Online conversations about corruption in South Africa

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Findings Summary

- South Africa's online corruption conversation can be divided into two broad camps i.e. the RET network who do not acknowledge state capture and are ardent Zuma supporters and those who recognise the detrimental effects of state capture on the country's ability to progress who typically support President Ramaphosa. (see Sections 3, 5 and 6.2.3)

- This research has identified the possibility of narrative manipulation within the country's online corruption conversation. The manipulation appears to be politically charged and centres around the different factions (RET and Ramaphosa factions specifically) within the ANC. (see Sections 6.1 and 6.2.3)

- While the instances of reported corruption are from more populous provinces like Gauteng and KZN, our data indicates that people appear to be mentioning less populous provinces (Limpopo and Free State) more frequently in the conversation. This indicates that what people choose to focus on when speaking about provincial-level corruption (on Twitter) may not be dependent on the size or volume of the cases that are reported in each of the provinces. (see Section 6.2.2)

- In Gauteng, the most prevalent conversation was about service delivery and high crime rates in Diepsloot where residents accuse the police of being corrupt (petty corruption) whilst in Limpopo the conversation centres around the EFF and their VBS bank scandal (grand corruption). (see Sections 6.2.2.1 and 6.2.2.2)

- The public must be aware of accounts that claim to be journalists because they may be posting content that is less neutral and more politically driven than verifiable journalists who are reporting for more credible news houses that can be held accountable for the content they post. Not all accounts claiming to be journalists are reporting in an impartial way and with journalistic integrity. (see Section 6.2.5)

- The case studies presented in this report display the reaches of corruption at a national level and also the associated risks for individuals involved. It also highlights the importance of factual information being presented by journalists and the media at large. The role of recognised media and civil society organisations in ensuring that mis- and disinformation within the corruption conversation is not being

shared is fundamental to countering South Africa's current corruption crisis by keeping the citizenry accurately informed. (see Appendix A)

- The online conversations about corruption in non-English languages were less retweet-driven compared to the overall conversation. This suggests that coordinated campaigns are more likely to be found in English. Individuals expressing their own ideas and those who are not involved in driving manipulated narratives appear to post in their mother tongue. (see Section 6.2.3)

1. Introduction

The Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC) is a non-profit organisation in South Africa. The CABC works to understand online conversations that take place about social and political division, public health and safety, and sustainability locally and abroad. At present, one of the biggest threats to South Africa's democracy is corruption[1]. This ranges from small-scale instances of corruption in everyday life, like paying "cool drink" (i.e., beverage) money to police officials, all the way to coordinated grand-scale corruption - i.e. by political and business elites, as well as state officials and organised crime - that abuse state funds and subvert public procurement led tender processes for personal gain.

This research was commissioned by the EU-funded *Enhancing Accountability Programme*'s Technical Assistance Facility (TAF), with the intention of providing a foundational study about how South Africans are engaging with and discussing corruption online. This report provides an analysis of trends and themes within online conversations that are both prominent and relevant to the purpose of this project. It is intended to help government and civil society organisations to combat corruption. Mis- and disinformation in this landscape are also important to identify and understand, in order to better inform citizens about devious intentions and tactics that are perpetuated or promoted in social media environments. Identifying and reporting on such narratives is of importance in the run-up to the 2024 national government elections, because of the potential that online media has shown - historically in the global north and south - to disrupt an election process that is both free and fair.

The main objective of this research was to provide a baseline understanding of the broad social media conversations around corruption and anti-corruption in South Africa. Other objectives included identifying key themes (or focus areas) within the conversation that can be further studied, identifying key authors within the conversation along with their sentiments, and getting a better understanding of the behavioural drivers within the conversation. This report identifies the various tactics at play within the conversation between the

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[1] https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2018-global-analysis

associated key authors. The data analysed for this report was posted on social media between 1 May 2023 - 30 June 2023. This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the CABC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

2. Social Media Context

According to a 2023 report by Simon Kemp, there are 43 million internet users in South Africa, suggesting an internet penetration rate of 72% of the entire population[2]. *StatSA's 2021 Household Survey*, found a similar rate, reporting that 77.7% of South African households have at least one member who had access to or used the internet at home, work, place of study, internet cafés, or public hotspots[3]. Provincially, the *StatsSA* survey found that access to the internet using all available means was highest in the Western Cape (89,1%) and Gauteng (86,7%), and lowest in Limpopo (63,7%) and the Eastern Cape (64,7%).

According to the same report by Simon Kemp, the number of social media users in the country stands at 26 million, suggesting that the majority (60%) of internet users described above are also users of social media. South African users spend an average of 3.2 hours a day on social media, which is above the global average of 2.4 hours a day and is indicative of a more frequent usage of social media platforms by South Africans in general, perhaps even suggesting a reliance on these sources for information, entertainment and other pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits they may bring[4].

According to *World Wide Worx's Social Media Landscape 2023* report, South Africa's social media use is dominated by Facebook (used by 57% of individual internet users aged over 15 years) whilst TikTok (31%) occupies the second spot of most used social media platform[5]. Instagram (28%), Twitter (23%) and LinkedIn (15%) round up the top five social media platforms in the country. The same report explains that there is gender parity amongst South African social media users across platforms and age groups.

Social media has brought many important issues to light and opens opportunities for these topics to be evaluated and addressed at scale[6]. With this in mind, social media activity often serves as an early warning of what conversations and narratives may penetrate the broader societal ecosystem and become normative[7]. One particular platform, Twitter, has outsized influence in this regard when compared to other social media platforms because most South African politicians (and their political parties) have Twitter accounts and all media houses make extensive use of the platform. Conversations on Twitter can move rapidly to traditional media and to other social media platforms. The majority of Twitter users in South Africa are between the ages of 25 and 44 (51% of total Twitter users in the country). South Africans between the ages of 30 - 49 years represent close to half (48%) of registered voters[8]. With access to such large parts of the electorate over

[2] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-south-africa
[3] https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15482
[4] Fake news and COVID-19: modelling the predictors of fake news sharing (Apuke and Omar, 2020)
[5] https://mailchi.mp/ornicogroup/social-media-landscape-report-2023
[6] Fostering Dialogic Engagement: Toward an Architecture of Social Media for Social Change. (Kent &Taylor, 2021)
[7] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-00533-8
[8] https://www.elections.org.za/pw/StatsData/Voter-Registration-Statistics

Twitter, it is thus important to deeply understand topics of social concern, like corruption, because of the ability to use campaigns that have the potential to quickly reach a large part of the population.

3. Corruption Context

To position and help in the reading of this report, it is important to point out that corruption is defined here in line with the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act[9]. 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).

The corruption and anti-corruption social media conversation in South Africa has involved two clear sides since 2020. On one side, the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) camp, who are staunch Jacob Zuma supporters and who do not recognise state capture at all. On the other side, there is the President Cyril Ramaphosa/state capture camp, who recognise the detrimental effects of large-scale corruption and are actively trying to hold those responsible for state capture to account. These two camps have been dominating the online corruption conversation with specific hashtags such as #CR17BankStatements and #PhalaPhalaFarmGate (used by the group that continues to be labeled the RET camp, to discredit President Ramaphosa and implicate him in corrupt activities). Interestingly, CABC researchers have noticed that whenever progress is made on the findings of the Zondo Commission, the aforementioned hashtags become popular again and begin to trend on Twitter. The online state capture conversation is therefore synonymous with these hashtags. This will be covered in greater detail as such findings are reported further below in this document.

Corruption, in all of its forms, not only threatens the financial and social development of South Africa but also erodes the constitutional values upon which its democracy has been built. Corruption in South Africa has negatively impacted the South African government's ability to build homes, provide quality education and healthcare, create jobs, deliver services, and implement infrastructure development. These factors affect the social, mental, and financial well-being of all citizens, but impact low-income households more directly. Corruption is therefore not only a violation of citizens' constitutional rights but also a violation of their basic human rights[10]. Where the elected government has failed to deliver on basic human needs like water and electricity, civil society organisations have had to step up to the challenge of fighting corruption. Intimidation, suspensions, exile and death are realities for whistleblowers. The recent assassination of Babita Deokaran is fresh in memory, reminding South Africans of the lengths that bad actors are willing to go to silence those who point out wrongdoing in government departments and municipalities. South Africa's civil society organisations and free press have the opportunity to better inform the masses of the country about all forms of corruption currently taking place. Raising awareness of the increasingly detrimental effects of corruption on society is therefore important. To create this awareness and ensure that the online conversation about corruption is best

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[9] The Act can be found here: https://www.gov.za/documents/prevention-and-combating-corrupt-activities-act-0
[10] https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC-ab4ffe849

understood, the CABC uses a methodology that is constantly being refined to ensure that quality insights are returned.

4. Research Methodology for Data Collection and Analysis

The research methodology used by the CABC's team of researchers is summarised in Figure 1. Stieglitz and colleagues[11] identified four distinct phases in social media data analysis: (1) discovery, (2) collection, (3) preparation, and (4) analysis. Below, we describe how these phases guided our research process.

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the CABC's step-by-step research process.

In phase one, we familiarise ourselves with the topic by turning to news media, peer-reviewed literature, and consultation with subject-matter experts in the particular field of research. For example, Camaren Peter, Executive Director of the CABC, who co-authored Mark Swilling's book "*Shadow State: The Politics of State Capture*" was consulted in phase 1 and continued to offer support throughout the remainder of the project.

Once we have an understanding of the topic, phase two gets underway. In this phase, members of the extended team who are on social media platforms daily, namely a group of dialogue facilitators, collect words, hashtags, and phrases that they believe will be useful for understanding the conversation online. We refer to these types of text collectively as "keywords".

The preparation phase, phase three, is when researchers work collaboratively to analyse the initially-proposed keywords and contextualise them, in order to create a string of keywords that will return the best possible data of importance to a topic that is both prominent and relevant.

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[11] Stieglitz, S., Mirbabaie, M., Ross, B., & Neuberger, C. (2018). Social media analytics–Challenges in topic discovery, data   collection, and data preparation. *International journal of information management*, *39*, 156-168.

Examples of keywords used in our design include terms like 'corrupt' and 'state capture' with the names of South African municipalities, provinces, and state-owned entities also featuring. Names of relevant commissions, tribunals, and inquiries were also used. 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 linguistic idea of code-switching is prominent in the daily life of various South Africans and this is reflected in the social media content[12]. It was therefore essential that the keywords were drawn from a range of South African languages, and not only from English. In collaboration with colleagues from *Corruption Watch* and the *Enhancing Accountability Technical Assistance Facility*, a list of 81 keywords in official non-English South African languages, including colloquial terms was developed, and formed part of the list of 1 700 keywords used for this project. Of the 11 languages, the only ones that are not reflected in the keywords are Xitsonga and Tshivenda as they are less common on South African social media[13]. The 81 non-English keywords were segmented into 3 categories reflecting their origin in specific 'language families', namely, Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, and West-Germanic. Some were categorised as 'colloquial'.

The dual nature of many of the selected keywords - which may have one meaning in the language of origin, but another meaning when used in everyday slang - resulted in difficulties in identifying corruption-centred conversations in the African language families on Twitter and online news sources. A strong example of this is *ukunyoba,* which means 'to bribe' in isiXhosa, but is also colloquially used in reference to sexual activity.

After confirming the additional set of keywords and adding them to the analytics tool, all the keywords were 'cleaned', to eliminate as much content as possible that was not relevant for the purpose of this project. The complete data set for this study consisted of over 372 000 mentions of the keywords, within the 2-month reporting period (May and June 2023).

Running a rigorous quality-controlled process on the keywords is an iterative process that allows us to build taxonomies that dissect and arrange the data so that we can move to phase four, analysis.

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[12] https://www.ru.ac.za/perspective/latestnews/southafricanteachersswitchlanguagesinclasswhypolicyshouldfollow.html';
Code-switching as a form of communication: Insights from a South African public hearing discussion (DR Mabule, 2019)
[13] Malatji & Lesame, 2019

The data analysed for this study

Approximately 89% of mentions/posts within the dataset that will be unpacked in this report were from Twitter (see Figure 2). The dominance of Twitter as the primary source in our analysis relates to the individual extent to which social media platforms allow access to their data through an Application Programming Interface (API). An API may be thought of as a gate: the wider the gate is open, the more information can pass through for analysis.
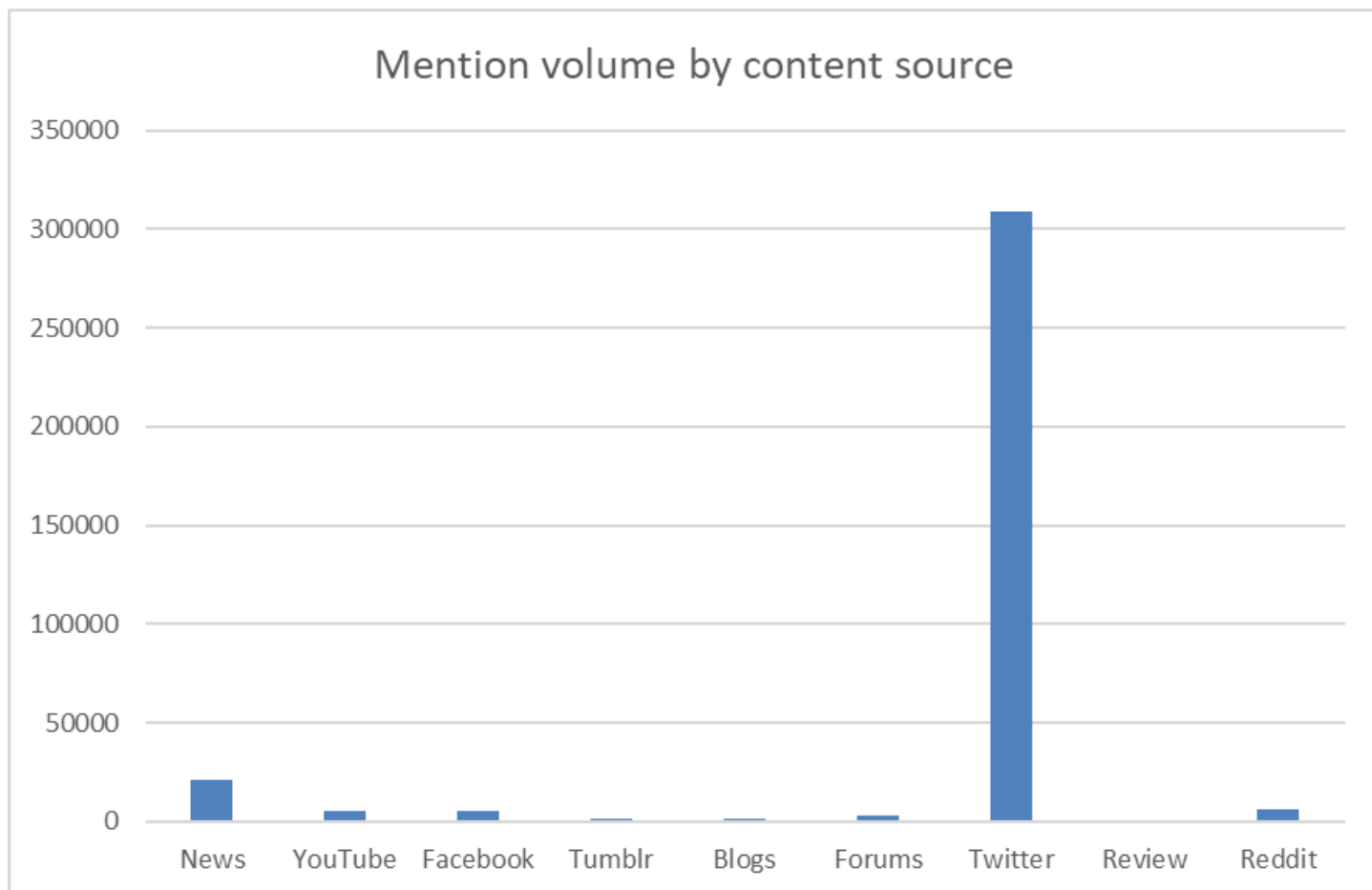

Figure 2: Mention volume by social media platform.

While Twitter's policy allows for access to large amounts of data, it is important to note that the insights drawn from Twitter do not represent the views of the entirety of South African society. The insights are drawn from a sample of accounts that use the platform, which has the potential to spill over into the real life of the entire citizenry through fearmongering, information overload, and other tactics like race-baiting[14]. More recently, the CABC analysed the "national shutdown" campaign that was run by a political party with a strong presence on Twitter, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). In the analysis, it was discovered that the language used for

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[14] CABC: The Dirty Dozen & Amplification of Incendiary Content During the July Unrest

this campaign created a false hype around what was essentially a planned and well-advertised protest that was more opportunistic in nature, rather than authentic[15]. The spreading of the posters and media content that took place online in this instance, spilled over from the online world, leading to some businesses closing their shops out of fear from the claims that were made and shared through various media.

The second-largest contributors of relevant mentions were from news sources, shown by category in Figure 3 (below). While the news media houses shown in this figure do not account for all mentions classified as *news*, it provides insight into which of the major South African media houses contributed most to coverage of instances of corruption, as it was identified for this study. The opportunity for Twitter users to see and engage with this content from these news media houses is important to keep in mind because of the presence that authentic news media houses, and those that may forego ethical reporting practices, have which can be retweeted or shared by other influential accounts[16]. Based on Figure 3 below, IOL appears to have reported the most on corruption as analysed by the keywords that were used to isolate this conversation (35%), followed by News24 (17%) and TimesLive (13%) with the remainder of selected media sources (35%) contributing less than 10% each.
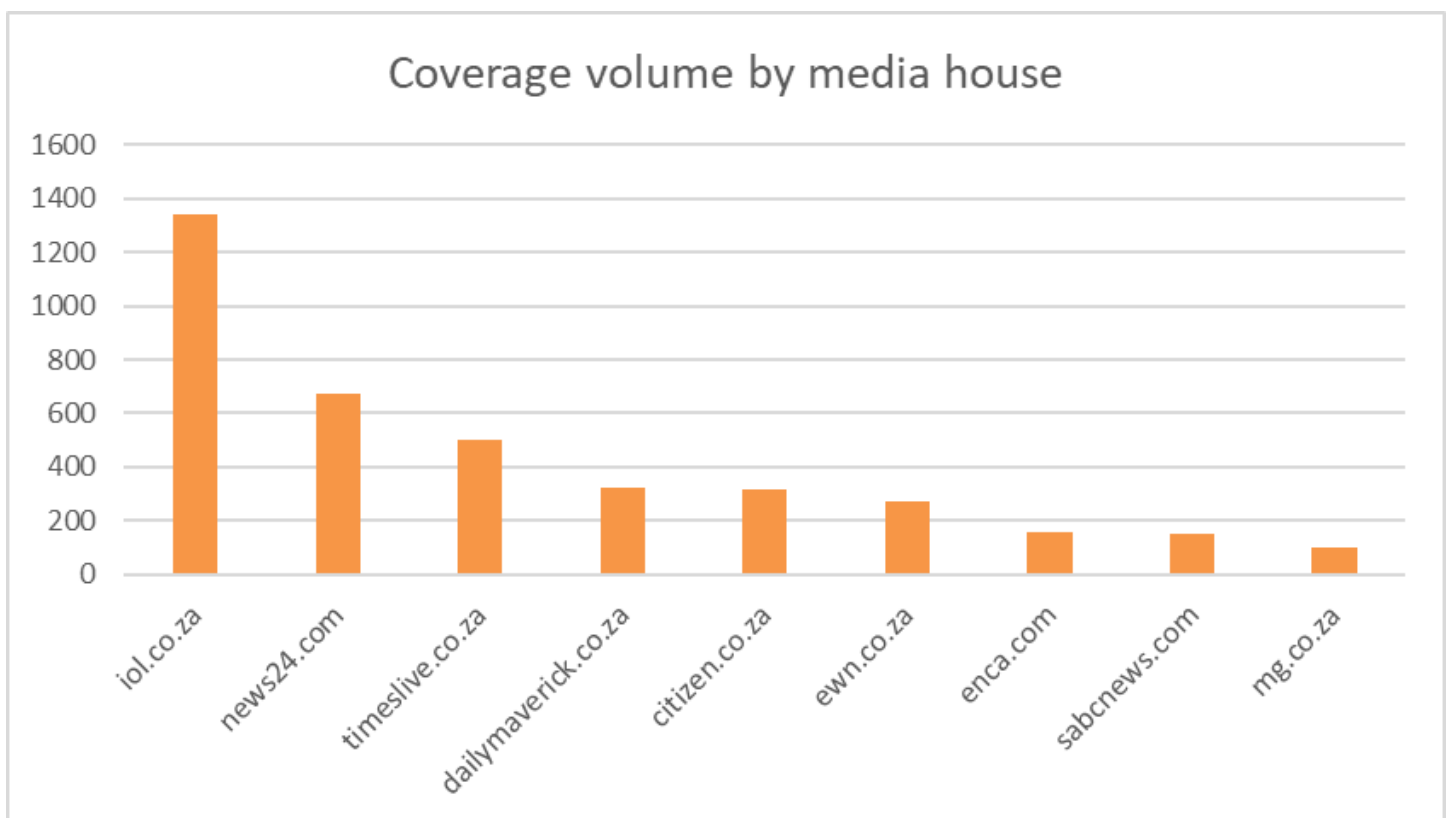

Figure 3: Volume of mentions by major news houses covering corruption-related news stories (N = 3837).

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[15] CABC: National Shutdown Deep Dive Report
[16] Who says what to whom on Twitter (Wu et al., 2011)

The use of social media, it has been suggested, may increase exposure to news media. This relationship may be especially explicit on Twitter, which focuses on information dissemination and consumption[17]. In conducting the research for this study, news articles were also collected across the major media houses if they related to the focus areas as reviewing these allowed the team to understand and assess disparities between the general news conversation and what was being spoken about on social media.

4.1. Broad limitations of the social listening tools

Social media listening tools use keywords to ingest and then categorise data. Although artificial intelligence capabilities are starting to be used in the generation of keywords, most of these features are still in a *beta* testing space[18]. For now, keyword data collection remains primarily in the hands of the team that collects the data and decides on the keywords to use and how to group them. The dataset from which the findings/metrics below were drawn, is based on a portion of the online public conversation, and does not represent the thoughts and opinions of the entire South African population.

The social media listening tool that researchers at the CABC use has wide access to Twitter and hence, Twitter content is the primary data that is analysed in this study. By comparison, conversations on Facebook can only be accessed by the social media listening tool when those conversations are posted on 'public' Facebook pages or accounts.

This created a limitation for the study, as it means that while more South African internet users are using Facebook and TikTok, the main datasets analysed for this study are drawn from Twitter. The keyword collection and refinement process creates room for data bias, based on the *a priori* beliefs of researchers and members of the CABC Dialogue Facilitation team who collect these words. To safeguard against this, different teams pick the keywords, 2 to 3 people who didn't choose the keywords are involved in the prominence, relevance, and quality check of keywords, and in keyword categorisation. A senior member of the research team is always involved in the phases of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Another limitation of the social media listening tool is the software's inability to consistently distinguish the gender of names that are not English, making effective automated identification of gender difficult. Further limitations of various components and metrics in analysing the data are explained in the relevant sections below. Location identification for example on Twitter relies on self-disclosure by the person creating the Twitter

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[17] Are people incidentally exposed to news on social media? A comparative analysis (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018)
[18] Beta testing is an opportunity for real users to use a product in a production environment to uncover any bugs or issues before a general release - https://www.productplan.com/glossary/beta-test/

account. Hence, even if a person is not physically in Gauteng yet this is listed as the display on their account, mentions by these accounts will appear within mentions from that region.

5. Focus Areas

Five focus areas became apparent from a broad review of the dataset that was returned based on the initial grouping of keywords. These were categorised as:

1. Whistleblowers - people who have revealed information about a certain kind of corruption.
2. Business - private sector corruption.
3. Immigration - immigration-related corruption, particularly concerning the Department of Home Affairs and border control.
4. Grand Corruption - state capture, national scale corruption involving political parties and their leaders.
5. Service Delivery and Local Government Corruption - small-scale corruption e.g. the bribing of traffic officers to get a driver's license or not pay a fine.

Figure 4 shows a breakdown of mentions by the 5 focus areas. The "uncategorised" group makes up 25% of the conversation. This means that a quarter of the mentions returned didn't fit into one of the focus areas.
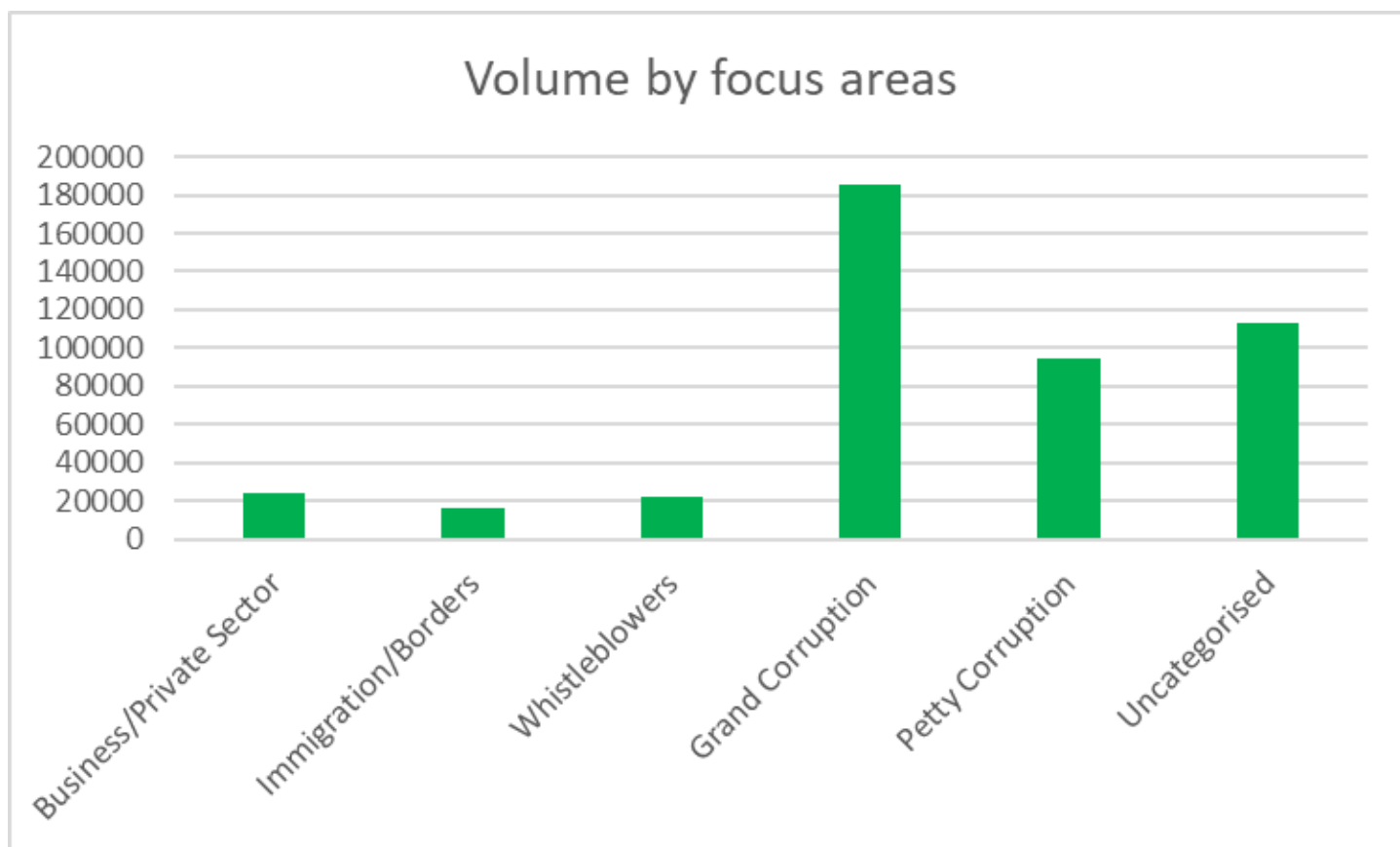

Figure 4: Breakdown of focus areas with the total that they are made up of showing in the top left corner.

Assessing posts that are labeled as uncategorised we found examples that were not pertinent to the purpose of this project. Examples of such posts can be seen here and here. Some examples that were relevant and should have been included in one of the focus areas were also found (see example here). The keyword-based categorisation is likely to have contributed to the non-categorisation of such posts and with time, they could be manually assigned to the appropriate category.

The set of social media posts returned by the other 75% of mentions was analysed to meet our criteria of prominence and relevance. Based on word cloud and topic assessments via the social media listening tool, it was possible to confidently place 3 quarters of the conversation into one of the five focus areas. It does however also highlight a limitation with the keyword-based nature of analytics tools, which has already been explained above.

5.1 A brief analysis and explanation of the focus areas

5.1.1 Whistleblowers

The assassination of Babita Deokaran, a whistleblower within the Gauteng Department of Health in 2021[19], has remained a constant in unearthing the difficulties facing those who stand up for justice and report wrongdoing. Deokaran's story has been covered extensively by News24 over the past few years, with a documentary[20] having been released and an ongoing special investigation[21] by News24's journalists remaining underway. This coverage has continued to amplify and conscientise South Africans to the plight of whistleblowers within the country.

During the study period in May and June 2023, articles began to identify and report on the experiences of whistleblowers across various governance bodies. In the city of Johannesburg, Sarika Laraj-Naidoo, who identified irregular expenditure to the tune of more than 8 billion Rand, has been suspended[22]. Martha Ngoye, a whistleblower working at the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), accused a member of the judiciary of involvement in the cover-up of corrupt acts[23] and Ntlantla Sebele, a whistleblower from the Department of Basic Education, spoke up about being tailed and visited at his home[24].

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[19] Deokaran a Freedom Fighter
[20] Documentary: Why Babita Deokaran was Murdered
[21] News24 Special Investigation - Silenced: Babita Deokaran
[22] COJ Dismisses Whistleblower
[23] PRASA Whistleblower Accuses Judge Makhubele
[24] School Jobs for Cash Ignored

5.1.2 Grand Corruption

For the purpose of this report, grand corruption is defined as the abuse of power by corrupt elites in business and politics, as well as state officials and organised crime. It is a systematic plan of action involving high-level public officials that causes serious harm, for example, the abuse of state funds or human rights violations[25].

Continued difficulties at the State Owned Enterprise (SOE), Eskom, have remained dominant in reporting on the aftermath of State Capture and mismanagement of public enterprises. From early March to late June 2023, articles about corruption at the power utility, and a focus on Andre De Ruyter's allegations continued to circulate. Whether it relates to the ruling party's objection to De Ruyter's claims[26], the summoning of De Ruyter to parliament[27], or the continued uncovering of criminal operations[28], Eskom keeps occupying the spotlight. Furthermore, unverified corruption allegations against individuals in Eskom's senior management have been spread on Twitter. We investigate these claims in a case study (Appendix A) further in the report.[29]

The lack of successful prosecution of those identified in the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture has seen Chief Justice Raymond Zondo criticise Parliament, indicating perhaps a new dispensation in the continued fight against corruption within government[30].

5.1.3 Petty Corruption

Bribery is a dominant theme in this focus area, with the Thabo Bester story for example shining a light on endemic corruption within the country's systems[31]. Toward the end of June, posts about body cameras on members of the JMPD began to trend along with the Thabo Bester saga[32].

5.1.4 Private Sector Corruption

The private sector corruption conversation in the country has been focused on Markus Jooste, the former chief executive of Steinhoff, who has been implicated in the largest fraud case in the history of the country[33]. The recent announcement of the German government's issue of a warrant of arrest[34] has highlighted the continued case against the former executive.

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[25] https://www.transparency.org/en/our-priorities/grand-corruption
[26] ANC Says De Ruyter Tarnished Its Good Name
[27] De Ruyter to Meet MPs
[28] Eskom Clerk Sentenced to 24 Years, see more: Eskom Employee in Court for Fraud see more: KZN Construction Mafia and Eskom
[29] Eskom: Sabotage Implicated Executive Not Currently on Radar , see more: R500M Tender Under De Ruyter Scrutinised
[30] Parliament's Response to Chief Justice Zondo see more: News24 Editorial: Zondo was Right
[31] Bester's Escape May Unveil A Web of Corruption, see more: Guest Column: Bester - A Display of Everything Wrong With Our Justice System
[32] Thabo Bester: A Timeline, see more Escape From Mangaung: The Thabo Bester Saga
[33] How Markus Jooste Almost Got Away with R200 Billion Con
[34] It's Important to Prosecute Jooste in SA amid Gemany's Arrest Warrent, see more: Germany Issues Arrest Warrant for Jooste

5.1.5 Borders

The Al-Jazeera exposé on corruption and gold smuggling, attributed to a "Gold Mafia", from Zimbabwe to the global north received international attention during the research period[35]. The role of South Africans in the smuggling and transportation of the precious metal highlighted the need for an internal investigation into the practice[36]. Subsequently, the role of the private sector in South Africa came to the fore, and two staff members were suspended at ABSA[37] bank. The international implications of the criminal activity undertaken by the "Gold Mafia", most notably concerning allegations against citizens of the United Kingdom and the use of various tax havens to launder proceeds from the smuggling of gold, has placed a global lens on issues of corruption across borders[38].

6. Findings

6.1 Broad Twitter metrics

Our corruption dataset returned 372 590 mentions during the period 1 May - 30 June 2023 (see Figure 5). The majority of these mentions were made up of retweets, which comprised 61% of total mentions volume[39]. This falls above the retweet percentage of 52% that was found in previous work done by the CABC on corruption-related conversations on South African social media[40]. Typically, conversations with high retweet percentages represent a small number of unique authors with a handful of views on a particular topic. A high retweet percentage can cast doubt on the authenticity of a conversation, as it could indicate coordination by a group of tweeters to amplify specific content.
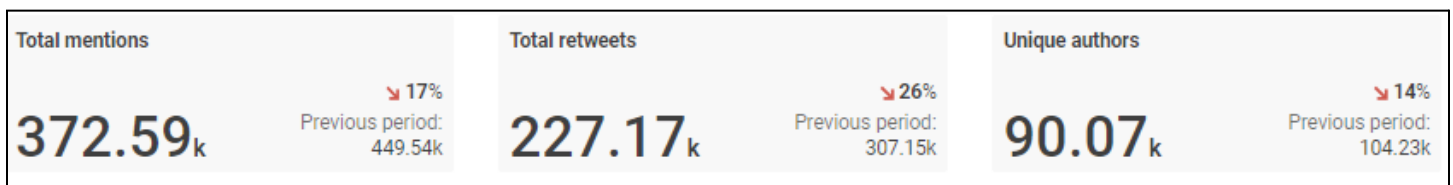
Total mentions		Total retweets		Unique authors	
372.59k	↘17% Previous period: 449.54k	227.17k	↘26% Previous period: 307.15k	90.07k	↘14% Previous period: 104.23k

Figure 5: Mention volume within the data set.

The dataset returned 90 073 unique authors. Measuring this number against the number of total mentions, each unique account produced around 4 tweets on average. While this study did not analyse data from the previous 2 months, (March and April), the social media listening tool indicates that conversation drawn from the keywords dropped by 17% during the reporting period (May and June). This may indicate that interest in

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[35] News24: Al-Jazeera Releases Documentary on Illicit Gold Trade

[36] Al Jazeera: SA to Investigate Gold Mafia

[37] ABSA Suspends Two Staff Members in Gold Leaf Tobacco Probe

[38] Al-Jazeera's Gold Mafia Expose The Tip of The Iceberg ; See More: Written Questions from Lord Oats - UK House of Lords ; See more: Corruption Watch: Can SA Pull Off a Successful Investigation

[39] A "retweet" is a platform specific measure of a repost/share for Twitter

[40] CABC Periodic Report: Corruption - January 2023

corruption-related content was higher during the preceding months, perhaps due to coverage of the Thabo Bester saga and initial court appearances, which occurred during the previous months[41].

In Figure 6, the top-trending topics between May and June 2023 show that while conversation about Eskom remained prominent throughout the reporting period, conversation about the suspended Public Protector, Advocate Busisiwe Mkhwebane, began to pick up. The phrase "corrupt ANC" also trended during the reporting period. The size of the words in Figure 6 represents its prominence as the term featured in approximately 10 186 mentions in this dataset.

Figure 6: Visualisation of topics that trended during the reporting period.

Ben Nimmo, a leading expert on researching and explaining how information "breaks out" from one medium to the next, has also created a coefficient that allows social media researchers to understand the likelihood that traffic around a keyword, phrase, or hashtag has been manipulated[42].

Using Nimmo's coefficient for traffic manipulation (CTM), we assessed the use of the phrases "Public Protector" and "corrupt ANC" over the reporting period. These coefficients can be seen in Table 1 below. Applying the findings of Nimmo's research, we see that the CTM for "Public Protector" is above the rate that was returned for the control group in Nimmo's experiment. Further research is needed to understand this mid-range result. However, the coefficient for "corrupt ANC" was well above the threshold of 30 that Nimmo used in his study to indicate "large-scale manipulation" of a phrase.

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[41] GroundUp: Thabo Bester and Nandipha Magudumana Back in South Africa
[42] Measuring Traffic Manipulation on Twitter (Ben Nimmo, 2019)

Table 1: Coefficient of Traffic Manipulation based on two trending topics.

Phrase	Coefficient
Public Protector	18.36
Corrupt ANC	41.51

Using this coefficient, it is already possible to see that parts of the conversation return a high probability of traffic manipulation based on the coefficient returned and a deeper analysis of the accounts that contributed to conversations that include phrases like "Corrupt ANC" is warranted. This type of analysis lies beyond the scope of the current report. Hence, it has not been further analysed here.

6.2 Audience Analysis

6.2.1 Twitter account location

Based on the limitations that are presented by self-disclosed locations of accounts as mentioned previously, we employed two distinct strategies to understand location within the conversation on corruption that was tracked. Our social media listening tool was able to return an account's location for just over 187 000 (50.2%) of all total mentions within this dataset. Of these mentions, almost three-quarters (71%), were created by Twitter accounts located in Gauteng (GP). The Western Cape (WC) accounted for 13% and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) for 8% of all mentions. The account location of the remaining 6 provinces contributed less than 3% each.

The 2023 edition of the South African Social Media Landscape Report (see Figure 7a), surveying individuals who had used Twitter over a 7-day period, shows a similar pattern i.e. that content is created mostly by those with account location set to Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga or the Western Cape. This group of provinces matches the latest figures on the provincial distribution of allegations to an extent of corruption reported to Corruption Watch, where Gauteng (43%), the Western Cape (9%), and KwaZulu-Natal (8%) account for the majority of reported corruption allegations[43]. Limpopo Province is a notable outlier. Based on account location only 2% of mentions in the dataset were made by accounts with Limpopo as the location. The distinction between social media usage in urban and rural areas (see Figure 7b), the low urbanisation rate of

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[43] Corruption Watch: Analysis of Corruption Trends - 2022

Limpopo[44], internal migration from Limpopo to Gauteng[45], and low rates of internet access in Limpopo[46] may explain this discrepancy.
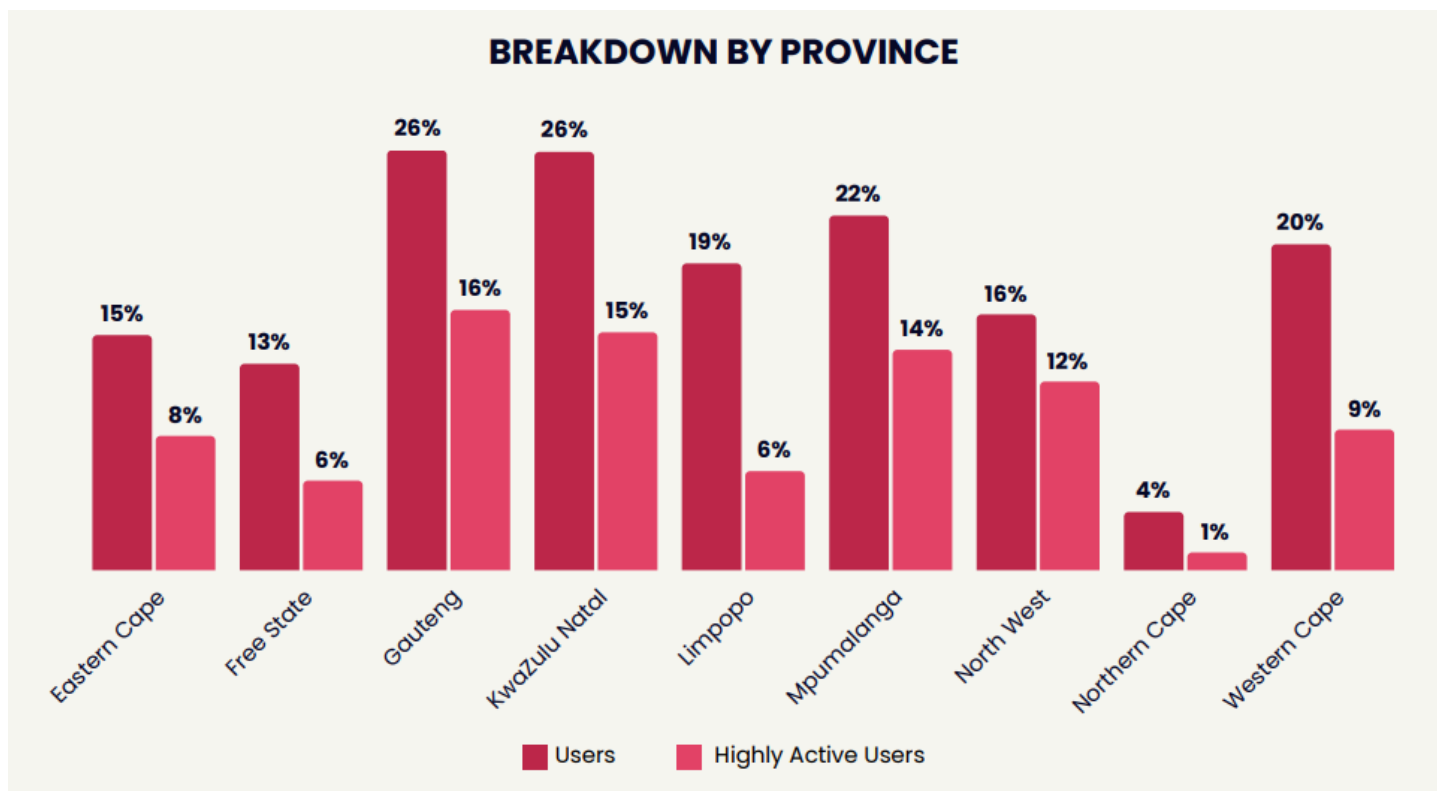

Figure 7a: Distribution of accounts per province who had used Twitter in the last two days[47].

[44] Nemukula, N. L. (2014)
[45] StatsSA: Mid-Year Population Estimates - 2022
[46] StatsSA: General Household Survey - 2020
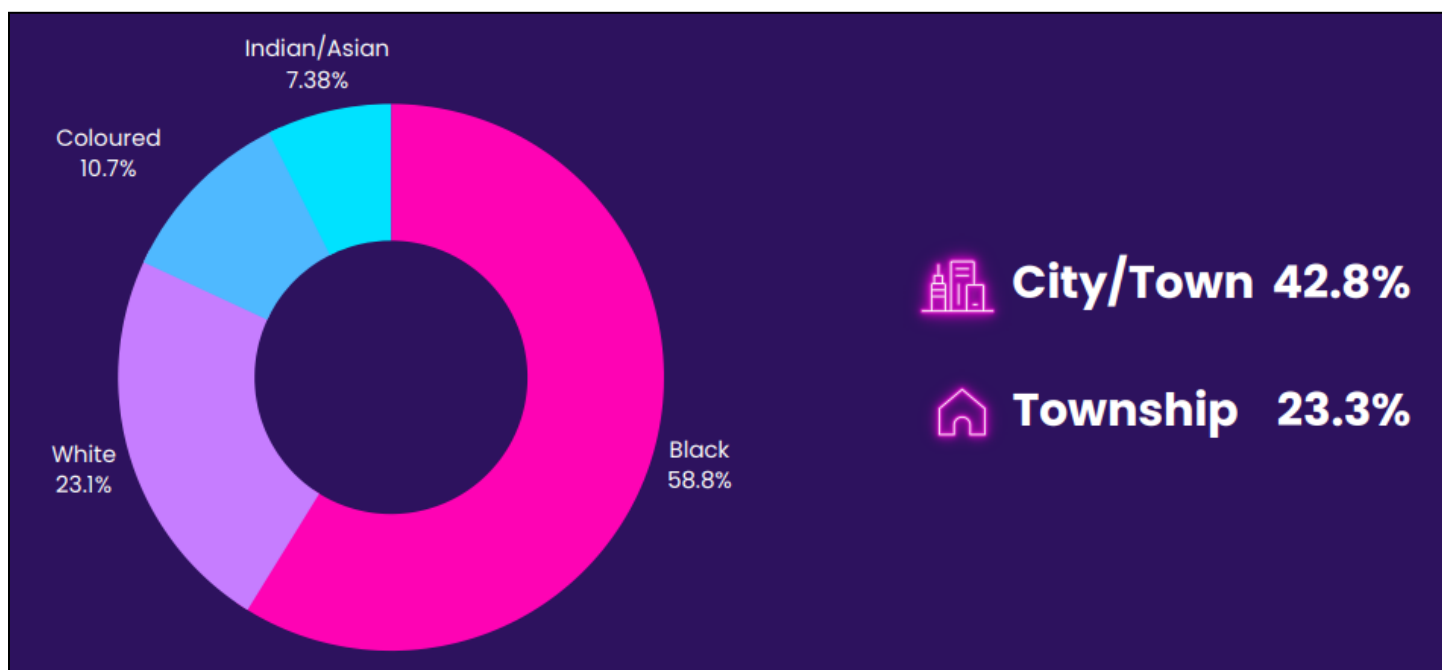[47] SA Social Media Landscape 2023

Figure 7b: Racial and Urbanised proportion of accounts who had used Twitter over a two-day period in 2022 [48].

6.2.2 Frequently Mentioned Provinces

While the Twitter account location information above explained where people in South Africa within 50% of the dataset were tweeting from, we sought a more comparative way to assess the Corruption Watch data. To do so, it was essential to understand which provinces people on Twitter mention when they speak about corruption in South Africa. A tag library with the names of the provinces was created and these tags were applied to the total mentions in the dataset.

Analysing the data in this way returned a completely different breakdown of mentions than that shown in Figure 7a. The province that was mentioned the most often in the Twitter conversation about corruption in South Africa was still Gauteng (see Figure 8). However, the percentage that these mentions contributed to the overall conversation dropped to 20%. The second and third most spoken-about provinces when referring to instances of corruption from the total dataset changed to Limpopo (19%), followed by the Free State (15%). This is a very important finding because it means that while most reports of corruption were from the most populous provinces, the conversation in our dataset indicates that socially, when conversing on Twitter about corruption, users appear to be mentioning the less populous provinces more frequently. This indicates that what people choose to focus on when speaking about provincial-level corruption (on Twitter) may not be dependent on the size or volume of the cases that are reported to Corruption Watch about corruption in each of the provinces.

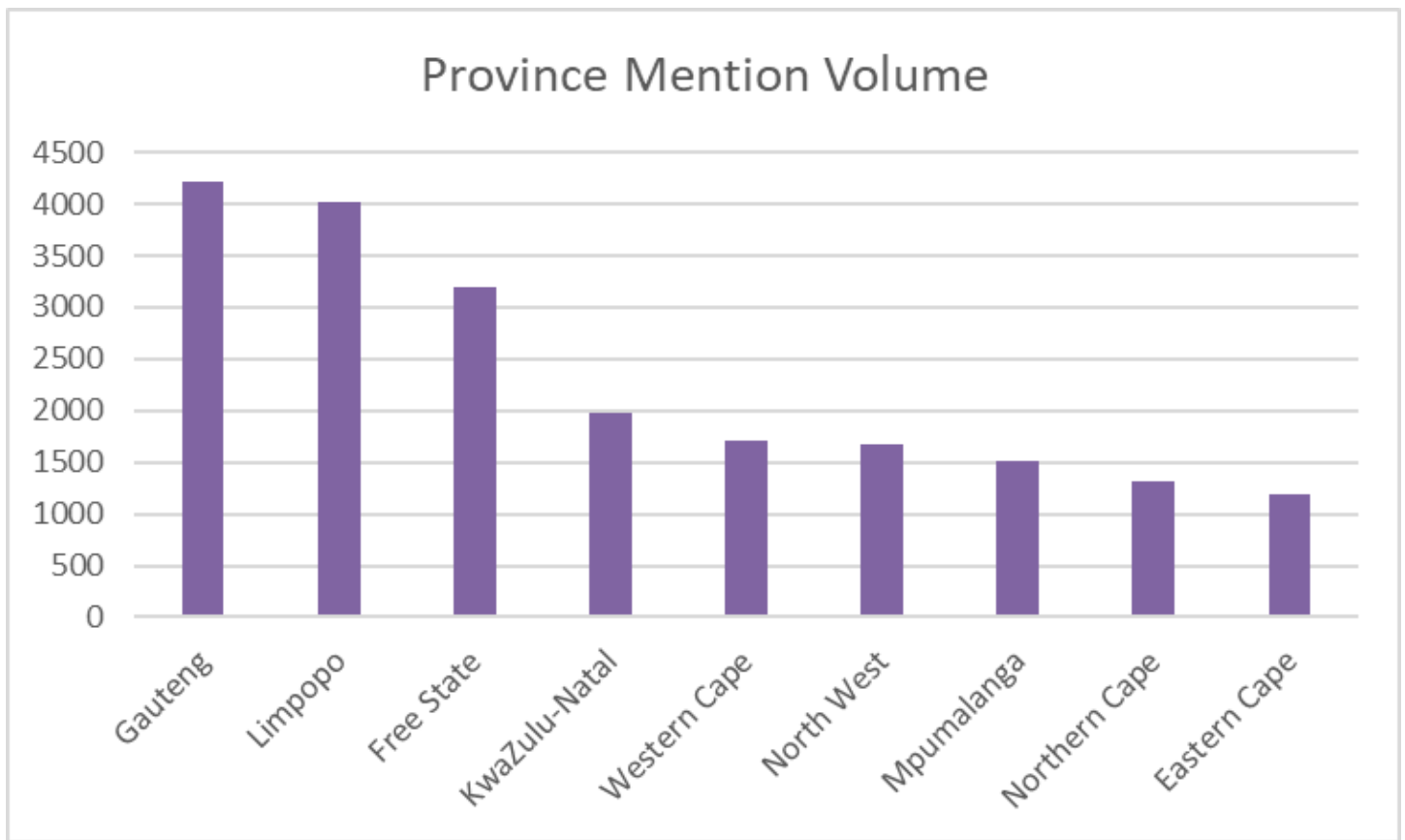[48] Ornico Social media landscape report, 2022.

Figure 8: Volume of frequently mentioned provinces.

Further analysing the content that is spoken about with regards to Gauteng, Limpopo, and the Free State, we sorted the mentions by the number of retweets they received, an indicator of content that is prominent and relevant.

6.2.2.1 Gauteng

In Gauteng, a post that was tweeted on 29 June (see Figure 9) showed the alleged arrest of a person said to be a member of the Diepsloot Community Forum.

Figure 9: Tweet showing arrest of alleged Diepsloot Community Forum member.

Looking back on Twitter as far as January 2022, we found that the word "Diepsloot" had been mentioned more than 89 000 times. The primary peak in conversation about Diepsloot took place in the week of 4 April 2022 and it involved the death of a man named Elvis Nyathi. At the time, the CABC covered how confusing narratives about community protests, Elvis Nyathi, and the infamous xenophobic and anti-immigrant organisation Operation Dudula - which targets mainly black and brown refugees and immigrants from the rest of the African continent (i.e. afrophobia) as well as from countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, proliferated on Twitter. The CABC covered the narrative confusion about Diepsloot, Elvis Nyathi, and Operation Dudula extensively in April 2022[49]. In that month, SABC news reported that one of the accusations of protesters in Diepsloot was that the police are corrupt[50].

Analysing the Diepsloot data through the lens of the five focus areas and the date range of this project, we observed that mentions categorised as "petty corruption" (see figure 10) grew in June 2023. The primary tweet in this retweet-based peak takes us back to the arrest of the Community Forum leader. This tells us that when reference is made to Diepsloot in the dataset, it corresponds with the main incident that took place between police and the community forum leader and that this type of incident is associated with ongoing problems of petty corruption in the region.

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[49]https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-04-18-posts-about-the-death-of-elvis-nyathi-stoke-the-flames-of-xenophobia/
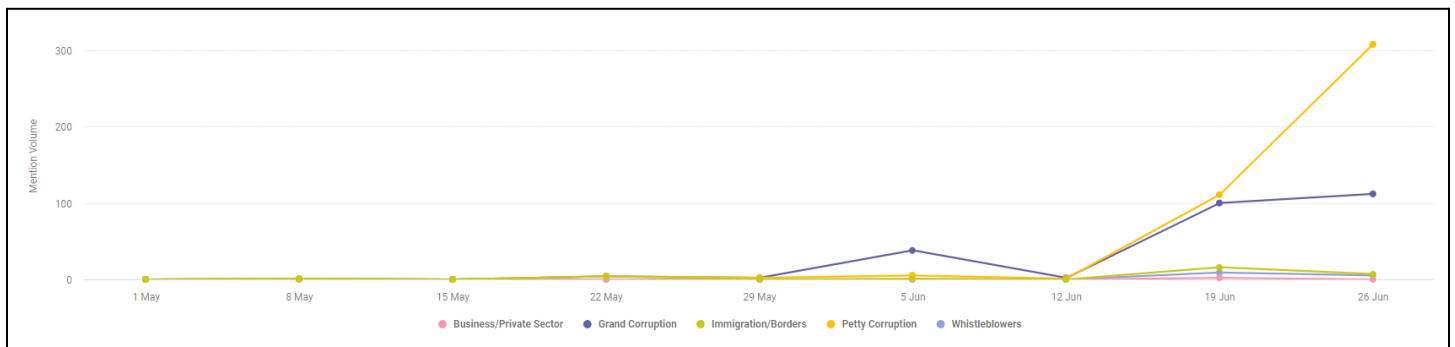[50] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0nAGiQCpOE

Figure 10: A rise in posts related to the focus area "Petty Corruption" (yellow line) is found in conversation about Diepsloot.

6.2.2.2 Limpopo

The major theme in the Limpopo conversations heralded the EFF as an active and involved party within the province, with the ANC positioned as a gatekeeper for service delivery. The EFF is a popular political alternative in the Northern provinces[51]. Within the context of corruption, the focus on the EFF related to the handing over of a refurbished community health centre in Rooibokfontein village in Mokopane. An EFF post, which relayed the handover of the new centre (see Figure 11), made direct reference to the need to fight against corruption and protect the well-being of the elderly within the country.

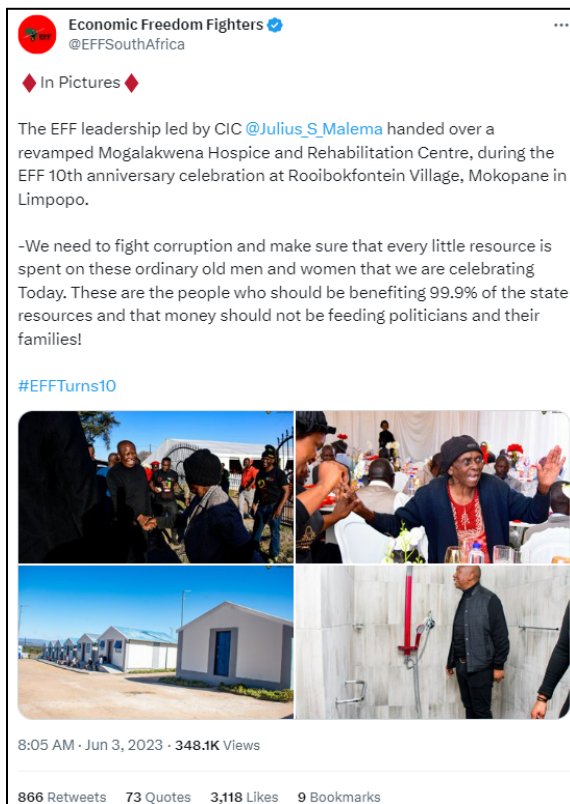[51] https://results.elections.org.za/dashboards/lge/

Figure 11: The EFF handover of a service centre in Rooibokfontein Village.

This post portrays the EFF in a positive way, positioning them as a political party that gets work done and is attuned to the plight of those that are vulnerable in society, in this case, the elderly. A counter-narrative that also featured in our dataset during the reporting period was the VBS scandal and the looting of funds intended for the elderly[52]. In Figure 12 below, we see that both before and after the post above was added to Twitter (3 June 2023), accounts posted about the VBS scandal, with one account going so far as to make the claim that "Julius Malema looted Limpopo Province". This may be in reference to Malema's disbanding of key structures in the Limpopo province[53]. However, it is a very broad and potentially defamatory comment to make given the platform on which it was said and may constitute mis- or disinformation. This post has been submitted to *Real 411* for expert analysis of the claims.

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52 https://ewn.co.za/2020/06/17/from-bank-heist-to-arrests-a-timeline-of-the-vbs-scandal
53 https://ewn.co.za/2022/01/25/malema-disbandment-of-limpopo-structures-was-due-to-low-votes-during-lge

Figure 12: Posts which make reference to the VBS scandal and the EFF.

6.2.2.3 Free State

The most retweeted posts within the Free State dataset were about Thabo Bester and the cholera outbreak.

A popular and infamous Twitter account due to the controversial content that it often posts, @AdvoBarryRoux, tweeted about Thabo Bester, claiming that not only does his attorney have rape and murder charges against him, but Bester's attorney's attorney also has tender corruption and fraud charges against him. This post has been included in Figure 13 below to show the volume of attention that it drew. It speaks to the idea that criminals are defending criminals and allows viewers an opportunity to reflect on the deep societal issues being faced when criminality and corruption are commonplace.

Also shown in Figure 13 is the second most-tweeted post in this sub-segment of the data, which was about the cholera outbreak. This post was tweeted by the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) leader, John Steenhuisen, who retweeted a post by the President in which the ANC took ownership of their shortcomings in controlling the outbreak of cholera. Steenhuisen took the opportunity to point out that it is weakened governance, because of corruption in the ANC, that landed parts of the Northern Free State in a disease outbreak. He claimed that funds meant for water provision were given instead to ANC cadres.

Figure 13: Posts with the most retweets that contained the keywords "Free State".

While the posts above showed the highest engagement among posts that contain "Free State", the word cloud in Figure 14 (below) of the 50 most frequently used keywords, phrases, locations, and organisations that included the words "Free State" identified a post about "Ace Magashule" that was posted by @MDNnewss (a page that claims in the bio to be "INTENTIONAL NEWS") as having had the most engagement. Although this post only shows 38 retweets, Ace Magashule continued to be mentioned, with words like "Free State" and 'corruption' appearing in hundreds of posts made by news sites and by individuals who tweeted about him and an asbestos tender procurement scandal.

Figure 14: Top 50 keywords based on frequency among posts containing the words "Free State".

Differences like these - between the word cloud and the retweeted content - provide the understanding that popular posts may not necessarily get the highest coverage. This is also clear when one looks at the word cloud and immediately sees that by frequency, more people on the platform were speaking about Magashule, while the viral nature of other tweets could be connected to individuals with large groups of followers who posted something about relevant topics within the reporting period that was chosen. If we adjust the date range of a sample set of a more general Twitter conversation that takes place in South Africa, we see tweets about Ace Magashule, his suspension, and the asbestos scandal that have hundreds of retweets. This is shown in Figure 15 below. A limitation of the social media listening tool is that when we use a broad Twitter search that is not keyword-based, the rate of samples that it randomly returns may mean that posts with the highest number of retweets are not returned in the dataset.
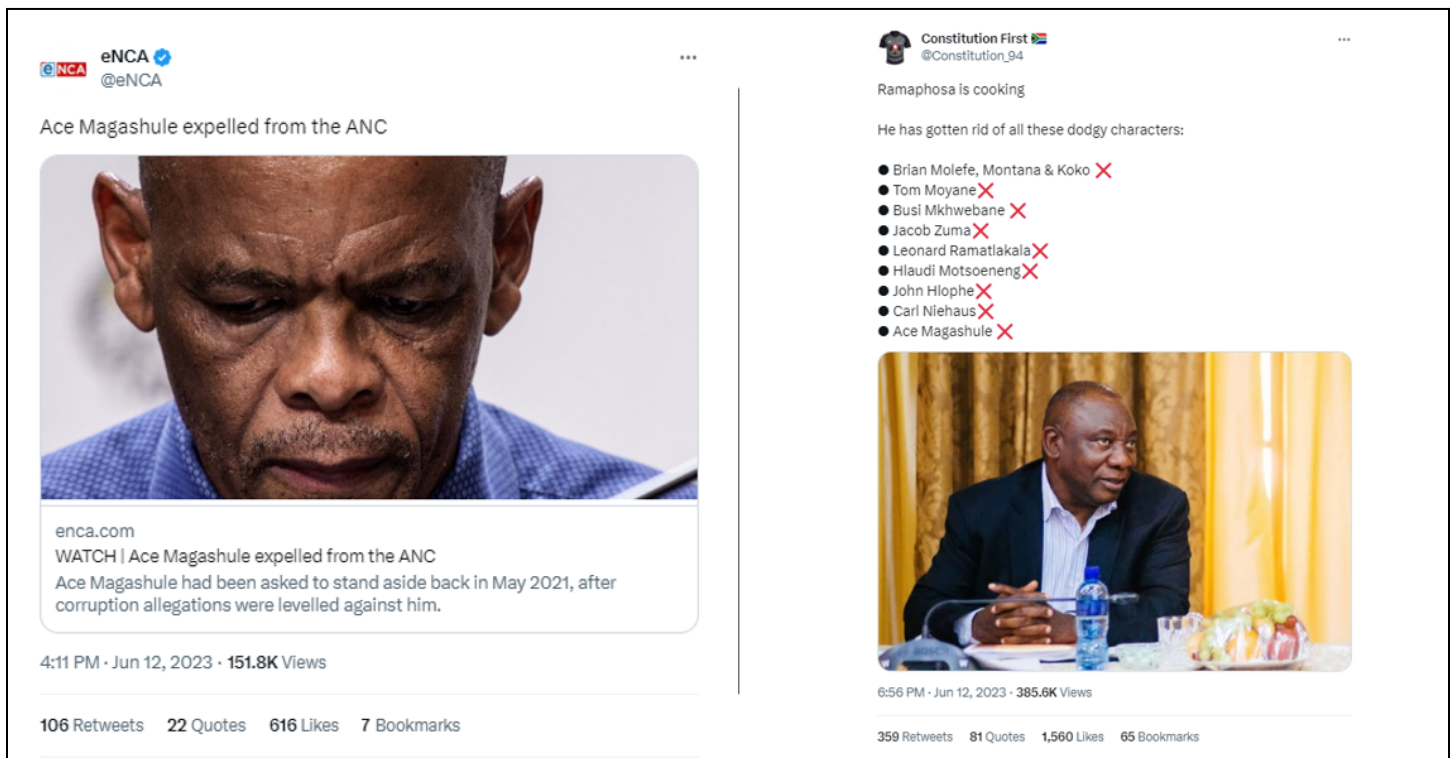

Figure 15: Posts found in conversations about Ace Magashule through a broader look at the search term.

Fortunately, the CABC teams work daily on Twitter collecting samples of conversations for researchers to use. See for example, in Figure 16, the image of a post that was collected about Ace Magashule's suspension around the asbestos scandal, which received even more engagement than a post about Thabo Bester and the cholera outbreak during the research period and didn't appear in the dataset is shown. Collecting these sample tweets across a broad range of topics that are covered by the CABC allows us to observe and integrate more depth of understanding into the data interpretation process.

Figure 16: Example of post about Magashule's corruption scandal collected and shared by daily teams on Twitter.

6.2.3 Language

The 81 keywords in non-English South African languages returned 25 150 mentions, with 17 960 unique authors - roughly 1.4 mentions per author. The conversations using these words were less retweet-driven, at 42%, compared to the 61% rate of retweets in the overall dataset. Due to the lower retweet rate, it is possible to say that content in one of the official languages that was returned is less likely to be the result of a coordinated campaign on Twitter. This presents a great opportunity for further investigation in order to uncover the relationship that may exist between coordinated narrative manipulation and English usage in African countries where English is considered the lingua franca.

6.2.4 Use of images instead of words

When collecting initial posts and information for the purposes of collecting the keywords, we noted the use of images to convey common issues of corruption. Examples of these images can be seen in Figure 17 below. The reason why images are used instead of text is not clear from a first inspection of this information. A theory offered by the researchers is that this tactic may be employed to prevent social media listening tools from easily picking up and categorising this content with images. Another theory is that this tactic may be employed to conceal the intentions of the account posting the images when they discuss certain corrupt acts. This was most notable in relation to bribes paid to traffic officials, as well as with regard to the purchasing of driver's licences from traffic authorities. This suggests that, in future studies, a keyword-matching approach could

benefit from the usage of additional means of analysis in order to pick up more examples like these posts and then unpack why this tactic is used with a larger sample set.
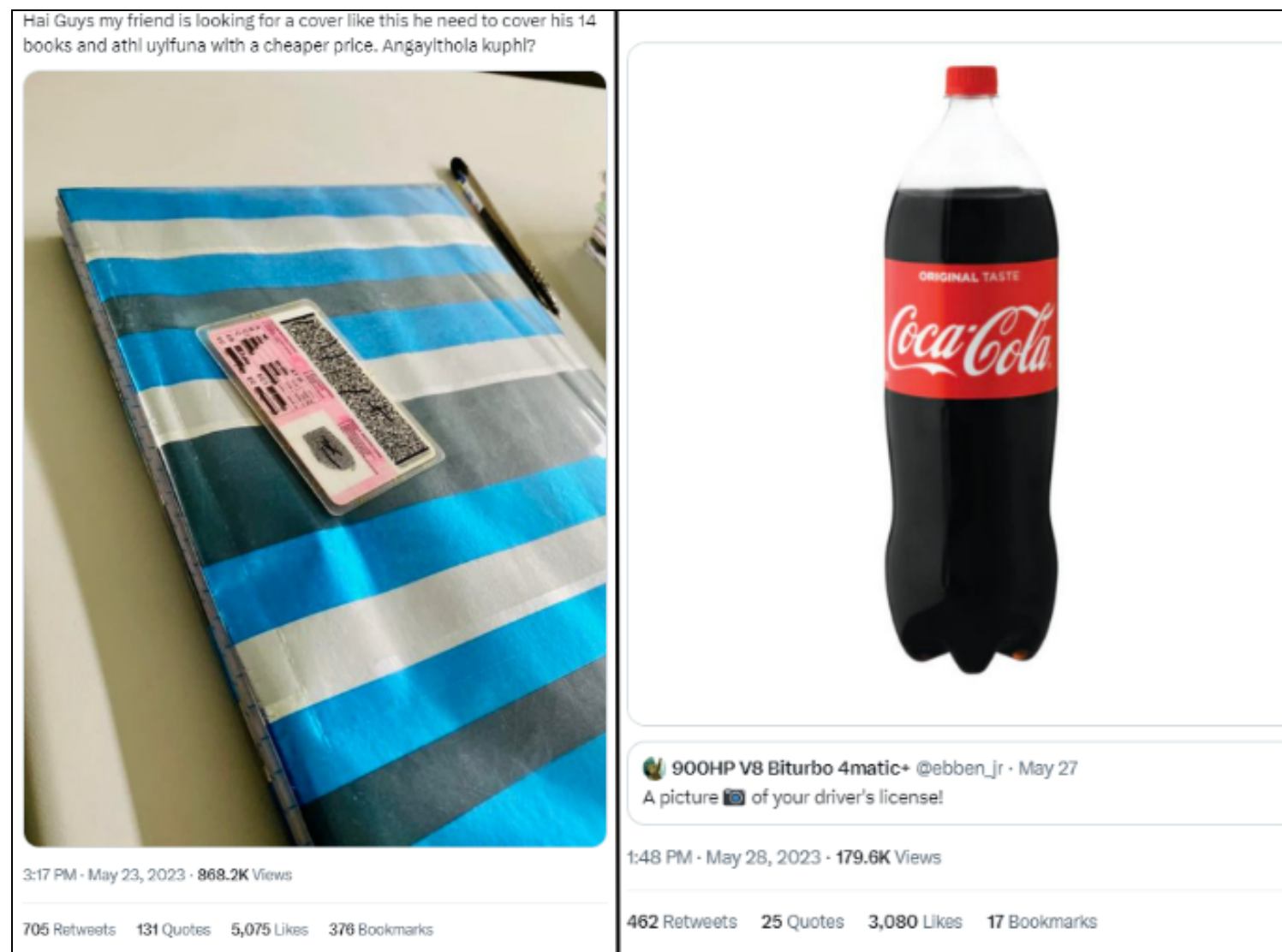

Figure 17: Imagery used to imply corruption in place of direct conversation.

6.2.5 Profession

The social media listening tool matches keywords in the biographies[54] of individual Twitter accounts against a list of professions curated by the platform. The professions listed underneath the pie chart (see Figure 18) represent all possible profession matches that the tool is trained to identify.

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[54] A Twitter biography or "bio" is a section of an account where the account owner can describe themselves or their interests. For more, see: Lifewire - What does the bio mean on Twitter
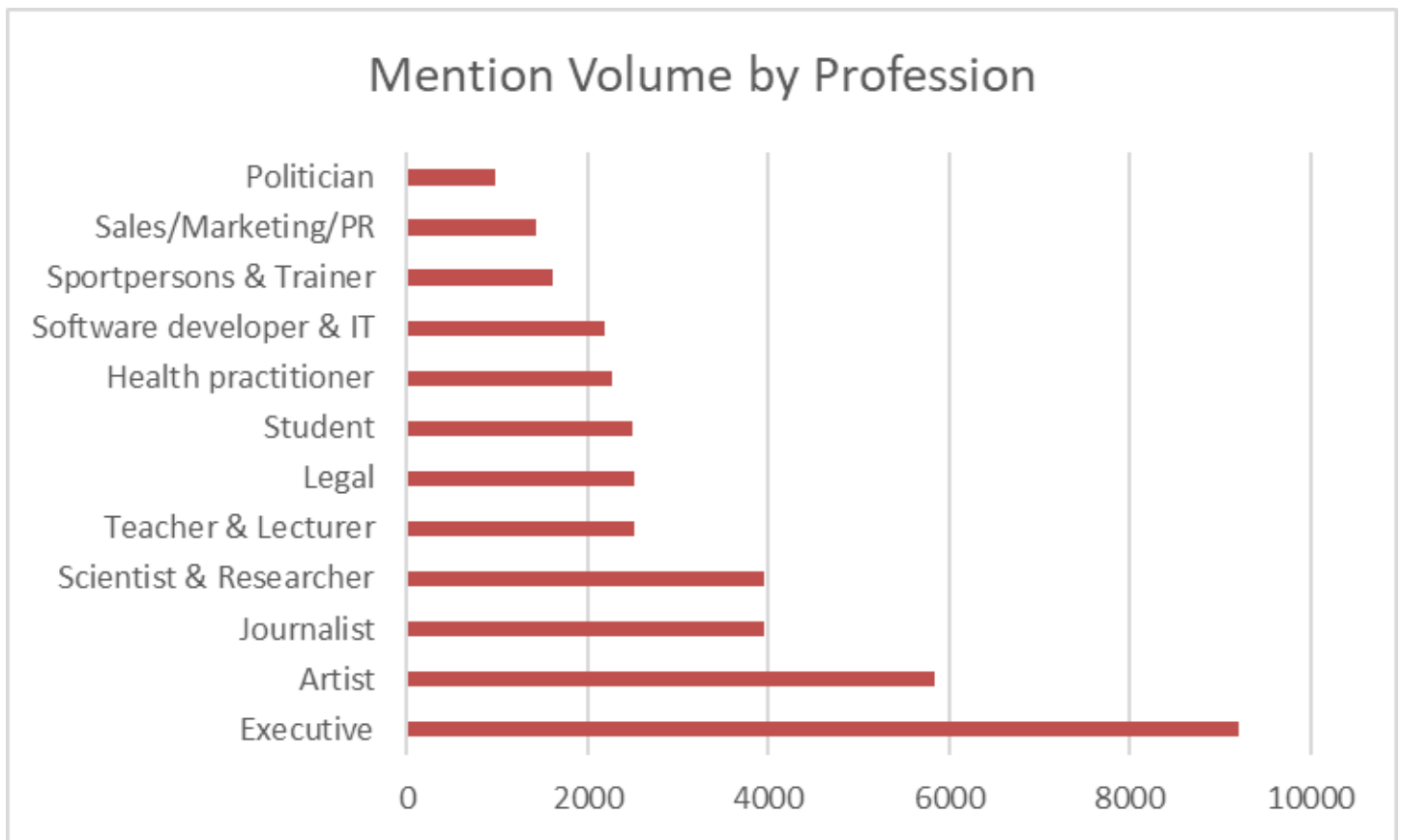
Figure 18: Breakdown of professions for accounts in the dataset.

Roles like "Editor", "Columnist", "Broadcaster", "Reporter", "Journo" and "Correspondent" among others within an account's bio will return the profession of "Journalist".

The distribution of the identified professions mostly correlates with the top professions identified within the 2022 South African Social Media Landscape Report (see Figure 19). The 2022 report was used because the 2023 social media report which has also been referenced in this document, provided a breakdown of social media users by income and socio-economic level rather than profession. A major difference in this dataset is that journalists rank 3rd for the profession that posts most frequently as opposed to 7th on the Social Media Landscape Report. Irregularities like these pique the interests of the CABC researchers, to understand what drives a difference in ranking in this way. Corruption is a hot topic in the South African online and offline media landscape. Hence, one expects to find journalists covering the topic. What was uncovered, however, is that there are Twitter accounts claiming to be 'journalists', that contribute to the conversation, drive specific narratives and cause specific keywords to be used.
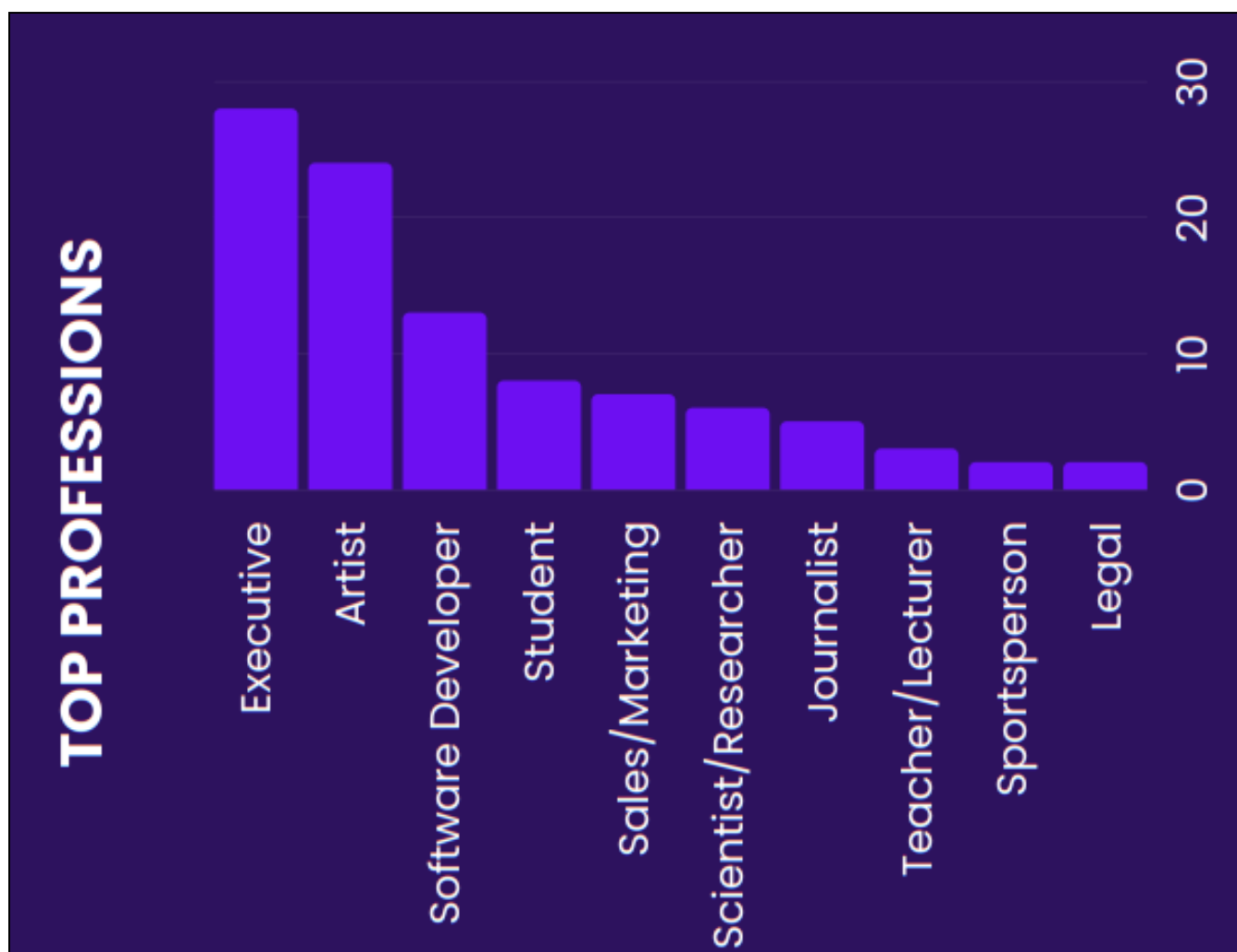
Figure 19: Breakdown of identified professions on Twitter in 2022, from the South African Social Media Landscape Report[55].

To understand who these 'journalists' were, and what they were saying, the top 100 accounts responsible for the most-frequent reporting on any topic of corruption within the dataset were analysed. Each of these 100 accounts was analysed on the following variables:

- Did they have Twitter Blue? (Y/N)
- Did they state the newsroom they were reporting for?
- Did they have a link to an external-facing site, like one of the news sites, or to a muckrack profile - i.e. do their profiles contain anything that could identify them as an authentic journalist?

Based on these variables, the accounts were individually analysed and categorised into red, amber, and green.

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[55]*South African Social Media Landscape Report, p45*

- "Green journalists" were those whose Twitter bio provided the most information, in terms of the variables listed above, and were rated as likely to be authentic, professional journalists. (Names of the 31 journalists that were on the green list included names like Sophie Mokoena, Heidi Giokos, Marianne Thamm, and Nkuule Njiko).

- "Red" was ascribed to Twitter accounts that returned the least information, and that, once qualitatively assessed, seemed to post content that didn't seem credible for an authentic journalist to tweet, based on the ethics and integrity that professional journalists should display in their work. The red list comprised 19 authors, including handles like MARIUSBROODRYK, MambaBroodryk, TvZim3, and Your_Syndicates.

Once the handles were split in this way, author lists were created with their usernames, which allowed for closer inspection of the type of content posted by these authors. In Figure 20 below, a comparison of the top 50 hashtags used by accounts in the "green" journalist list (on the left) and hashtags used by accounts in the "red" journalist list (on the right) is shown.
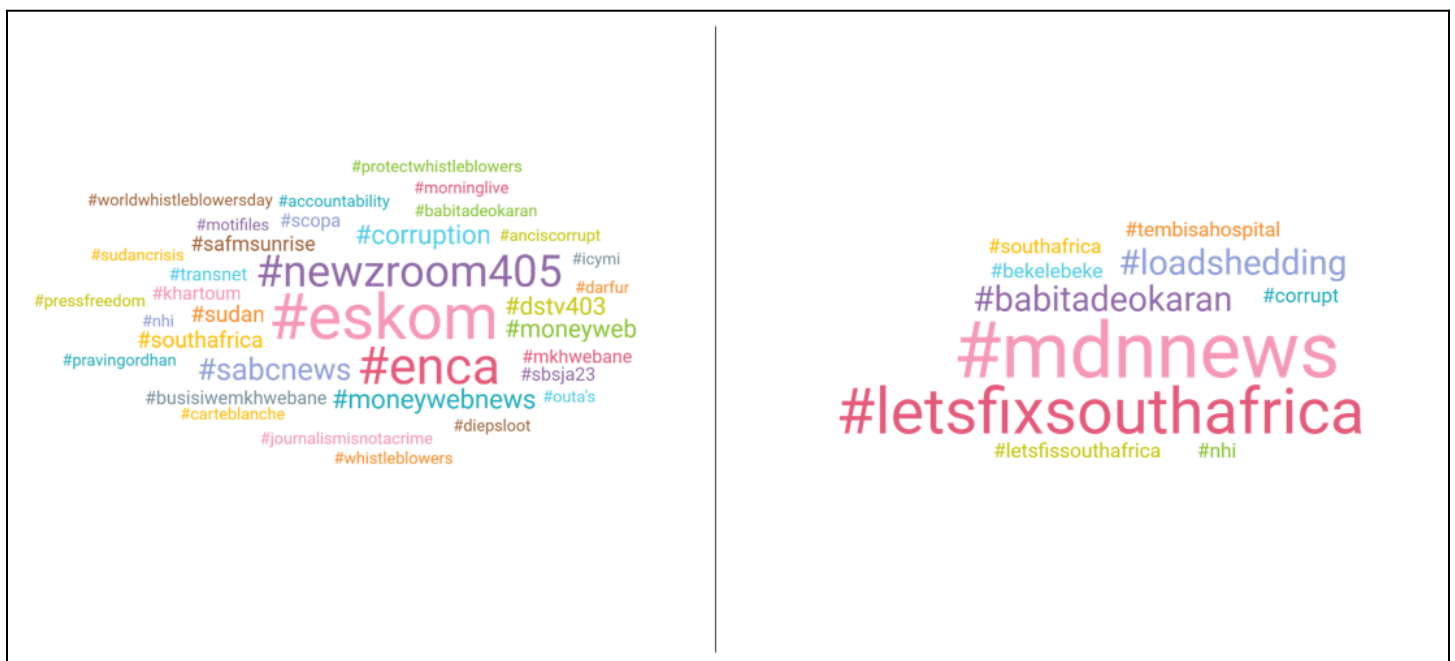

Figure 20: Top 50 hashtags used by "green journalists" (left) and "red journalists" (right).

#letsfixsouthafrica didn't feature in the posts by the green journalist list, but was prominent in the posts by 'red journalists' so it was the most obvious one to study in order to compare the tweets of journalists covering the same topics of corruption. "Let's Fix South Africa" appears to be the campaign slogan for Herman Mashaba's ActionSA, and along with its iteration #letsfixsouthafrica the slogan was tweeted by a political activist claiming to be a journalist and driving a very pro-ActionSA agenda (see Figure 21 below). A journalist that is as politically aligned to one party as this account appears to be would drive news and information that furthers the

interests of a party, rather than a range of topics that are equally and objectively covered. This pattern also raises questions about how and whether a journalist should split their personal and their news-reporting Twitter accounts, to ensure that party allegiance is not driving the content they would post as a journalist does for a credible news source.
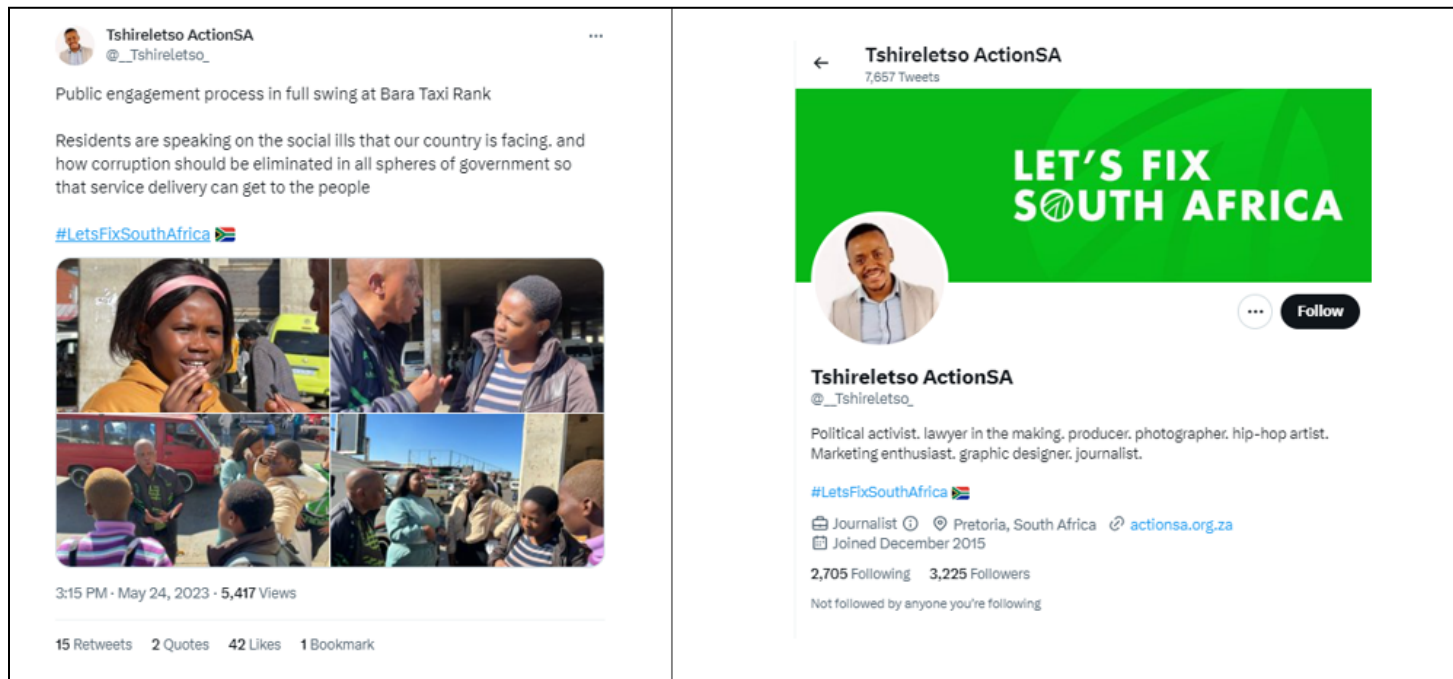

Figure 21: Journalist account that drives pro-ActionSA content.

Turning then to look at the people that these accounts are speaking about, on the topic of corruption, Figure 22 shows the most-mentioned names, broken down by sentiment. The darker the red, the more negative the content relating to that name; while the paler it is, (closer to grey), the more content with a more-neutral sentiment.
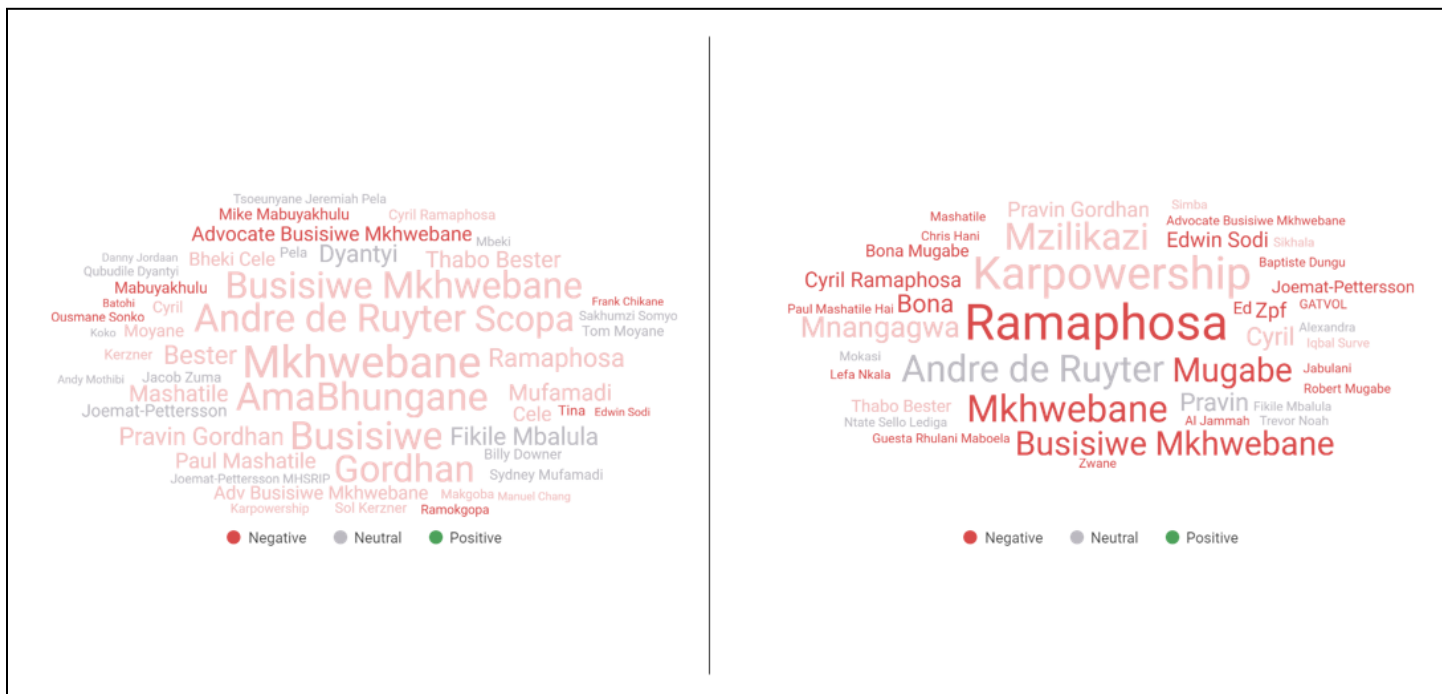
Figure 22: Top 50 people spoken about by "green journalists" (left) and by "red journalists" (right) - by sentiment.

What the information in Figure 22 tells us is that the green list of journalists, with names and words showing very light in colour, is posting in a way that is closer to a neutral sentiment on the topic of corruption, confirming to some degree the impartiality that authentic journalists use when reporting. The word cloud also suggests that a broad range of topics are covered at roughly the same frequency, given the size of the words displayed like "Mkwhebane", "AmaBhungane" and "Andre De Rutyer". This information on the topic of corruption is useful because a common narrative that is used in online manipulation campaigns is to claim that the media in South Africa is biased and you cannot trust the information they provide. With graphs like the word cloud to the left, it is possible to counter the narrative of there being no media freedom in South Africa that causes citizens to doubt the authentic information that is being presented to them. The group of "red journalists" on the other hand appear to be posting about "Ramaphosa" most frequently in the conversation about corruption and according to the social media listening tool, the sentiment toward him in their posts appears dark red or "negative" suggesting that little to no impartiality is being used by this group. This calls into question the intention behind the content that is posted by such accounts claiming to be journalists.

7. Conclusion

In this section, we summarise the key insights that surfaced from our analysis and we discuss the results. We also identify areas for potential anti-corruption interventions, as well as directions for future research.

7.1 Key Insights

Big Picture: South Africa's online corruption conversation can be divided into two broad camps i.e. the RET network who do not acknowledge state capture and are ardent Zuma supporters, and those who recognise the detrimental effects of state capture on the country's ability to progress who typically support president Ramaphosa.

Narrative Manipulation: This research has identified the possibility of narrative manipulation within the country's online corruption conversation. The manipulation appears to be politically charged and centres around the different factions (RET and Ramaphosa factions specifically) within the ANC.

Less Populous Provinces Dominate Conversation: While the instances of reported corruption by individuals to the South African Police Services and organisations like Corruption Watch are from the most populous provinces like Gauteng and KZN, our data indicates that people appear to be mentioning the less populous provinces (Limpopo and Free State) more frequently within the online conversation. This indicates that what people choose to focus on when speaking about provincial-level corruption (on Twitter) may not be dependent on the size or volume of the cases that are reported in each of the provinces.

Provincial Nuances: In Gauteng, the most prevalent conversation was about service delivery and high crime rates in Diepsloot where residents accuse the police of being corrupt (petty corruption) whilst in Limpopo the conversation centres around the EFF and their VBS bank scandal (grand corruption). The difference in time since these corrupt acts were perpetrated and how they influence the conversation is also of interest.

Journalist Influence: Not all accounts claiming to be journalists are reporting in an impartial way and with journalistic integrity. Some of the posts from suspicious journalists are less neutral and more politically driven than verifiable journalists who are reporting for more credible news houses that can be held accountable for the content they post. The social media listening tool allows us to track how diverse the range of topics are that are covered by verifiable journalists and provides insights that counter a common isolation tactic in narrative manipulation that claims you cannot trust the media because they are not covering topics as neutrally as possible. The role of recognised media and civil society organisations in ensuring that mis- and disinformation within the corruption conversation is not being shared is fundamental to countering South Africa's current

corruption crisis by keeping the citizenry accurately informed and able to develop trust in authentic media houses.

Language: The online conversations about corruption in non-English languages were less retweet-driven compared to the overall conversation. This suggests that coordinated campaigns are more likely to be found in English. Individuals expressing their own ideas and those who are not involved in driving manipulated narratives appear to post in their mother tongue.

7.2 Opportunities for anti-corruption efforts

Communications Campaign: Increasing awareness of the two identified camps is imperative in understanding how the conversation shifts and evolves. This could be done by using a combination of the CABC's ability to track and monitor conversations in near real-time along with the in-house capabilities to create both low and high-end content from the perspective of promoting greater social cohesion. Other examples of communication-type campaigns include but are not limited to:
- **Provincially-disaggregated anti-corruption messages:** The distinction between the most-populated and represented provinces online and the provincial focuses noted in this report, provide an opportunity to diversify messaging within the anti-corruption space. While the more populous and economically active provinces draw the widest attention, targeted intervention, in the form of creative communication strategies can be leveraged to great use in the northernmost provinces particularly.
- **Encourage media literacy and informed consumption of journalism:** Engagement with unverified journalists and influencers may speak to a broader issue of mistrust in traditional media sources. Communication aimed at encouraging media literacy, the comparison of multiple news sources, fact-checking, and critical engagement, especially in regard to hot-button topics such as corruption, may prove effective in ensuring that the broader public is able to access the correct information and discern inflammatory content from the truth.

Further research: author analysis of social media conversations: Given the potential for narrative manipulation that was identified using the 'coefficient of manipulation' approach, there is an opportunity to conduct detailed author analysis research on the conversation to either confirm or refute this potential.

Language: Language may be an important item in the toolkit for coordinated attempts to drive specific narratives. With a low retweet count returned from the content that was not in English it appears that this content is less amplified and draws attention to the intention behind content that is posted and frequently retweeted in English in a country where it is not the most spoken language but the most accessible as it is the lingua franca.

7.3 Directions for Future Research

Longitudinal Study: The continued reference to corruption scandals from previous years, most notably the EFF's VBS scandal, may provide an opportunity for longitudinal narrative research into social media conversations about such scandals. This study would involve the same research methodology but over a longer period of time so that the corruption conversation can be observed over time and changes in the narratives of particular scandals can be tracked. The insights drawn from tracking a conversation over a longer period of time, as in *Appendix C*, would support the generation of deep contextual understandings of how conversations mature over time.

Author Analysis: A holistic analysis of key authors or key role bearers within a social media conversation may provide insight as to how narratives may emerge, be amplified, or be distorted over time. An author analysis embedded in a key focus area may generate rich insights into the sources of content encountered by online audiences.

Broader Social Media Analysis & Open-Source Technologies: A notable limitation in this report is its restricted scope in terms of which platforms it could draw data from. While Twitter (now X), provides for ease of information analysis, the content and conversations on alternate platforms such as Facebook, TikTok or YouTube may provide additional insights into social media conversations that involve different demographic and interest groups. These understandings may in turn further enrich and improve the generalisability of future reports. Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) technologies may prove vital in gaining access to these platforms in future, for example having the potential to analyse the inter-related hashtags used to drive specific content on TikTok[56]. OSINT tools provide the potential for further analysis of Geolocation[57], among other outcomes.

Manual collection/collation of sensitive data: As identified in section 6.2.2, keyword-matching may not be ideal when dealing with sensitive subject matter, such as an individual's personal engagement with corruption. A manually-collated repository of content which was intended to conceal or allude to corrupt acts, from across social media platforms, may prove useful for future analyses of public perception of corruption.

Research Group on vernacular expression on social media: A collaborative research group, focused on tracking and understanding contextual and vernacular expressions on social media may prove a prudent starting point for the identification and analysis of broader, non-English content. Multilingualism is an important

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[56] [Bellingcat: Analysing TikTok Hashtags](#)
[57] [Bellingcat: Finding Geolocation Leads](#)

area for development for the CABC and other researchers interested in social media in South Africa, and further experimentation and research are necessary.

Appendix A - Case Studies

Corruption not only hinders the delivery of services to those who need them most, it can also erode levels of trust in institutions and individuals.

This section of the report looks at two case studies that were topical at the time of the research period and are in line with the above statement.

Corruption at Eskom, in relation to former CEO Andre de Ruyer's allegations and Adv Busisiwe Mkhwebane's allegations against Tina Joemat-Pettersson, were among the trending topics in the overall corruption conversation between 01 April and 05 July 2023.

Figure 23: Trending and fading topics between 01 April and 05 July 2023.

Karen Pillay

Already overwhelmed by high rates of unemployment, crime, and high cost of living - as well as deteriorating states of healthcare and education systems, South Africans have now been forced to accept loadshedding as a daily reality.

Among the reasons for Eskom's decline and inability to consistently provide South Africans with uninterrupted power were corruption and sabotage. Political interference has also been cited among the reasons for the rampant corruption at Eskom.

Earlier this year, corruption at Eskom became a topic of interest after the utility's head of security Karen Pillay was suspended, for failing to follow proper procurement processes when awarding Fidelity Services Group a R500 million emergency security contract last year.

Pillay was mentioned in 2 983 online conversations between 01 April and 05 July 2023. See Figure 24 below.
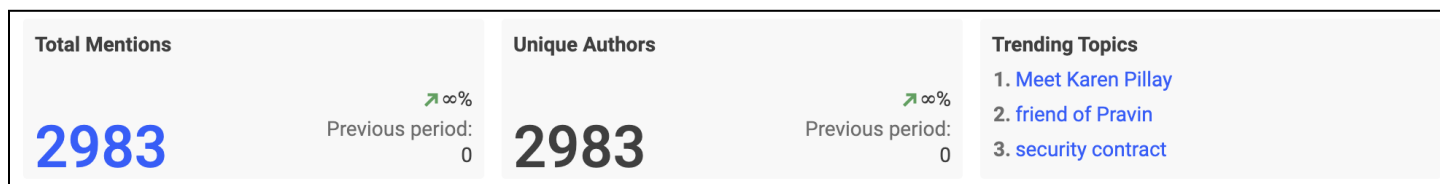
Total Mentions		Unique Authors		Trending Topics
2983	↗∞% Previous period: 0	**2983**	↗∞% Previous period: 0	1. Meet Karen Pillay 2. friend of Pravin 3. security contract

Figure 24: Online mentions of Karen Pillay between 01 April - 05 July 2023.

Pillay reportedly appointed Fidelity on an emergency contract after learning of threats to Eskom's infrastructure at different power stations.

According to a report by The Citizen, "In situations of emergency, government departments or state-owned enterprises have the authority to bypass the traditional competitive bidding process and directly engage a single supplier".

A month before Pillay was suspended, City Press reported that Fidelity had been appointed without competitive bidding and "based on dodgy findings contained in the privately-funded controversial George Fivaz Forensic & Risk report. (GFFR was privately appointed by De Ruyter to investigate corruption at Eskom - its findings have also been a subject of controversy. Read more about this *here*.)

The publication also revealed that the SAPS had not been informed of sabotage at Eskom, and that companies that had an open contract to provide forensic expertise to the utility were also not assigned this task.

Since then, Pillay has been accused of sabotaging power stations to benefit from the R500 million Fidelity contract. These accusations have not only come from the African Society Congress, but also from social media users.

Online mentions of Pillay spiked on June 6, when Twitter user @ISephara shared a post alleging that Pillay was responsible for the "deliberate destruction of Eskom conveyor belts, stations, and other hardware, so companies linked to her can get contracts to fix the "damage" (see Figure 25).
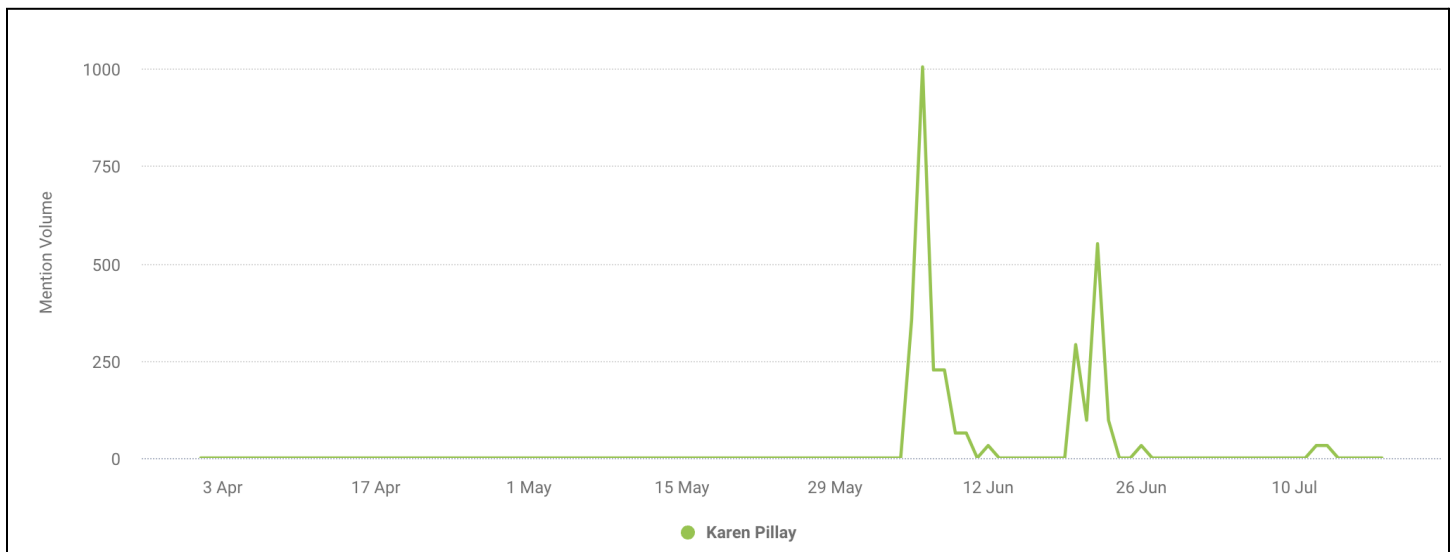
Figure 25: Volume of the Karen Pillay conversation between 01 April and 05 July 2023.

A day before the peak, on 5 June, two accounts, @azania1023 and @goolammv had also shared posts alleging that Pillay was responsible for sabotaging Eskom and causing load shedding. @azania1023's post was among the top three most-retweeted within the Karen Pillay online conversation (see Figure 26).

It is important to note that on 4 June, City Press published an article alleging that a high-ranking Eskom executive was linked to sabotage at power stations - however, the official's name was not published. It remains unclear how/why the above-mentioned accounts concluded or got wind of the claims that Pillay was responsible for the alleged sabotage.

Other than media reports on the developments in the Pillay story, the main theme in the top 25 most-retweeted content was that Pillay, accused of being Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan's cousin/best friend/ex-girlfriend, is responsible for sabotaging Eskom for personal gain - and should be arrested. Unverified screenshots, allegedly of Pillay communicating with service providers, were also among the most retweeted content during this time.
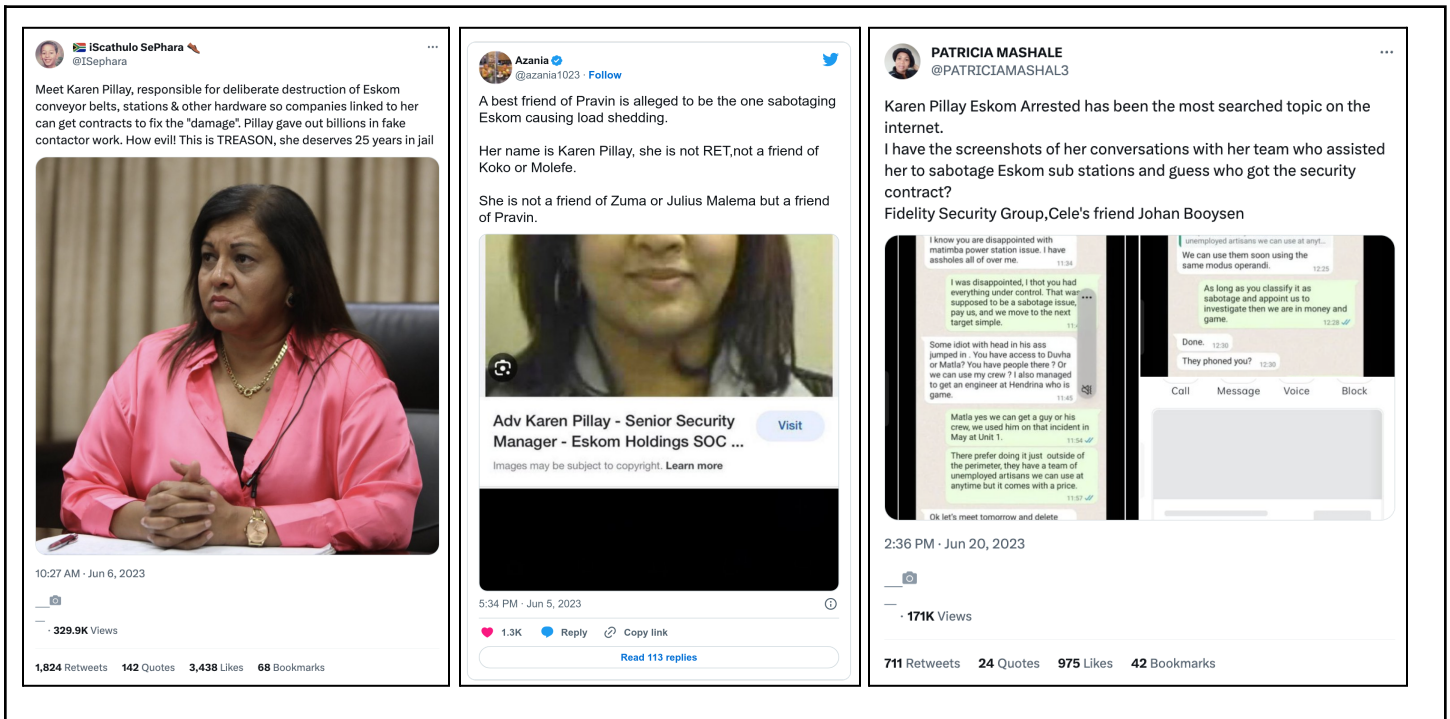
Figure 26: Snippets of the top three of the 25 most-retweeted posts within the online Karen Pillay conversation.

The top 10 authors (see Figure 27) in the Pillay conversation generated around 11% of all mentions. An analysis reveals that these authors, predominantly, shared/retweeted content that accused Pillay of sabotaging Eskom for personal gain.
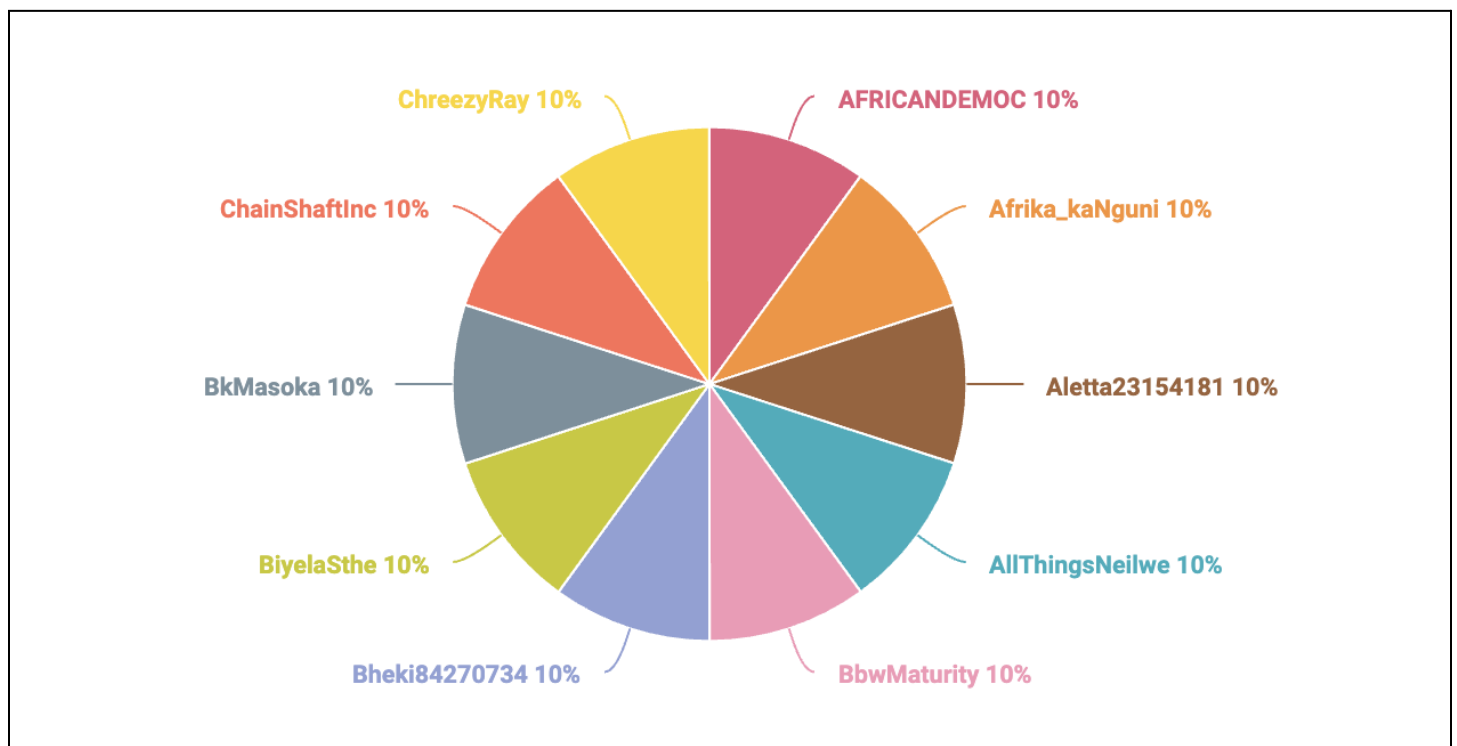

Figure 27: Top 10 authors within the Karen Pillay conversation.

This is with the exception of the @AFRICANDEMOC account, which shared an alleged statement by Pillay, asking her to "come forward" and meet, as well as the @BbwMaturity and @ChainShaftInc accounts, which shared an article reporting on Pillay's suspension. The original source of the tweets shared by some of these top 10 accounts came from @azania1023; @PATRICIAMASHAL3; @ISephara; @SATruth5 and @Nhleiks5.

Tina Joemat-Pettersson

Member of Parliament and former Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson was part of Parliament's Section 194 committee, also known as the impeachment inquiry, established in 2021 to look into suspended Public Protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane's fitness to hold office. Joemat-Pettersson died on 5 June. The cause of her death is unknown. At the time of her death, she was facing allegations of bribery from David Skosana, Mkhwebane's husband. Skosana had accused Joemat-Pettersson of trying to solicit a bribe of R600 000 from him - to make the impeachment inquiry against his wife Mkhwebane "go away". The R600 000 was reportedly to be equally divided between Joemat-Pettersson, ANC Chief Whip Pemmy Majodina and Section 194 committee chairperson Qubudile Dyantyi. It has further been reported that Skosana laid charges of extortion against Joemat-Pettersson. Both Dyantyi and Majodina reportedly denied the allegations.

The online conversation about Tina Joemat-Pettersson received 16 131 mentions from more than 11k unique authors within the research period. See Figure 28 below.
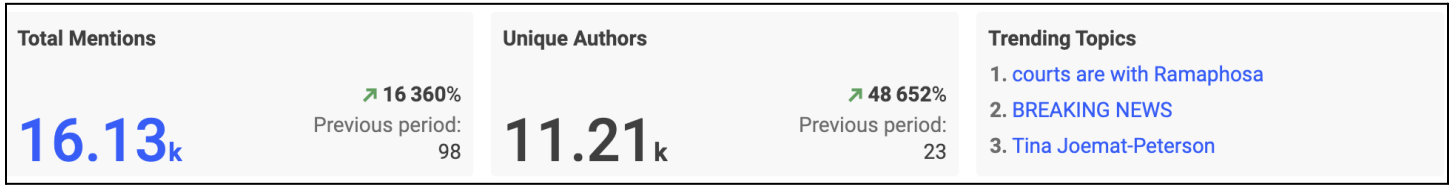
Total Mentions		Unique Authors		Trending Topics
	↗ **16 360%**		↗ **48 652%**	1. courts are with Ramaphosa
	Previous period:		Previous period:	2. BREAKING NEWS
16.13k	98	**11.21**k	23	3. Tina Joemat-Peterson

Figure 28: Online mentions of Tina Joemat-Pettersson between 1 April - 05 July 2023.

News of her death led to the second-highest peak in the online conversation, surpassed only by the peak recorded on 13 June, when Mkhwebane held a media briefing during which she publicised audio recordings, allegedly, of Joemat-Pettersson attempting to solicit a bribe from her husband, Skosana (see Figure 29).
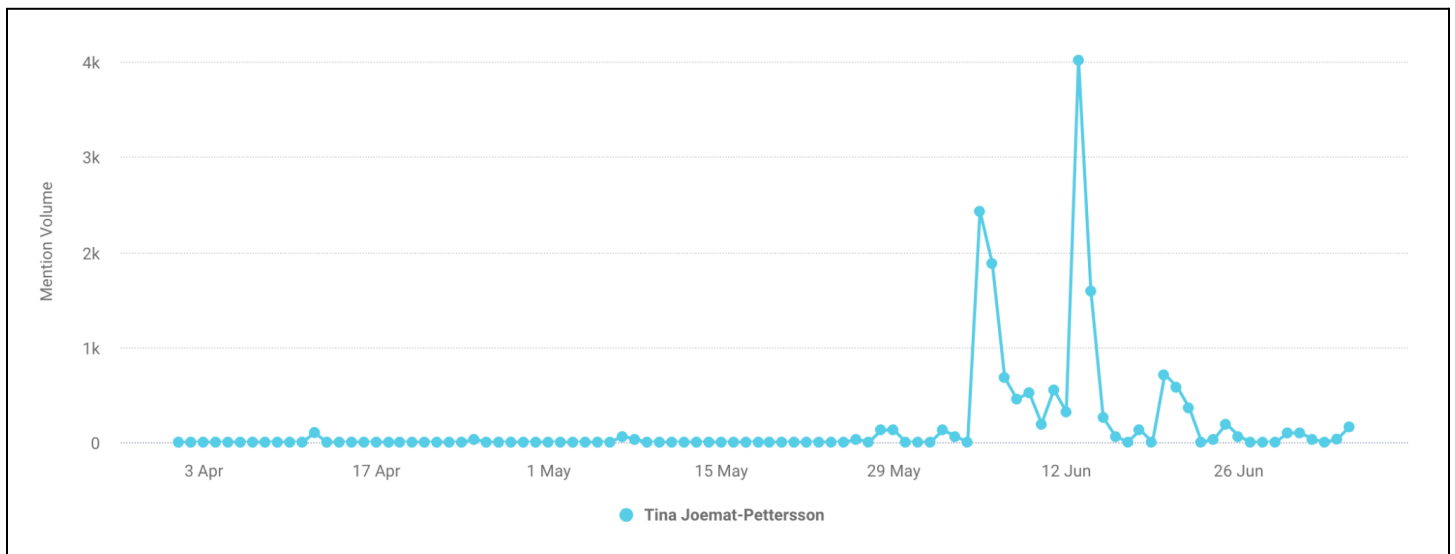
Figure 29: Volume of the Tina Joemat-Pettersson mentions between 01 April and 05 July 2023.

On the back of this, Mkhwebane also called on Dyantyi to recuse himself as chairperson of the Section 194 committee - a move that could cause further delays in the inquiry. Dyantyi refused to recuse himself.

A closer analysis of the top 25 most-retweeted posts in the online conversation about Joemat-Pettersson revealed a mixture of posts (see Figure 30). These include:

- Media outlets and journalists reporting on Mkhwebane publicising the alleged audio recordings and Whatsapp messages between Skosana and Joemat-Pettersson;

- Users alleging that Joemat-Pettersson had been assassinated; killed by Ramaphosa or committed suicide.

Figure 30: Snippets of the top three of the 25 most-retweeted posts within the online Tina Joemat-Pettersson conversation.

The top 10 authors in the Joemat-Pettersson conversation (see Figure 31) generated around 7% of all mentions. Included in the content shared by these accounts are posts speculating around Joemat-Pettersson; posts from users rubbishing Skosana's allegations; and those quoting snippets of Mkhwebane's press briefing.
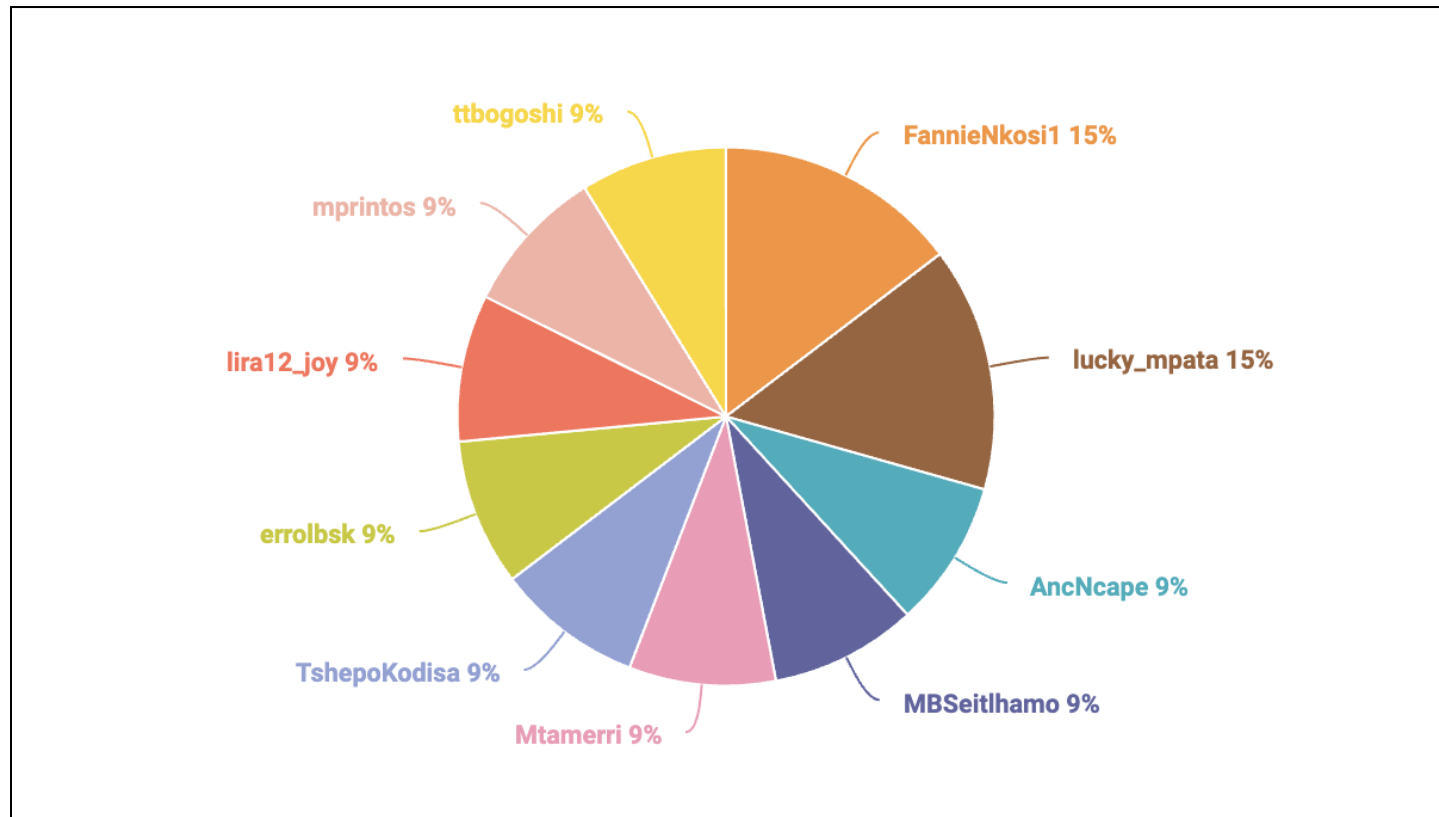

Figure 31: Top 10 authors within the Karen Pillay conversation.

The original source of the tweets shared by some of these top 10 accounts came from @Madiboity; @kasibcnews; @Gentlements; @DKNMOHAMMED and @AdvoBarryRoux.

In these two case studies, the CABC detected instances of mis- and disinformation in both conversations. Among these were:

- Posts alleging that Pillay had been arrested for her role in the Fidelity contract. This was reported by a site called FreshersLive. The CABC could not find any other reports to corroborate this.

- Posts speculating around Joemat-Pettersson's death. As reported in the media, Joemat-Pettersson's death is the subject of an inquest investigation by the police.

Appendix B - Analysis of Mentions Containing "Diepsloot"

Reviewing social media conversations over the last year - between June 2022 and June 2023 - it was important to understand what it is that South Africans talk about when they refer to a place like Diepsloot in online conversation. A word cloud was created to identify the most frequently spoken about topics. This word cloud is shown below in Figure 32.

Figure 32: Word cloud of the top 50 "keywords" that include "Diepsloot" between June 2022 and June 2023.

More than 5 000 mentions included the word "residents". Posts from October 2022 and June 2023 explain that residents from Diepsloot embarked on protest action against their ward councillors, who are both members of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). These posts from October 2022 and from June 2023 are positioned alongside each other in Figure 33 below, to represent continued efforts by residents in the area to demand protection against crime in their area, which they believe requires assistance from the president because of the corruption they claim is in the police force[58].
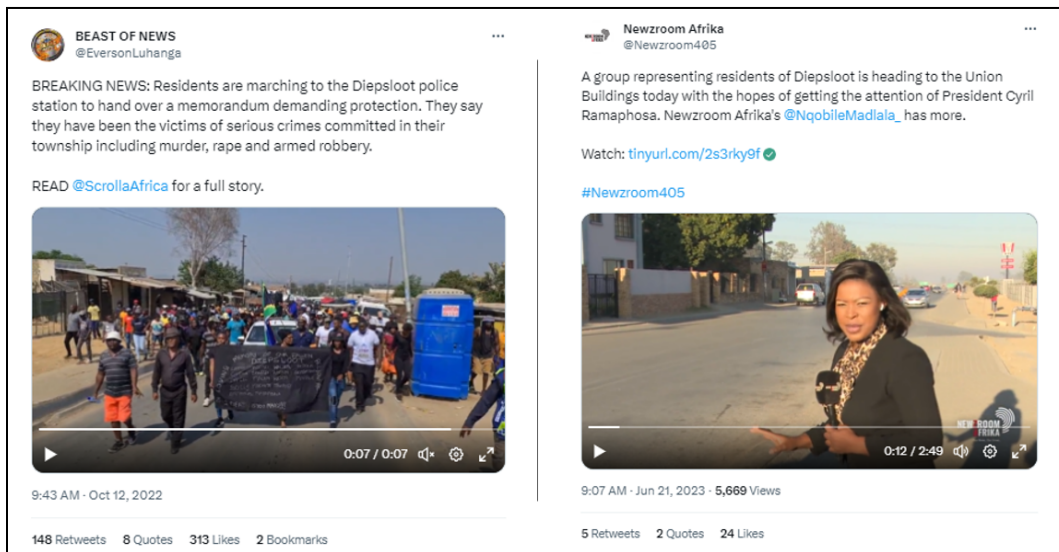

Figure 33: Residents protesting for better service delivery in Diepsloot.

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[58]https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/diepsloot-community-pleads-to-president-to-solve-rising-crime-in-the-area-e9bde2ee-8fa3-4c82-b0ad-259300c0eb74