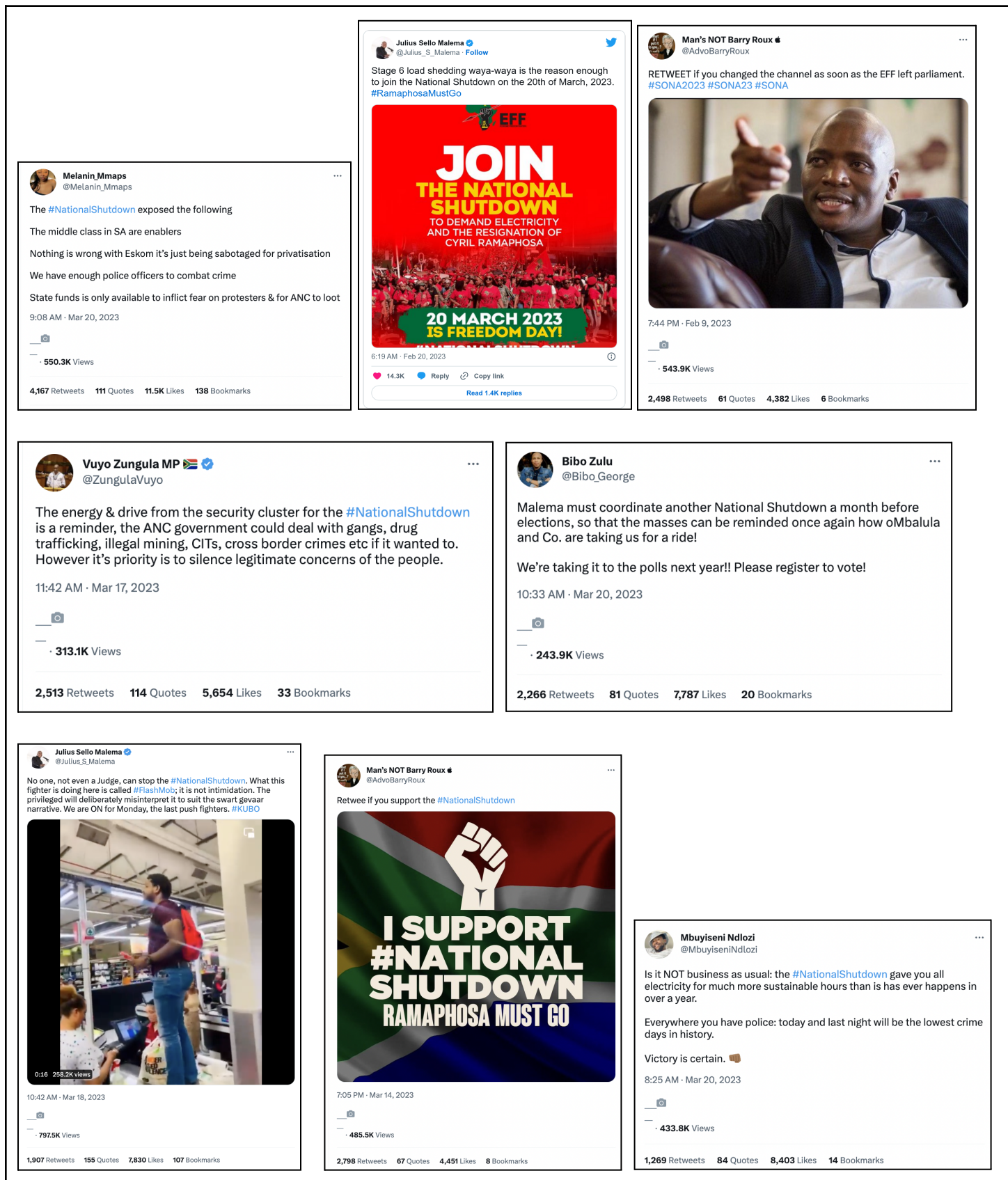
*Figure 7: Tweets that express a perspective portraying the National Shutdown favourably*

The EFF's shutdown has been criticised for failing to live up to its hype. A recent [poll](#) by TimesLIVE asking readers whether the shutdown was a success resulted in 41.77% of respondents questioning "what shutdown" 36.75 voting that the shutdown "was quiet because it was the day between weekend and a public holiday" and 21.5% saying that it was "peaceful, [it] shutdown businesses and got the message across".

On the other hand, the EFF has declared it a success, taking credit for the suspension of load shedding and for the closure of some activities (and businesses), deeming the day as "not business as usual". However, an analysis of what occurred in the days leading up to the shutdown reveals that the selection of 20 March as shutdown day, as well as the events leading up to this, worked in favour of the EFF. It is important to note that:

- 20 March was gazetted as a special school holiday on 18 March [2022](#), a year short of the announcement of the National Shutdown. With children home from school, parents are likely to take the day off giving them an opportunity at 4 straight days without work if they took leave on Monday. With people on leave and school's closed, there would be less traffic on the roads;

- It is possible that some businesses may have decided to close on the Monday because of EFF messaging, but also because Tuesday, 21 March was a public holiday. Hence, 17 - 21 March 2023 could be treated as a long weekend; and

- The suspension of load shedding was, according to Eskom, due to the "significantly lower than anticipated [demand](#) for electricity".

## Narrative analysis

As we build up to the 2024 elections, the governing party is expected to come under major scrutiny as opposition parties seek to replace the current leaders who have been embattled by factionalism, allegations of corruption and a general lack of confidence by the citizenry who face unemployment, high crime rates and poor service delivery. Journalists also [identified these areas](#) as the main topics against which the EFF spoke at their protest. Tagging the content in our dataset based on these issues, we were able to quantify and visualise these narratives within the National Shutdown and Anti-EFF categories.

Close to 150 000 mentions were tagged within the National Shutdown category and 1430 mentions were tagged based on our Anti-EFF category. These numbers are based purely on the keywords that were used in our tags and are not a representation of every single post that could be returned. This limitation with the keyword style data collection must be noted as it has certain shortcomings.[4]

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[4] *Understanding the Radical Mind: Identifying Signals to detect extremist content on Twitter*. Mariam Nouh, Jason R.C. Nurse and Michael Goldsmith (2019)

Figure 8 contains a breakdown of the tagged mentions that were returned based on the National Shutdown category. Mentions containing Ramaphosa and Zuma tags contributed to 73% of the National Shutdown conversation, with the remaining 27% split between Service Delivery, Load shedding and Civil Unrest.
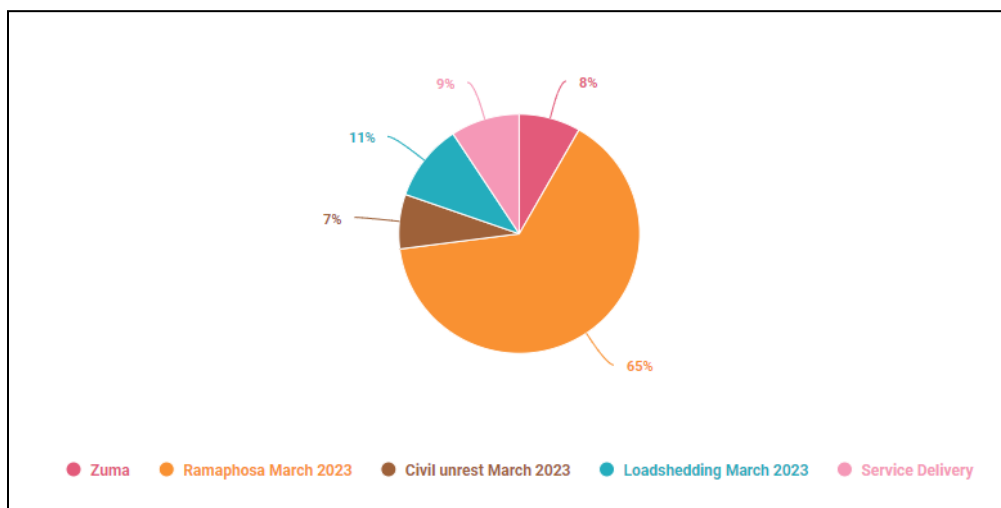


*Figure 8: National Shutdown category breakdown based on tagged posts*

In Figure 9 we see a similar chart that is based on the 1430 Anti EFF mentions that were tagged. Again, talk of Ramaphosa and Zuma dominated these mentions with the Ramaphosa tag appearing in 60% of the mentions while 13% comprised the Zuma tag. The service delivery tag did not return any mentions within the Anti EFF dataset however, the Civil Unrest tag was larger in this conversation (based on percentage breakdown), as a talking point for those afraid of some of the veiled threats that were made just days before the march became the potential for riots and looting to take place.
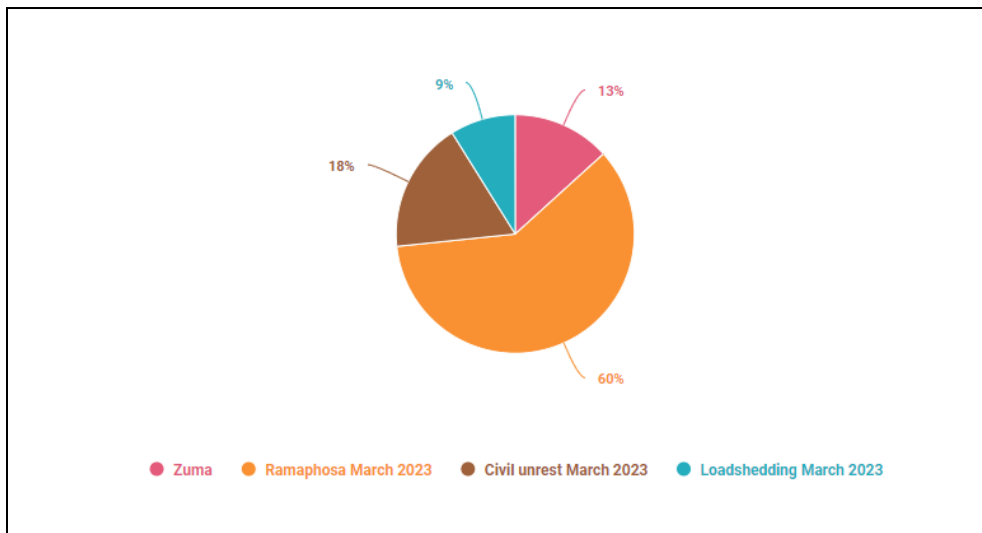


*Figure 9: Anti-EFF category breakdown based on tagged posts*

Remember to review Appendix A to understand the keywords that were used within the categories and tags.

Below we take a closer look at the tagged mentions in greater detail. Mentions tagged with Ramaphosa and Zuma are explained under "The ANC leadership" subtitle.

## The ANC leadership

Within the National Shutdown category, keywords that had been tagged with "Ramaphosa" and variations of his name including "phala phala" and #CR17bankstatements accounted for 65% of all mentions that were tagged. This equates to 95 716 mentions. A topic review of these mentions reveal that some of the biggest conversations in terms of volume included words like #RamaphosaMustGo, ANC, Julius Malema and Marikana (Fig. 10).
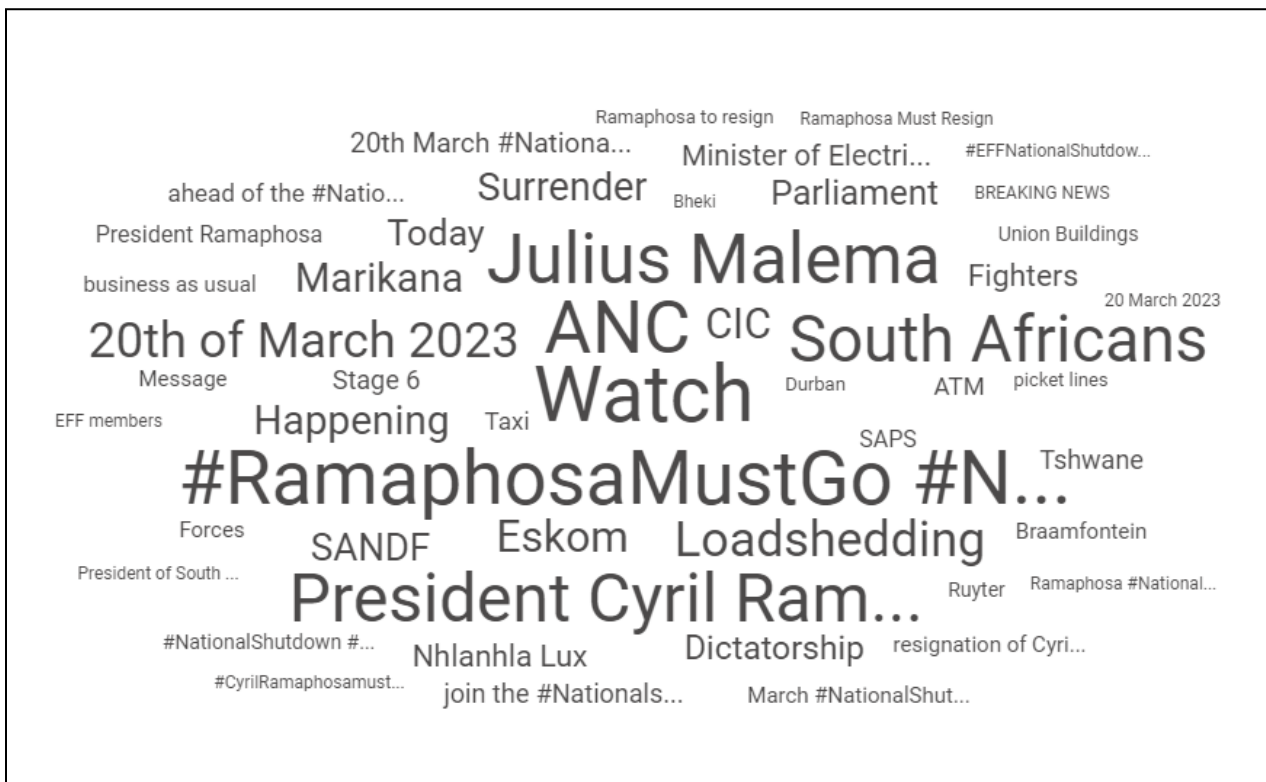


*Figure 10: Topic cloud of mentions returned based on keywords in the Ramaphosa March 2023 tag*

The biggest drivers of #RamaphosaMustGo within our dataset were found from the official page of The African Transformation Movement (ATM) and by account @54Battalion. Both tweets can be seen in Figure 11 below.

The post by the ATM received more than 80 000 views and includes a letter that the leader of the ATM, a member of parliament, Vuyo Zungula, wrote to the Public Protector on 20 March 2023 because of an Interim report that cleared President Ramaphosa of all violations of the Ethics Act. The letter includes a link to a

Section 89 independent panel report that was conducted and a link to a YouTube video. One person commenting on this post reminded the ATM that the Section 89 Panel evidence on which they relied was "untested". Another person commenting also sarcastically referred to the "mountain of evidence" that the ATM were trying to put forward in their attempt to undermine the decision of the Public Protector and push for the resignation of the President.

@54battalion relies on the angle of race using a video of the grannies singing "Zuma must go" that went viral when South Africans gathered to express their unhappiness with then President Jacob Zuma, a nationwide protest in which the EFF played a big role in 2017.  The post makes reference to the idea that white people who supported the impeachment of former President Zuma do not support the EFF against Ramaphosa and further suggests that their feelings should not be considered (see Fig 11).



*Figure 11: Mentions with the highest retweets using #Ramaphosamustgo*

The fact that these posts were both created by a political party and a strong social media supporter of the EFF shows the political nature of the attempts to undermine President Ramaphosa rather than a general citizen-led dissatisfaction with the President.

Reviewing the posts within the keyword Marikana we see the positioning of Ramaphosa as a hit man who does not care about black lives (Fig. 12). Much like the Sharpeville Massacre lives in our shared memory of South African history, the devastation caused by the irrational, fatal shooting at Marikana is also a constant reminder of how civilian protest action in the past has gone terribly wrong.



*Figure 12: Example of Marikana post within the Ramaphosa March 2023 tag*

@MbuyiseniNdlozi, which although not verified, appears to be the official account of the EFF member of parliament, also tweeted about Marikana the day before the EFF's protest. This post is shown in Figure 13 below and again draws attention to the fact that violence ensued against black people while they were trying to protest.



*Figure 13: Post by @MbuyiseniNdlozi comparing the EFF's March planned protest with the very violent events that took place at Marikana.*

This post received close to 300 000 views and alongside the reference to innocent black workers who were killed, it also includes militant language like "No retreat, No surrender" next to #nationalshutdown alluding to this idea that protesters at the EFF's "National Shutdown" could be met by the same intensity and violence that the Marikana miners faced.

A few people commenting on @mbuysenindlozi's post call him an "ice boy", referring to his secondary position in the EFF. An "ice boy" is loosely defined as a person who does not significantly contribute financially to the team but rather carries out the demands of other members in a group.

12 219 mentions were tagged with "Zuma" related keywords. Within these mentions comparisons were made by Twitter users of the difference between Zuma's leadership and Ramaphosa's. One of the biggest comparisons drawn between the two appears to be the support that Ramaphosa receives from white South Africans over Jacob Zuma. As we've seen in Figure 7 above and again in Figure 14 below, posts about white South Africans taking the Zuma "National Shutdown" more seriously was a popular reference in the National Shutdown narrative.



*Figure 14: Posts comparing Zuma and Ramaphosa and whose interests each served.*

The topic cloud shown in Figure 15 below shows commonly used words, phrases and hashtags that were returned by the Zuma tag. What clearly stands out are the words "President Zuma", accounting for just over 16% of these mentions.



*Figure 15: "President Zuma" appears in most of the mentions that received the Zuma tag*

The ideas that are driven along with the words "President Zuma" are that he was a better president, that he allowed South Africans to exercise their democratic rights and that no one was threatened with violence at the time of the #zumamustfall protests. Examples of these posts are shown in Figure 16 below.



*Figure 16: Examples of posts claiming that Jacob Zuma was a better and more democratic leader than Ramaphosa are driven under the topic "President Zuma".*

Looking briefly at some of the accounts that drove the "Zuma was better" narrative, they all appear to be influencer accounts, two of them with tens of thousands of followers, and while they do not all necessarily show strong support for the EFF, they all contain older posts on their Twitter wall with a strong anti-Ramaphosa sentiment. This could mean that opportunistic Zuma supporters saw an opportunity with the disproportionate coverage of Ramaphosa's resignation and the EFF's "National Shutdown" to use the same hashtag to drive their own pro-Zuma content.

As we noted in Figure 9, the percentage of Zuma related content that was tagged in the Anti-EFF category was higher than the National Shutdown category. One of the posts that was returned was by an account called @OnlineScoops. This account, which is followed by "Economic Freedom Fighters" Official account (Fig. 17), declares in its bio that it has videos and tricks.



*Figure 17: Twitter Bio of @OnlineScoops*

Usage of the word "tricks" here is of interest because the most retweeted post tagged with "Zuma" in the Anti-EFF category shows videos shared online of hundreds of people who showed up at Lemo Mall in Bloemfontein on 16 March 2023 to submit their CV to clothing retailer Ackermans that would be opening up a new branch in the mall. The only news story that researchers were able to find online is from a radio station called "OFM". It is alleged that the people showed up after the store posted job vacancies on the Lemo Mall website. @onlinescoops used emotive language calling the scene that is recorded "heartbreaking" and uses this video to drive a message about removing the ANC with #NationalShutdown (Fig. J). Zuma is not even a primary talking point on this post but the name is used as a keyword stuffer/filler among a list of other keywords and hashtags like SANTACO and #VoetsekEFF makes little sense for the purpose of the post.

In one of the comments to the post, someone claims that this is not a video of South Africa but rather Zimbabwe and asks the poster to "stop lies" (Fig. 19). This is highly improbable unless it is a video from before 2019 when Pepkor, owner of Ackermans, still had a presence in Zimbabwe. In an effort to draw further attention to this post, another Twitter account @'s known problematic accounts on Twitter like @LandNoli,

@DZumaSambudla and @PSAFlive (Fig. 20). This further raises questions about the purpose behind this post, it's authenticity and why it was used to drive #NationalShutdown.



*Figure 18: Daily Online Scoops tweet about people applying for a job at Ackermans*



*Fig 19: Tweet replying to Daily Online Scoops saying the video is not in SA but in Zimbabwe*



*Figure 20: Tweet replying to Online Scoops tweet tagging a range of accounts*

## Service delivery and load shedding

A key feature of the EFF protest is that it was meant to be an opportunity for the party to demand electricity for citizens that are tired of poor service delivery in the country. Although when addressing the public, party leader Julius Malema raised issues like unemployment, crime and gender based violence, the posters that were distributed regularly online focussed on only two topics, "to demand electricity and the resignation of Cyril Ramaphosa" (See Fig 21.)



*Figure 21: EFF protest poster that mentions two issues, a demand for electricity and the resignation of Cyril Ramaphosa*

Because the issues of unemployment, gender-based violence and crime prevention were kept out of the protest posters, we decided to use a different tag for "Service Delivery" (see keywords in Appendix A) and "Load Shedding". Returning to Figure 21 above, we see that load shedding terms were tagged more often (11%) in the National Shutdown narrative than those related to service delivery (9%).

What these smaller percentages in relation to posts about the ANC leadership suggest is that the "National Shutdown" appears to have been less focussed on service delivery and demanding electricity for the masses and more on driving a political agenda of removing President Ramaphosa from his office. This disconnect in volume regarding the share of conversation related to President Ramaphosa and Service Delivery was not reflected in pictures of the EFF's protest in Alexandra Gauteng on 20 March 2023, where Ramaphosa is not even mentioned but claims that the success of the #NationalShutdown proves that "our people '' are tired of load shedding, corruption, unemployment, crime and gender-based violence. See Figure 22 for an example of this post.

In his speech on 15 March 2023, Julius Malema also appears to show his hand with regard to his political agenda when he says that protesters must take up space at strategic points and "raise their fists for the downfall of Ramaphosa." In fact, for the duration of this clip that was shared by @EFFSouthAfrica, Malema

doesn't mention service delivery and electricity at all. He encourages Ramaphosa Must Go banners to be at all major roads and he addresses people who had shared images of tyres, in reference to the burning of tyres that takes place at destructive protests, as enemies who are exposing the EFF's "business plan".



Figure 22: EFF tweet about march demands

A Twitter user commenting on this post claimed that the people at the protest were used as pawns by a cult leader who wants a seat in parliament within the ruling coalition, potentially reminding people who view the tweet that demands for better service delivery do not appear to be the primary aim of the EFF. Another twitter user commented with laughing emojis to draw attention to the small overall support that the EFF has from the electorate. Both these posts can be seen in Figure 23 below.



Figure 23: Tweets commenting on the extent of support for the EFF and reasons for the march

# Civil unrest

A key concern for South Africans, both civilians and the government, ahead of the planned protest on 20 March 2023 was the potential for violence to erupt on the streets and for people to be injured or innocent lives to be lost. Fresh in our shared memories as South Africans are the deaths that occurred of freedom fighters and other innocent civilians under the Apartheid regime. Even more fresh in our shared memory is the chaos that ensued when KwaZulu-Natal faced 8 days of looting, riots and a failed security cluster, who have since acknowledged that they did face weaknesses in protecting South Africans during the July 2021 Riots.

The concerns that opportunistic looters and rioters were planning on distracting the EFF protest and potentially causing violence was spurred on by the EFF who a few days ahead of the planned protest issued letters to businesses and malls in parts of the country. An example of the letter that was sent can be seen in Figure 24, where someone responding to a post of Advocate Dali Mpofu asks if committing unlawful acts is not intended as part of the protest then the EFF need to explain the last sentence of the letter that was issued. The last sentence reads "the EFF will not be liable for anything that might happen to your business, school, workplace, tuck-shop and or institution, should you decide to open and operate on the aforesaid day." The language in the letter comes across as a pre-emptive warning that the protest may turn violent and it's in the interest of business owners and others mentioned, to close shop. As we have noted above, the public was alerted a year prior that 20 March 2023 would be a school holiday. However, the EFF still went on to claim the victory that they had caused the schools and factories to close because of their protest.
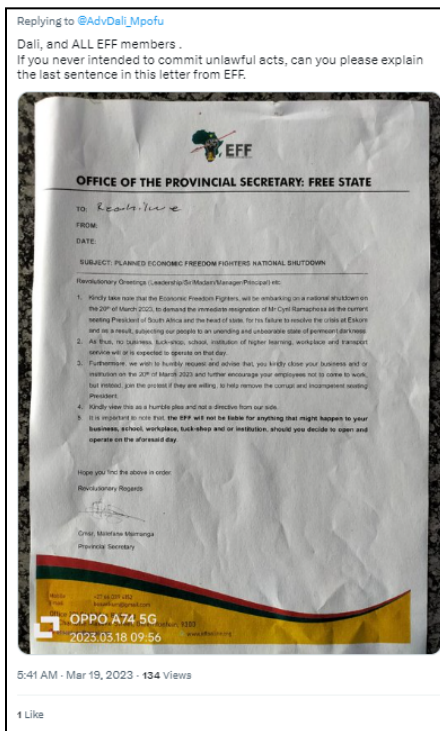


*Figure 24: Tweet querying the rationale of the final sentence in the EFF letter*

A tool that politicians have in their basket of tactics is intimidation. Intimidation inherently signals a disregard for human rights and a preference for repression[5]. Intimidation in the electoral voting process is used as a means to demobilise with the risk of getting reported being lower than other measures like vote-buying[6].

Looking back at Figure 6, we see that in the days before the EFF issued letters to businesses and malls with veiled intimidation, conversation about the EFF protest was low in comparison to the volume of conversation in the days following the letter being issued. After the businesses received the letters, the #EFFpresser was held where the media houses were invited and Julius Malema made claims about his "business plan" that had to be addressed. This forced the Minister in the Presidency and the joint security cluster to hold a press briefing the next day to discuss how they plan to handle any potential outbreak of violence and prevent the threats of burning tyres and civil unrest that was being spread within the narrative of a National Shutdown.

Returning to Figure 8, we observe that 7% of the mentions returned for the National Shutdown within our dataset, related to issues of looting, riots and violence. The post in Figure 25 for example was found in our dataset. It was tweeted by the head of Action4SA, a new political party, and contains a video of someone dressed in EFF regalia telling people that they will be hit if they are seen in school uniforms because the EFF gave them advance notice to close down.



Figure 25: Herman Mashaba weighing in

This video that threatens violence makes very little sense because schools were already to be closed based on the government mandate. By using this type of content, the EFF managed to weave a narrative online and in

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[5] *Carrots and sticks: Experimental evidence of vote-buying and voter intimidation in Guatemala*: Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos; Chad Kiewiet de Jonge; Carlos Melendez, David Nickerson, Javier Osorio. (2020)
[6] *Electoral violence: An introduction:* Sarah Birch; Ursula Daxecker; Kristine Ho¨glund (2020)

writing (via the letters sent out) that South Africans were susceptible to violence on the day of their planned protest while simultaneously claiming that it would be a peaceful protest.

While they claimed that they didn't want to resort to violence, people dressed in EFF regalia who appear to be unprovoked, are seen in Figure 26 on 20 March 2023 burning garbage bags.
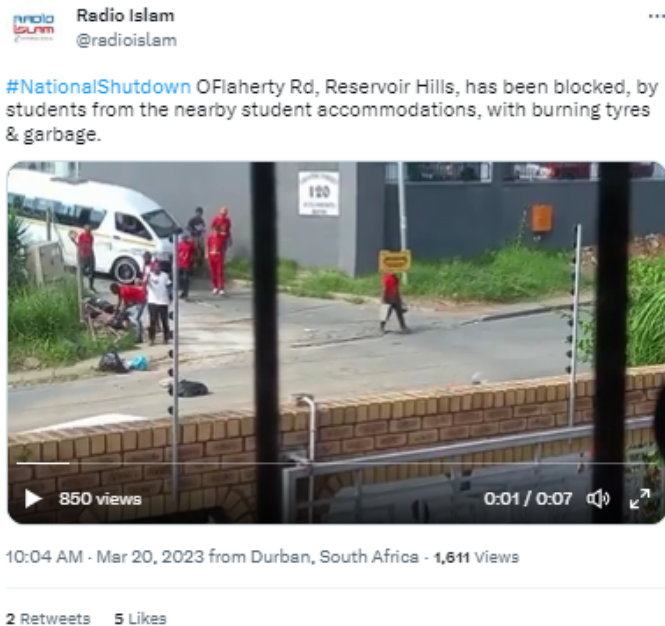


*Figure 26: Tweet about National Shutdown road closure in Reservoir Hills, Durban*

As early as 14 February 2023, an account that claims to be a current branch secretary for the EFF @NethonondaBles8 showed pictures of people carrying tyres and calling on fighters in the EFF to go out in numbers (Fig 27.)

*Figure 27: Tweet calling on people to join the protest*

The post received 472 likes and among these likes we were able to find accounts that claim to be members of the EFF (Fig. 28). This would imply that what Julius Malema said about enemies showing pictures of tyres and exposing his "business plan" does not correspond with the online examples that show people who align with the EFF in support of a call for fighters with tyres.
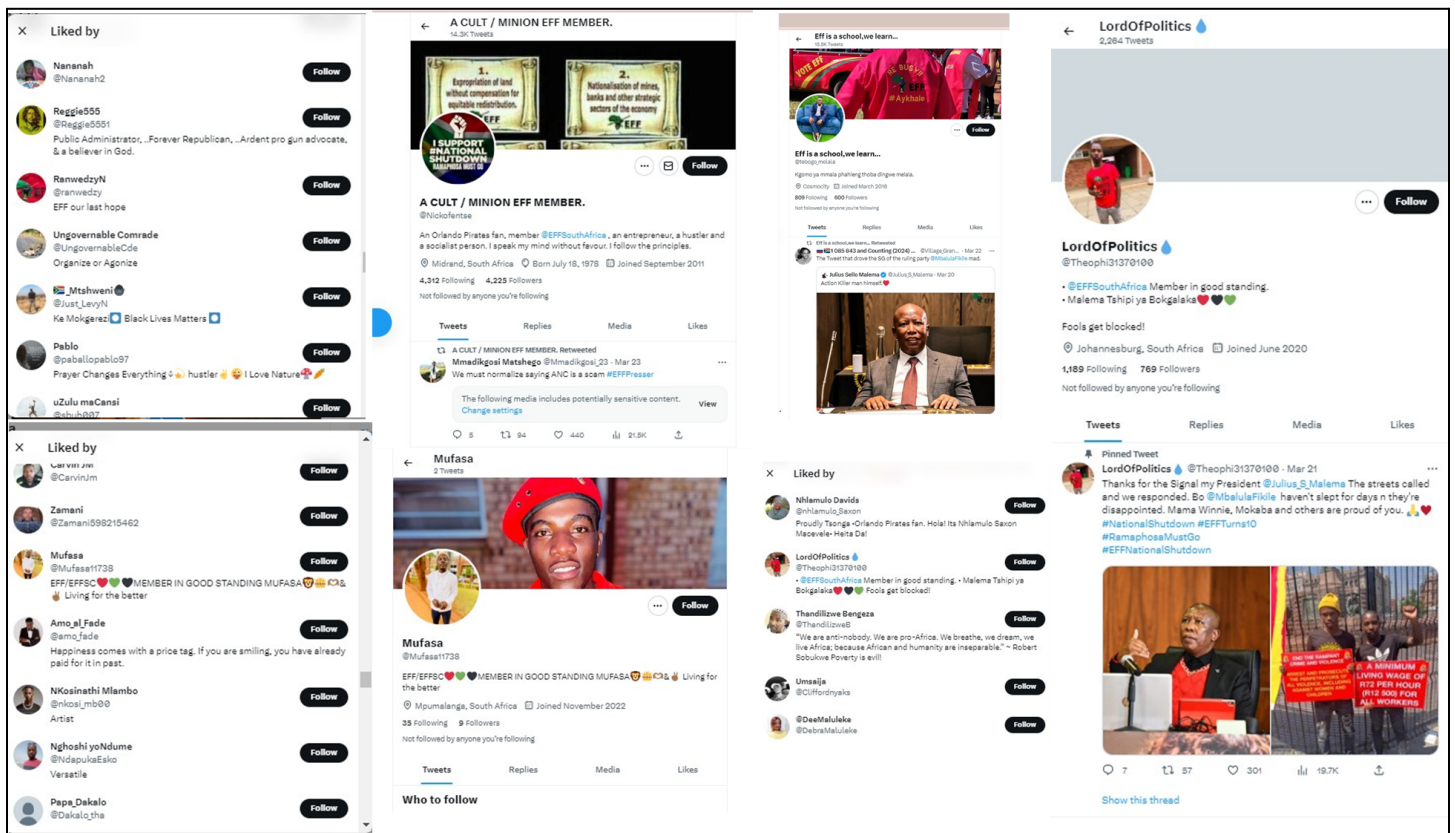
*Figure 28: Accounts that appear EFF aligned and some who call themselves members who liked the post in Fig 27.*

## Author analysis

Accounts displaying suspicious behaviour

### Entrepreneur @07372145stix

The Twitter user @07372145stix scores 60% in a Truthnest analysis for bot indicators (see Figure 29). The account is producing a high number of tweets per day – an average of 53 tweets a day, which is not the norm for most users. 99% of the content is retweeted. This account whose account information contains no indication of who the actual user is appears to be operating as an amplifier of specific content as represented in the hashtags that it retweets. It has used #NationalShutdown 76 times. Among the content that it retweets are tweets that are supportive of using unConstitutional means to remove President Ramaphosa from office. The implication of anonymous accounts amplifying content is that Twitter provides a form of online commons for public discourse. When there is platform manipulation that is occurring it give the appearance that more people hold such views than is actually the case and there is an opportunity here to sway public opinion.
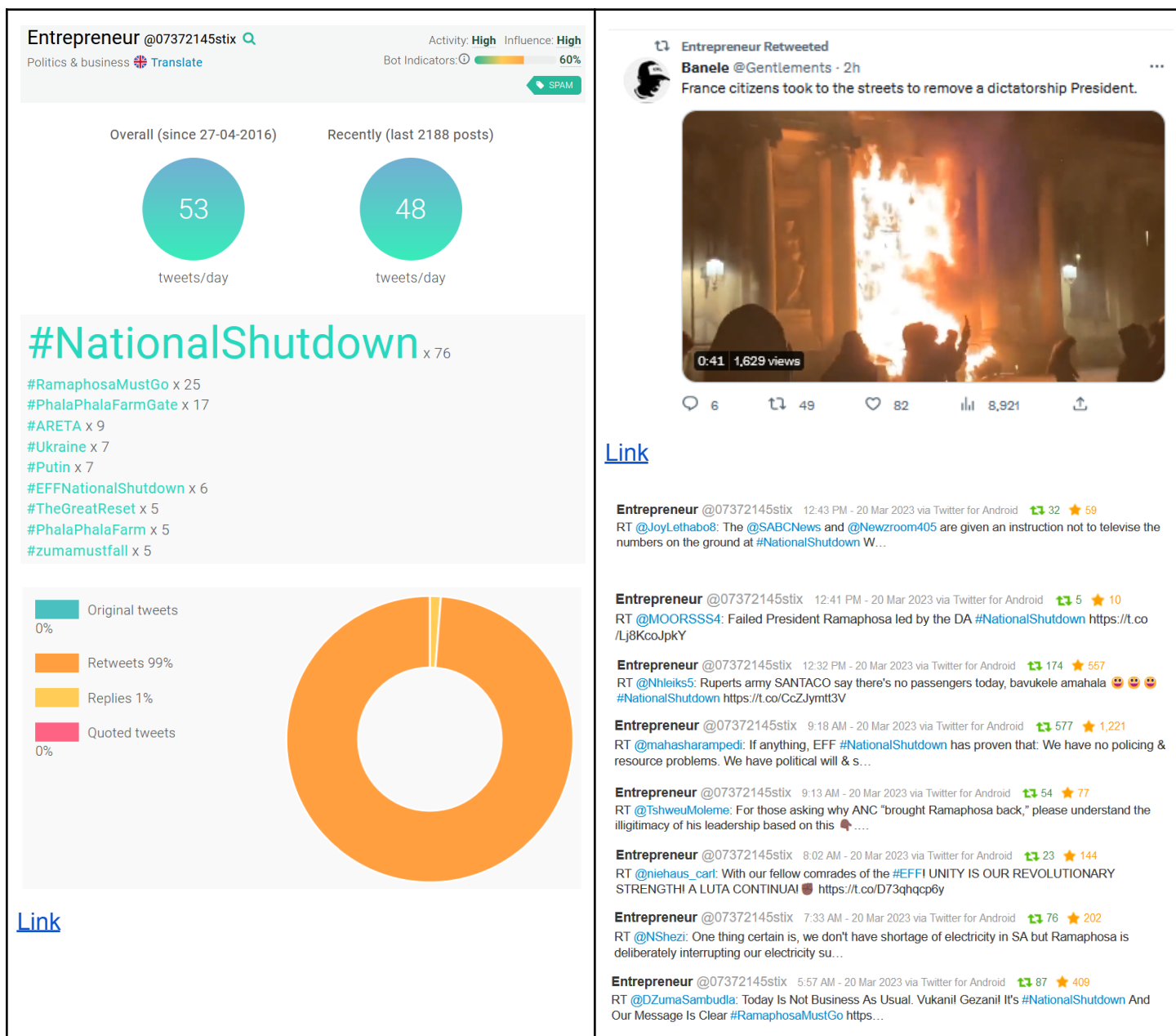
*Figure 29: Truthnest analysis of @07372145stix account*

There are also a range of retweets containing content that speculates about spies and which allege that there are CIA and Western intelligence conspiracies going on (see Figure 30 below). The nature of the narrative is that the CIA is against Jacob Zuma and supports President Ramaphosa and that people should therefore be against Ramaphosa because he is a puppet of the West. This is an ongoing narrative in the South African conversation on Twitter.

*Figure 30: Retweets by @07372145stix*

Among the steady stream of retweeted content, there are references to the protests in France with an equivalency being drawn to the National Shutdown in South Africa. The account also sources a stream of retweeted content about how the Western media and South Africa's mainstream media cannot be trusted (refer to Figure 31).
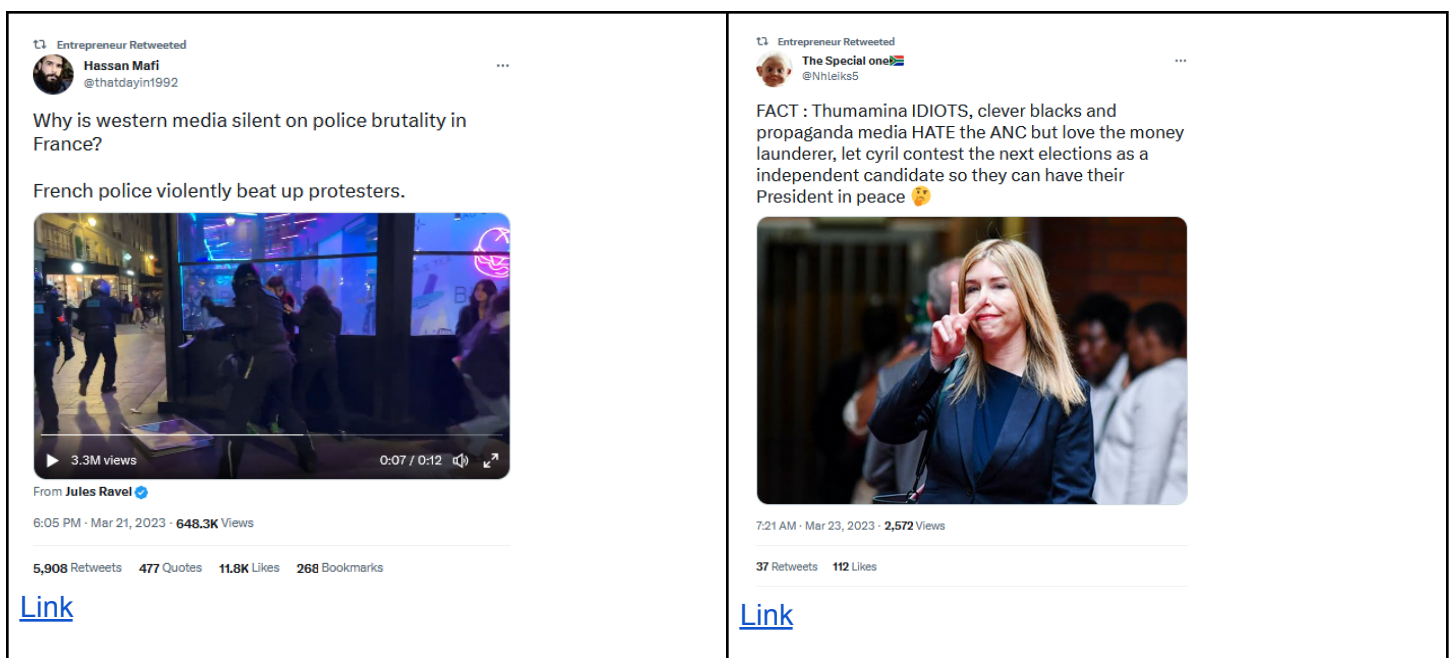


*Figure 31: Retweets of content about the media by @07372145stix*

<u>Sthe Biyela @Biyelasthe</u>

The account @Biyelasthe scores 100% for bot indicators in a Truthnest <u>analysis</u>. Its tweet volume recently jumped from 19 tweets per day overall to 365 tweets per day for its last 2187 posts (see Figure 32). At the time of writing this report, it had used the hashtag #nationalshutdown 479 times. The tweet type that this account engages is 100% retweets. This account likely functions as an amplifier of an amalgam of other accounts' content. This could be part of a deliberate tactic in that online users recognise it as holding a particular set of views, but if it is a handle that is only retweeting a lot of incendiary content, the user that originated that content will be reported to Twitter for contravening its community standards as opposed to the amplifier which itself is behaving in a suspicious manner.

#NationalShutdown x 479
#EFFNationalShutdown x 72
#RamaphosaMustGo x 54
#NationalShutDown x 33
#ShutdownSA x 22
#ShutDown x 19
#EFF x 19
#sabcnews x 14
#Nationalshutdown x 12
#Loadshedding x 6

Original tweets 0%
Retweets 100%
Replies 0%
Quoted tweets 0%

Link
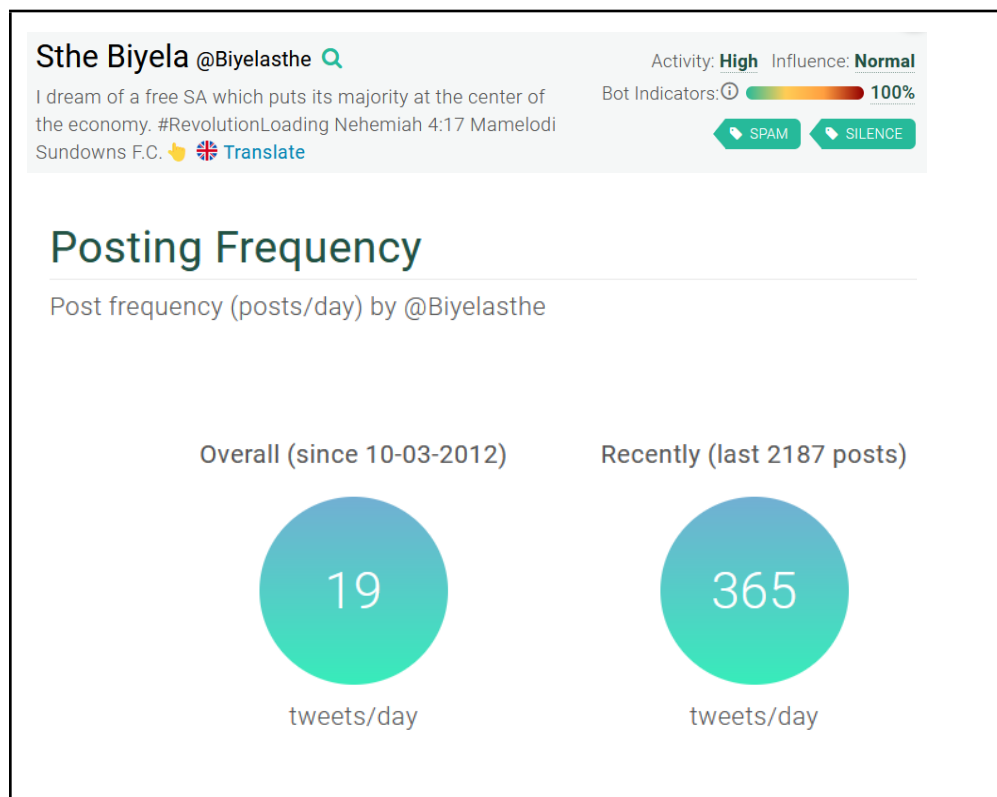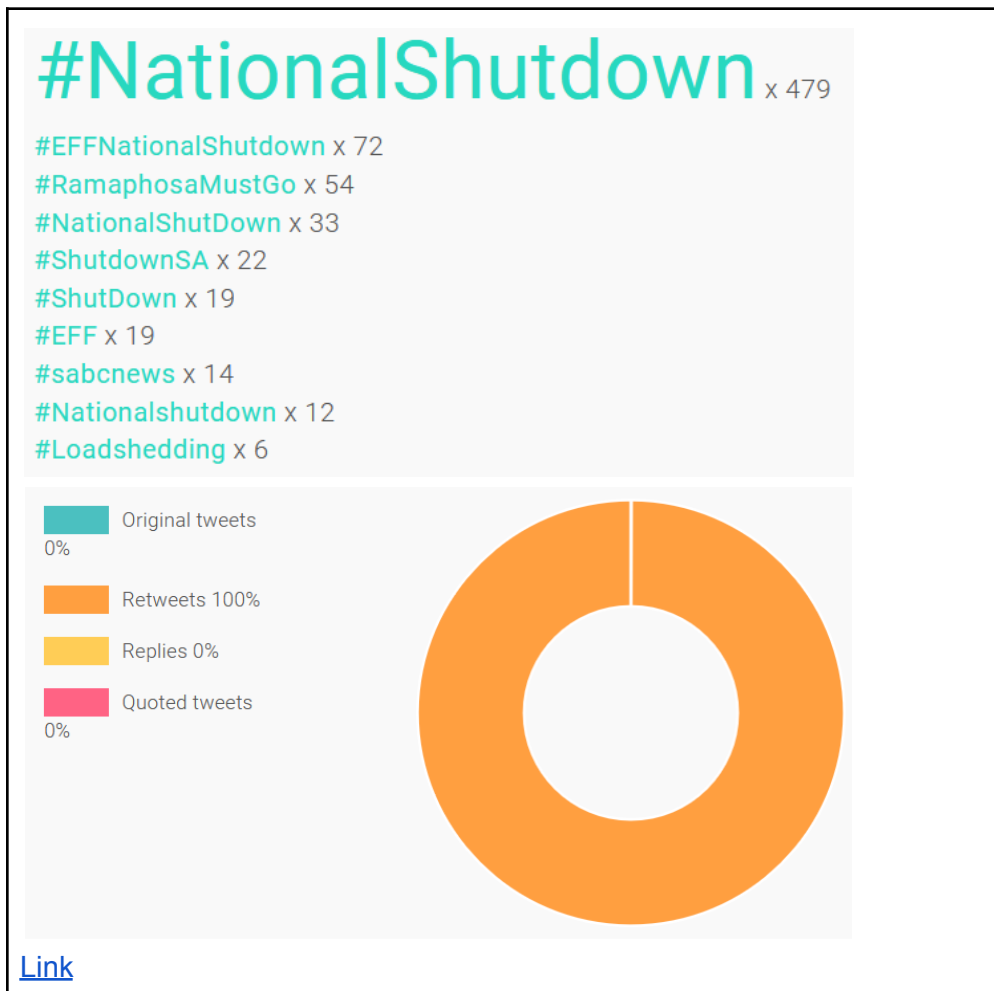
*Figure 32: Truthnest analysis of @Biyelasthe*

The Special one @Nhleiks5

The account @Nhleiks5 is another Twitter user that has been tweeting a lot of #NationalShutdown content. For example, the account tweeted #NationalShutdown 78 times and #Nationalshutdown 30 times. A Truthnest analysis scores the account 30% for bot indicators. It is therefore likely not a fully bot operated account, but the fact that it has been flagged by Truthnest as having suspicious followers stands out (see Figure 33).
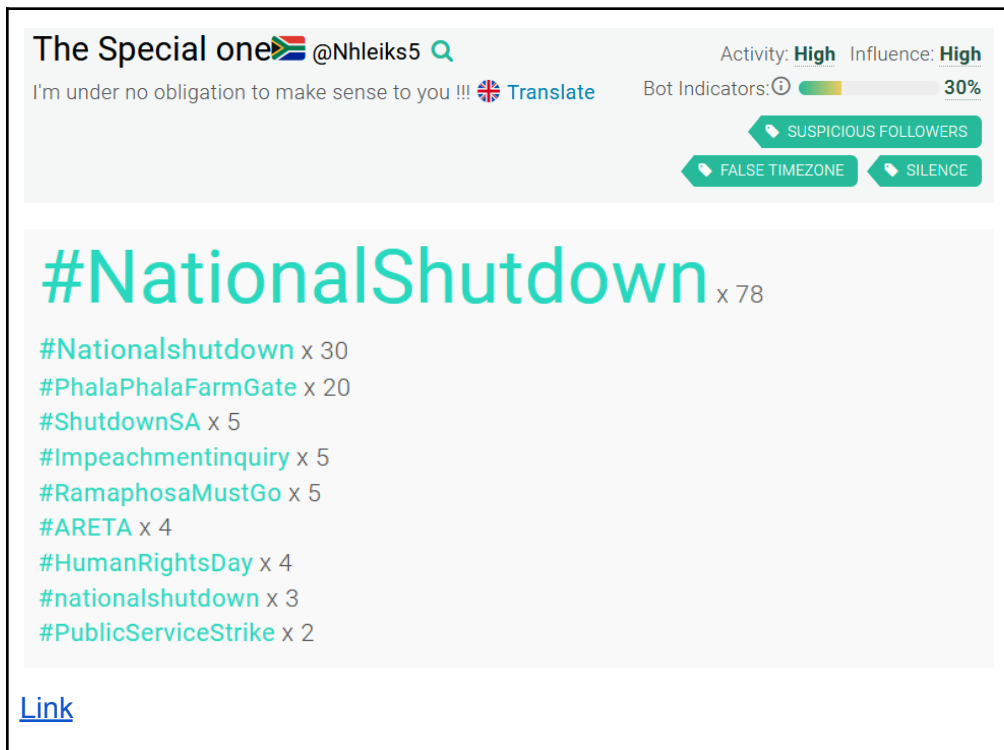
*Figure 33: Truthnest analysis of @Nhleiks5*

The Special one's account information provides no sense as to who the human operating the account may be (refer to Figure 34 below).
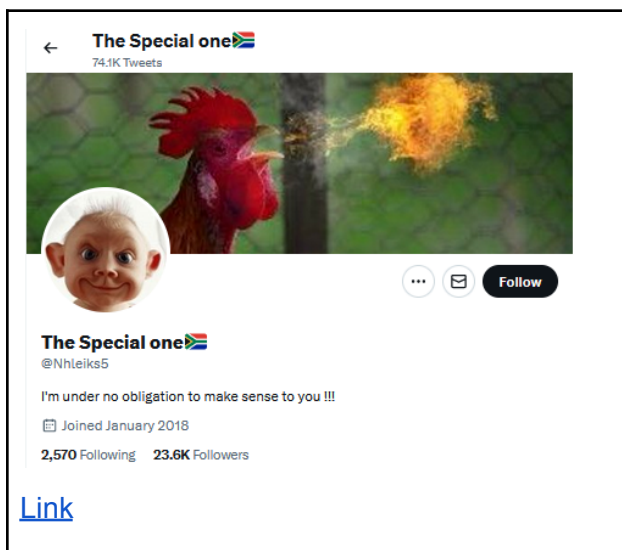


*Figure 34: Account information for @Nhleiks5*

A sample of content tweeted by the account is of a nature where there is assertion that the ANC has responded in a heavy handed manner without the balance of acknowledgement that the way that EFF leaders

spoke about the National Shutdown in the lead up to it gave rise to the response by the ANC led government (see Figure 35).

The account also contributes to spreading disinformation narratives, such as the idea that load shedding was stopped as a result of the National Shutdown, which is not a factually correct characterisation, as load shedding was at a lower stage on the day of the march because of the decreased demand over the long-weekend and the completion of maintenance which was already happening prior to the protest demands being made.



Link



Link



Link



Link
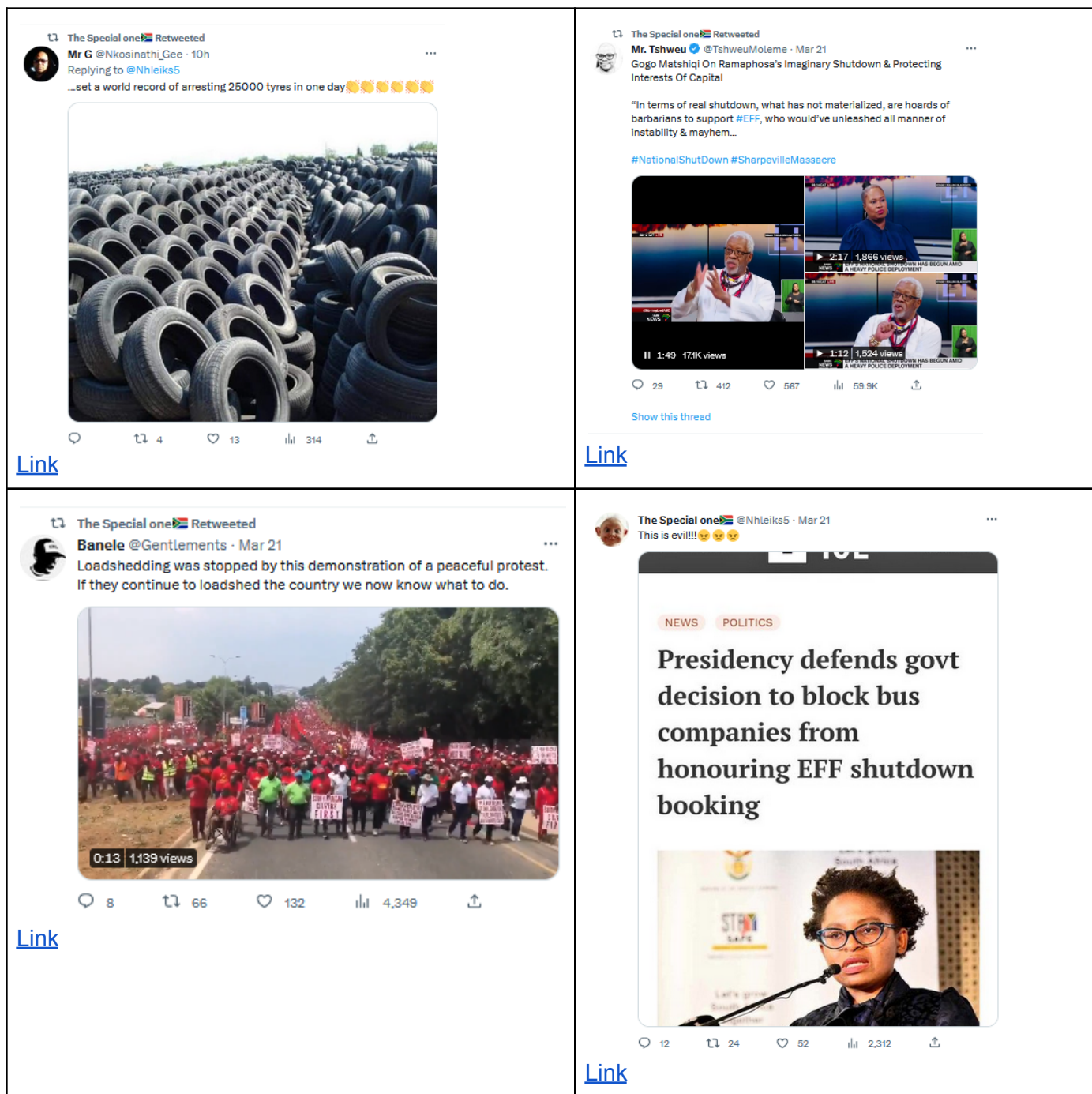
Banele @Gentlements

The account called Banele (@Gentlements) made use of the hashtag #NationalShutdown 69 times and #Nationalshutdown, 12 times. Truthnest analysis scores Banele 60% for bot indicators (see Figure 36). The user is a high activity high influence user, meaning that this account is an influencer account that is prolific with activity. The account's weekly activity shows an uptick during the days just before and on the day of the National Shutdown.
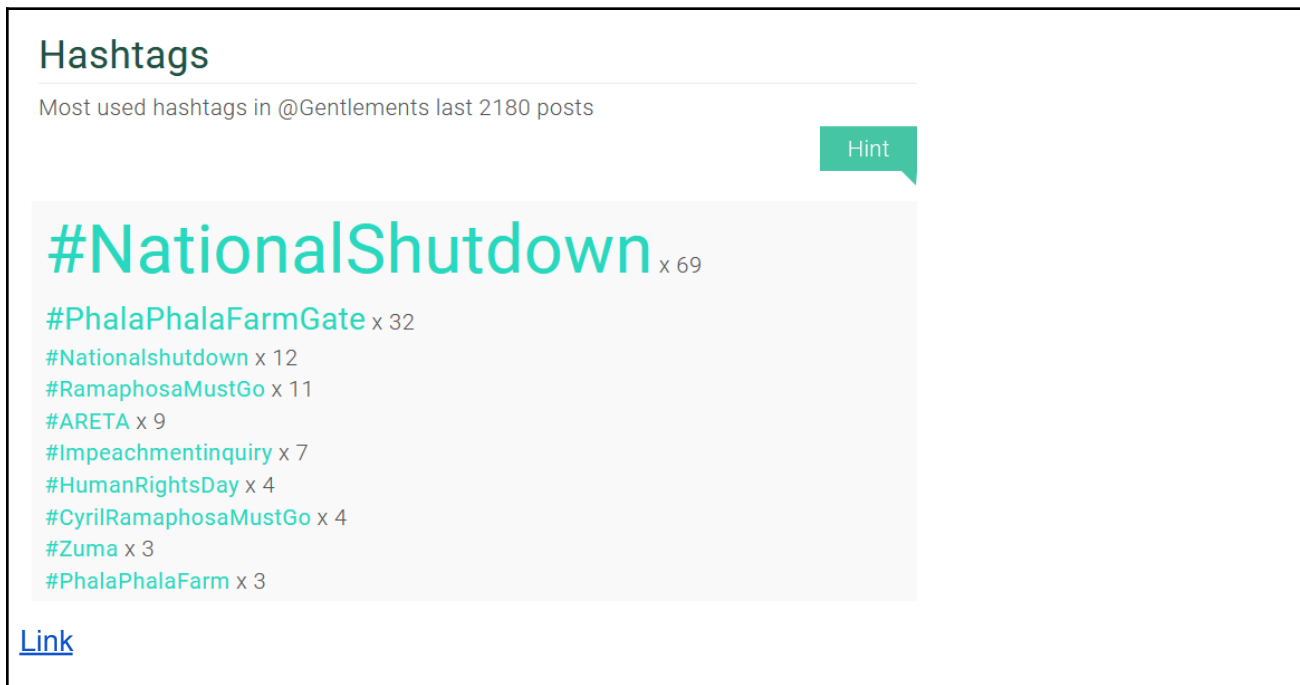
## Hashtags

Most used hashtags in @Gentlements last 2180 posts

Hint

# #NationalShutdown x 69

## #PhalaPhalaFarmGate x 32

#Nationalshutdown x 12
#RamaphosaMustGo x 11
#ARETA x 9
#Impeachmentinquiry x 7
#HumanRightsDay x 4
#CyrilRamaphosaMustGo x 4
#Zuma x 3
#PhalaPhalaFarm x 3

Link
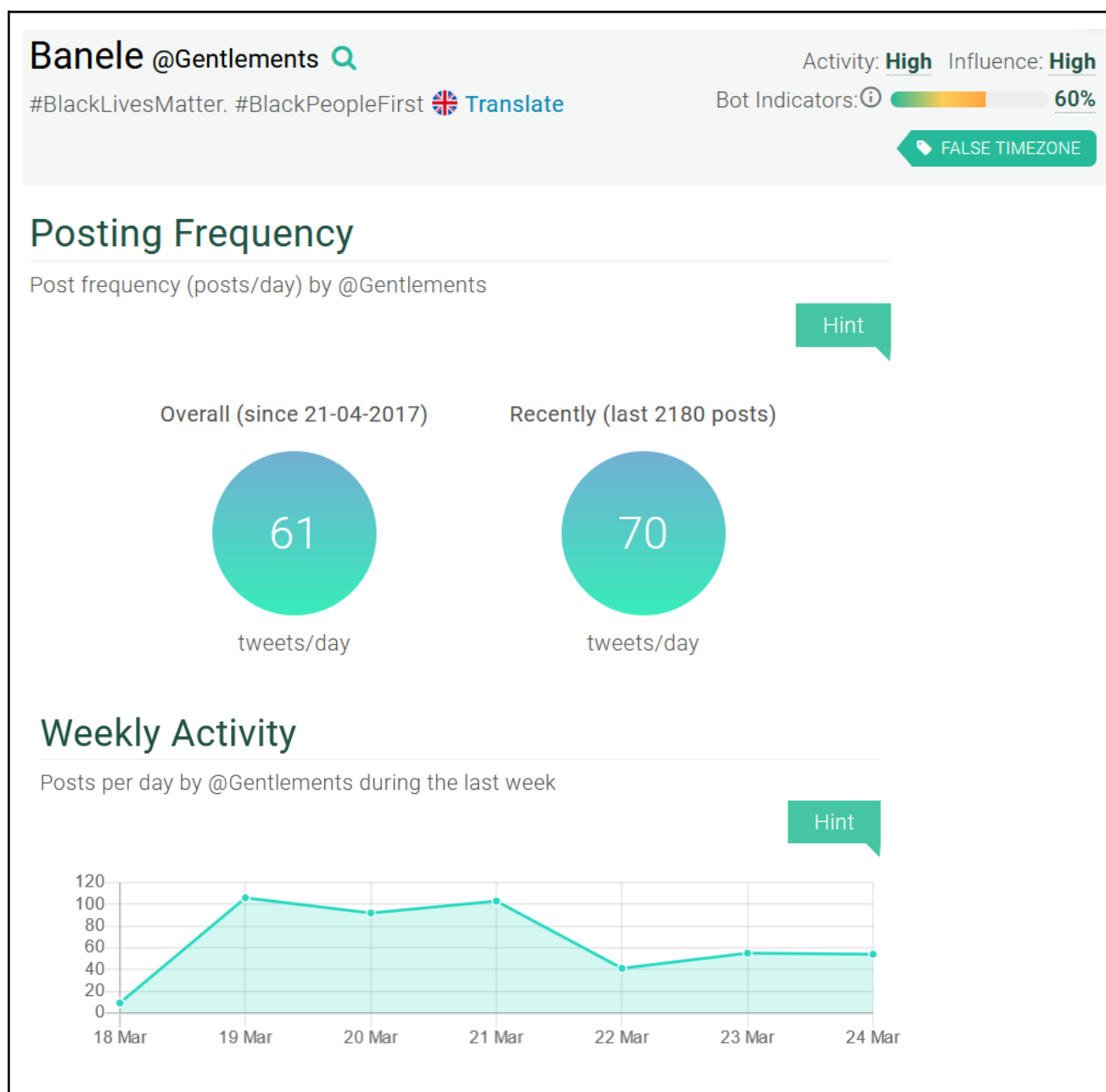
*Figure 36: Truthnest analysis of @Gentlements*

Accounts posting content that promotes violence

In the way that EFF messaged during the lead up to the National Shutdown, its leadership appears to have preemptively threatened anyone who opposed the protest. This verbally escalates the situation and creates panic and confusion amongst that part of the citizenry who rely on social media spaces for understanding current events and who are unable to analyse the entire conversation, because of sheer volumes. Post examples are shown in Figure 37 below.

*Figure 37: Examples of EFF members putting the National Shutdown across in violent language*

The Duduzile Zuma Sambudla account was tweeting actively about the National Shutdown in the lead up to it and during the protest. The "We See You!!" tagline displayed is seen in the profile picture of this account and in tweets. Twitter account user, @kimheller3 was also vocal on her timeline. Examples of these tweets are shown in Figure 38 below.
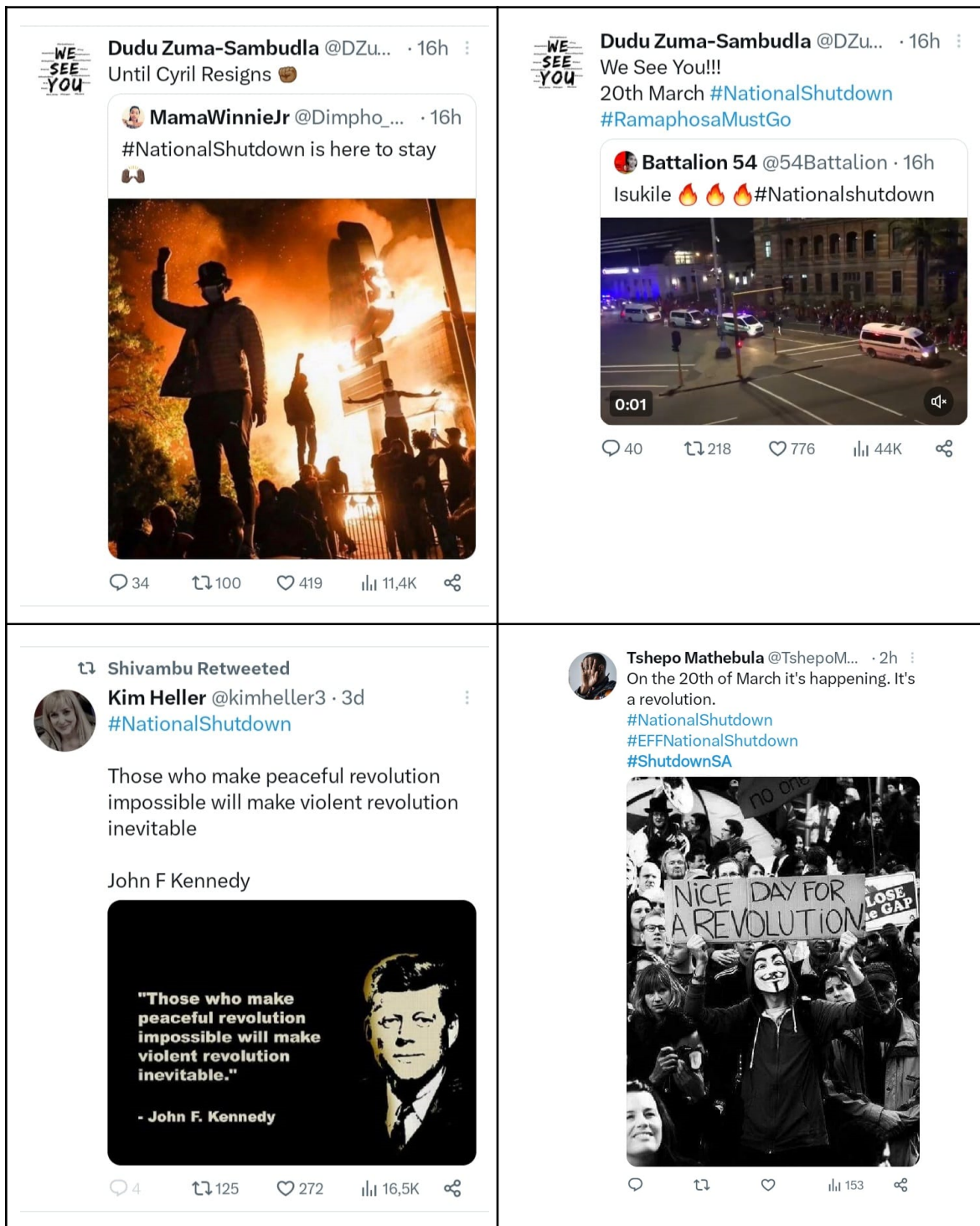
*Figure 38: Example tweets by non-EFF supporters of the National Shutdown*

## Accounts undermining the freedom of the press

In the course of our analysis, CABC found numerous tweets that disparage the role of the media in South Africa (see Figure 39). A trend that CABC has observed across a range of its reports is that there are a range

of accounts that engage in repeated attacks on journalists and the media. Over time this is contributing to a narrative that challenges the legitimacy of the media by undermining its credibility as a trusted source of news.



*Figure 39: Tweets that are critical of the media's reporting*

## Conclusion

As we head toward the 2024 elections, it appears that attacks directed at the ethics and integrity of current president Cyril Ramaphosa are going to feature largely in opposition party campaigns to sway the electorate. A clear tactic is claiming that the President, a black South African himself, doesn't care about the lives of other black South Africans and that he is an oppressor of black lives. This pits the people against a common enemy creating the "us vs them" narrative that lies at the heart of populism. It is easier to control fear and trust where people are presented with a single common enemy rather than looking at the complex nature of state capture, failing infrastructure and corrupt practices at all levels of the government that have been brought to light since the end of Zuma's term in office.

Another key aspect to campaigning appears to be the strategic choice of times and days to claim a victory that could appear to the public as though the party making the claims are doing a far better job than we see in reality. Veiled threats of violence and intimidation toward a public that is already in fear from historical events is another aspect to watch out for as we get closer to the elections.

Well-known Twitter accounts that have been tracked by the CABC during times of unrest are found time after time to have a voice in incendiary conversations that are taking place online. Blocking these accounts doesn't prevent the machinery that operates them from continuing in their planned tactics. This means that the social media landscape is one in which a new account, just as pernicious, could be created and pick up where the blocked account left off. This is why greater advocacy around the tactics employed by bad actors must continue and a clear reason for policy makers to address some of the flaws in the social media business model, especially in relation to its capability of news sharing.

**Appendix A**

Categories for investigation in broad Twitter conversation:

March National Shutdown Category:

("National Shutdown" OR #nationalshutdown OR nationalshutdown OR #nationalshutdown OR #EFFNationalShutdown OR #EFFPresser OR #20March OR #20march2023 OR #EFF) NOT ("Peter Obi" OR Kenya OR Nigeria)

OR (("planned shutdown" OR "Close down everything" OR "No retreat No surrender" OR "business as usual" OR "streets are calling" OR "20 March" OR "enough is enough" OR "close shops" OR #Notbusinessasusual) NEAR/20 EFF)

Anti-EFF category:

"Voetsek EFF" OR #voetsekeff OR "Voetsak EFF" OR #voetsakeff OR #Nonationalshutdown OR #Nationalflop OR ((#Flop OR flop OR fail) NEAR/20 (EFF OR "Economic Freedom Fighters" OR malema))

Civil Unrest Tag:

Loot OR Riot OR "agent provocateur" OR "agents provocateur" OR "July 2021" OR tyre OR burning OR vandal* OR "damage to property" OR "property damage" OR disperse OR "rubber bullets" OR loudspeaker OR "loud speaker" OR phoenix OR unrest

Ramaphosa Tag:

#Ramaphosamustgo OR #CyrilMustGo OR "Ramaphosa must go" OR "Ramaposa must go" OR "Cyril must go" OR Ramaphosa OR "Cyril Ramaphosa" OR #Ramaphosamustfall OR "Ramaphosa must go" OR Matamela OR cupcake OR Ramaposer OR Ramasofa OR "Phala Phala" OR phalaphala OR #phalaphala OR Marikana OR Marikane OR CR17bankstatements OR #CR17bankstatements

Service Delivery Tag:

water OR electricity OR "access to water" OR "Access to electricity" OR unemployment OR jobs OR crime OR security

Zuma Tag
Zuma OR #WenzenuZuma OR #Wenzen OR #WenzeniUZuma OR duduzane OR duduzile OR JZ OR #zumamustfall OR Nxamalala

## Loadshedding Tag:

```
Loadshed OR "Load shed" OR "Load Shedding" OR "Stage 6" OR "Stage 8" OR "Stage 16" OR
blackout OR "Black out"
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