Project: Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society

Project Series: Xenophobia

Social Media Analytics Report 5

01 July - 30 September 2023
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Table of Contents

1. Findings Summary

- **Role of Public Figures**: Public figures particularly politicians and their statements can significantly impact the online conversation and public discourse on immigrants in South Africa. (see Sections 5, 7)

- **Prominent Hashtags**: The most prominent hashtags in the conversation about xenophobia during the reporting period were #operationdudula, #putsouthafricansfirst, and #putsouthaficansfirst. These hashtags have been consistently dominating the conversation over the reporting periods. This suggests that these posts that make use of these hashtags are central to driving xenophobic narratives on X. (see Section 6)

- **Concerns Over Illegal Immigrants**: The conversation surrounding xenophobia in South Africa consistently includes mentions of concern about the number of illegal immigrants in the country and their perceived impact on the economy and security. These concerns often centre on immigrants from countries like Zimbabwe and Nigeria, but include all immigrants. (see Sections 5, 7)

- **Deportation Debates**: The discussion features ongoing debates about the deportation of illegal immigrants, with some advocating for mass deportations. Notably, there is a subtheme regarding the dehumanising treatment of immigrants during deportation, such as being dropped off at the border without assistance. (see Sections 5, 7)

- **Crime and Murder Concerns**: A recurring subtheme in the conversation revolves around concerns that foreigners are involved in criminal activities, including crimes such as murder. There is a perception that crime rates are increasing due to a growing number of immigrants in South Africa. (see Section 7)

- **Xenophobic Rhetoric as Patriotism**: Xenophobic rhetoric is sometimes presented as an expression of patriotism. South Africans are encouraged to join patriotic groups and defend their country. This theme is associated with hashtags like #PutSouthAfricansFirst and #OperationDudula. (see Section 7)

- **"Proudly Xenophobic" Accounts**: The conversation reveals the emergence of accounts that identify as "proudly xenophobic." These individuals assert that they are labelled as xenophobic without their concerns being heard. (see Section 7)

- **Specific Event-Related Hashtags**: The report mentions the hashtags #sizokuthola and #jhbfire, which refer to specific events that occurred during the reporting period. (see Section 8)

These findings give us insight into who is engaged in driving xenophobic and anti-immigrant narratives and sentiment online, what they are saying, how the narratives are framed and to what ends they are deployed.

2. Background

The CABC has been monitoring posts, networks and disinformation campaigns on issues of xenophobia since May 2020. In June we released a Lay of the Land report in June 2022, outlining the main narratives fueling xenophobia in South Africa up until that point. In March 2023, Xenophobia Social Media Analytics: Report 1 provided insights on xenophobic narratives based on examining the behavioural drivers of xenophobia. More than 80% of mentions in the conversation exhibited negative sentiment towards foreigners in South Africa, as confirmed by crowd-verified data. A key finding was that immigrants are blamed for South African socio-economic problems and the government's lack of service delivery. In May 2023, Report 2 focused on the political mobilisation of online anti-immigrant conversations. Key hashtags in the conversation were #operationdudula, #putsouthaficansfirst (no letter *r* in the word "africans") and #putsouthafricansfirst, with Operation Dudula's reach continuing to grow. A range of violent crimes were attributed to immigrants, despite a lack of evidence as to who had perpetrated the crimes. A finding was that particular key accounts were displaying behaviours that indicate an intention to potentially manipulate the conversation. Report 3, released in July 2023, categorised key individuals and organisations involved in the online conversation about immigrants in South Africa. The research revealed that individuals who hold predominantly negative views towards foreign nationals are noticeably more engaged on social media platforms. They tend to post more frequently than those with positive sentiments, attracting higher levels of interaction from the public. The report identifies Operation Dudula and Gayton McKenzie as influential figures in the South African xenophobia discussion, with their viewpoints being exaggerated. It also found similarities in beliefs between these prominent figures and a coordinated network responsible for the establishment of the Put South Africans First movement in 2020. Report 4 analysed key hashtags and content themes to investigate the potential for co-ordinated campaigns. Nimmo's Coefficient of Traffic Manipulation[1] was used to examine ten specific hashtags to assess whether they were being used in manipulated conversations that weren't being authentically driven by South Africans and to uncover the role of these hashtags in promoting anti-immigrant sentiments. Additionally, Report 4 includes a network map highlighting prominent authors to provide insight into influential individuals in this domain.

3. Introduction

This report is part of a series under the title of *Promoting Human Rights, Democracy and an Equitable Society*, with the overall objective of reducing hate speech and discrimination against women, migrants and minorities. It examines xenophobia and anti-immigrant narratives that trend and become popular on social media in South Africa from 01 July to 30 September 2023. It is the fifth report funded by the European Union (EU) as part of

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[1] Nimmo, B. (2019). Measuring traffic manipulation on twitter. University of Oxford Internet Institute.

the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change's (CABC) programme focusing on xenophobia. The report series offers regular analysis of troubling narratives and divisive content relating to xenophobia on South African social media.

4.   Research Methodology

This data for this report was obtained through social media listening tools. Initial keywords were chosen through a qualitative process, combining existing knowledge, desktop research, a literature review, and social media analysis. These keywords were further refined by manual checks. A social media analytics tool was then used to track conversations on xenophobia in South Africa. This social media listening tool gathers data and enables analytics from various sources, with Twitter (now known as X) being the dominant platform. The majority of South African politicians maintain active X accounts, and media organisations heavily utilise the platform. As a result, discussions on important public issues can rapidly transition between conventional media and social media channels like X. Additional sources include websites such as blogs, digital media publications, and forums.

According to *Data Reportal's Digital 2023: South Africa* report[2] and *World Wide Worx's Social Media Landscape 2022*[3] report, South Africa has 3.65 to 9 million active X users. X often acts as an early indicator of emerging conversations and narratives within society. Nonetheless, other social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp also play a crucial role in discussions related to immigrants in South Africa. Historically, WhatsApp has been used to incite, mobilise, and coordinate xenophobic violence in South Africa. This report primarily conducts a narrative analysis of various hashtags and phrases, referred to as "search terms," derived from the initial xenophobia query mentioned earlier.

This report consists primarily of a narrative analysis of various hashtags and phrases (hereafter referred to as "search terms" or "terms") found within the initial xenophobia query explained above, within a more recent time period.

5.   Conversation volume

During the reporting period of 01 July to 30 September 2023, there were a total of 973 690 mentions[4]. The overall conversation grew by 13% compared to the previous three-month period. The number of unique authors posting was 102 340. This represented an 8% increase compared to the number of authors in the previous three months. This conversation therefore continues to grow, both in respect of the overall mention volume as well as the number of unique authors in the conversation

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[2] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-south-africa
[3] https://website.ornico.co.za/2022/06/29/social-media-landscape-2022/
[4] A mention is a piece of web-based content that matches the keyword terms defined in the query that is set up for this research. It is posted to or from a social channel and could be a tweet, a phrase in a news article or a comment on a YouTube video. Brandwatch. (2022). Glossary of Terms.
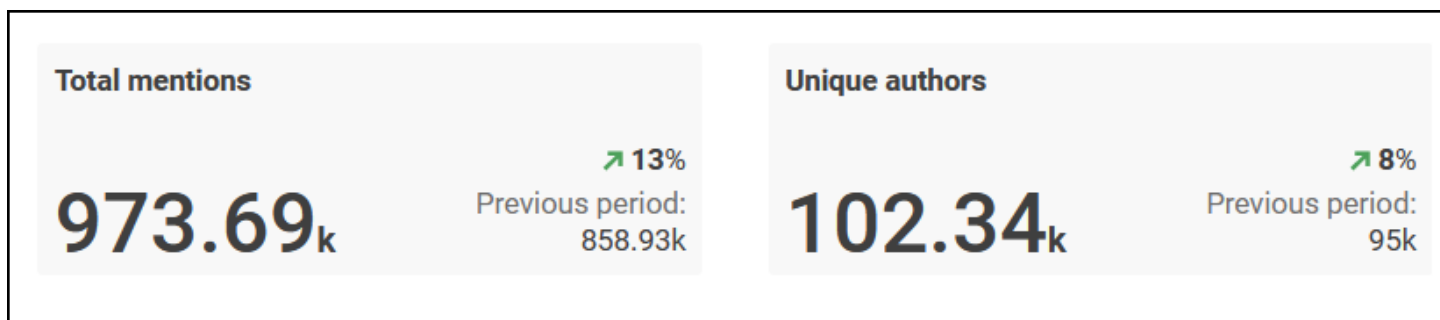
Figure 1: Volume metrics for 01 July to 30 September 2023

The stance that these authors take on the topic of xenophobia is not readily trackable within the capabilities of the social media analytics tool that is used to monitor and assess this content. However, what we are able to see is the time-series trend of unique authors commenting on the conversation (see figure 2 below). This allows us to understand the topics of conversation that received a lot of interest from unique authors.
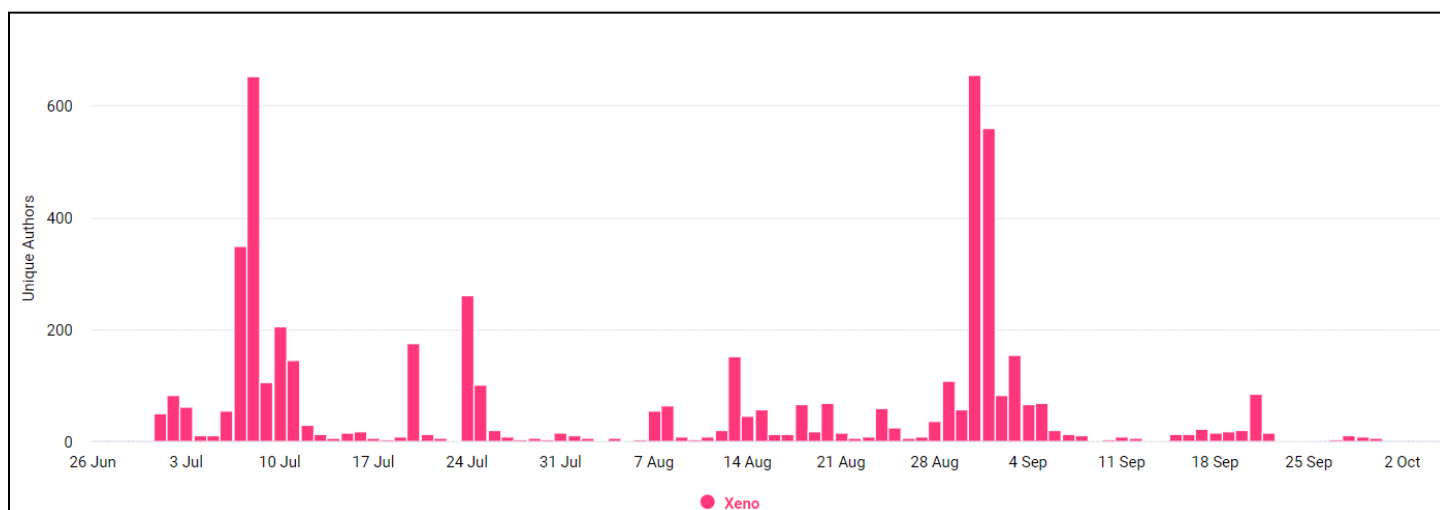

Figure 2: Time-series analysis of volume of unique authors over the reporting period

Within the reporting period, the dates that returned the highest number of unique authors on the topic were 08 July and 31 August 2023. The conversation on these days focussed on:

- 08 July 2023 - Kenny Kunene shutting down an illegal bus rank as part of a campaign called Operation Restore. Kunene is the Member of the Mayoral Committee (MMC) of Transport in the City of Johannesburg.
- 31 August 2023 - Kenny Kunene makes headlines again, this time calling for eviction laws to be amended and for the mass deportation of illegal immigrants.

Kunene who previously supported the governing party of South Africa, the ANC, is now the Deputy President of the Patriotic Alliance, a political party formed a decade ago and has only gained popularity in more recent years, that appears to be campaigning on the European and North American populist strategy of driving an anti-immigrant worldview[5].

Turning to the mention volume (see Figure 3 below) we observe that at peak A, the mention volume was 95% higher than average. When we disaggregated the data we obtained a more nuanced view of what was driving the volumes constituting Peak A. The high mention volume at point A was driven mainly by 6 534 mentions using the hashtag #khositwala (the winner of the Big Brother Titans TV Show). Content related to Khosi Twala was returned in the dataset because it refers to her travel to Mozambique. As it is not pertinent to the topic of xenophobia that is being covered in this report, it means that how we use country names requires a closer look to ensure that messages like these do not skew the numbers in the dataset. In the same peak, there were also 519 mentions using the hashtag #newzroom405 and 434 retweets of a tweet about a Zimbabwean illegal miner being arrested in Riverlea. The #newzroom405 content was largely related to news coverage by Newzroom405 of this arrest. Speaking while in handcuffs, the Zimbabwean man said that he is not concerned about his arrest and that he has been underground for over two weeks, highlighting the deplorable conditions that illegal workers are willing to endure in South Africa. Newzroom405 reported that Police Minister Bheki Cele was visiting the area for an imbizo on illegal mining.
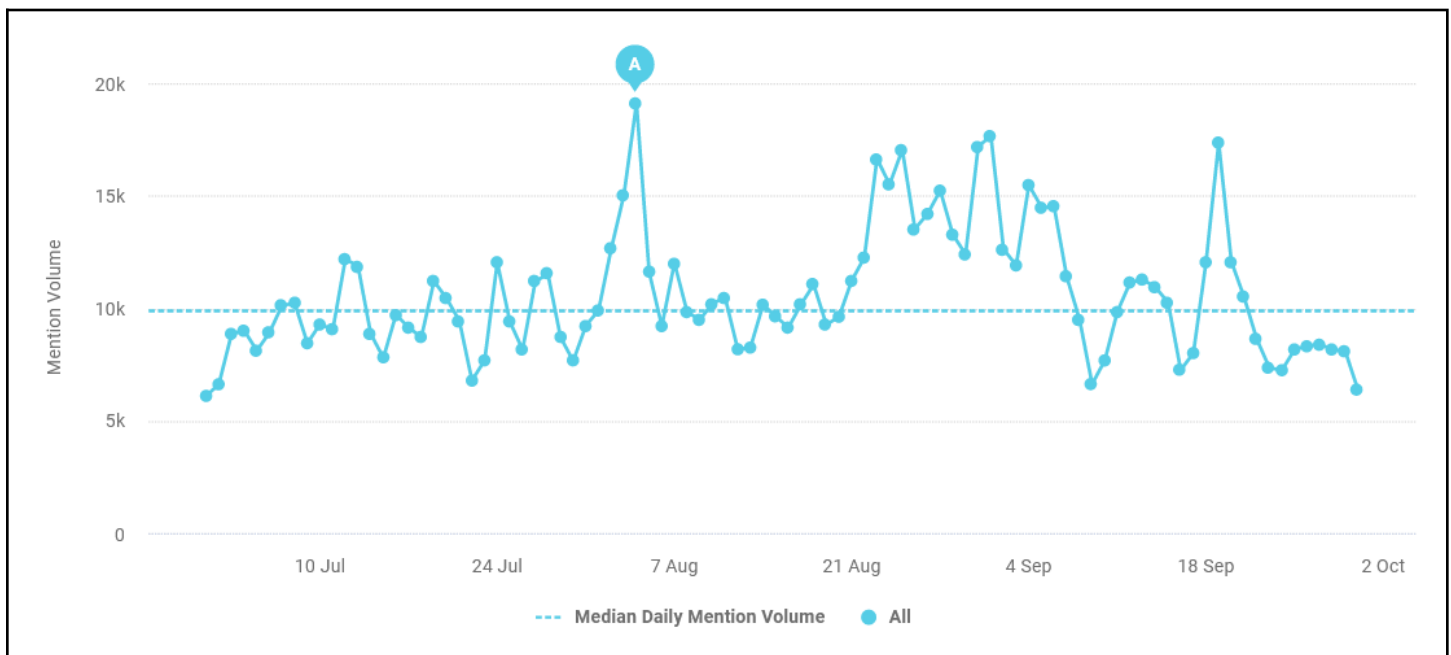

Figure 3: Mention volume over time for 01 July to 30 September 2023

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[5] Populism and inequality: Does reality match the populist rhetoric? (Strobl et al; 2023)

6. Conversation trends

Consistent with prior reports, the most prominent hashtags in the conversation were #operationdudula, followed by #putsouthafricansfirst and #putsouthaficansfirst. These hashtags are shown in Figure 4 below. #Zimbabwe was also a prominent hashtag in the South African conversation during the reporting period. This is due to the 2023 Zimbabwean elections that took place between 23 and 24 August 2023. The hashtags #sizokuthola / #sizokthola and #jhbfire refer to specific events, which will be elaborated on further.

Figure 4: Top hashtags

Analysing the topics that trended and faded during the reporting period, we see that conversation about #khositwala died down quite early, suggesting the limited impact of this hashtag in the xenophobia and anti-immigrant conversation. The size of the word in Figure 5 shows how prominent this topic was to South Africans using X, as it is slightly larger (appearing in 10 613 total mentions) compared to #zimbabwe (which appeared in 9 107 mentions) in our dataset. The hashtag "#zimbabwe", however, consistently trended throughout the reporting period and is therefore among popular hashtags that were found throughout the reporting period. The hashtag #nigeria appeared in fewer mentions than #zimbabwe but, like this hashtag, it remained a consistently used hashtag through the reporting period. Importantly, the posts that are returned with hashtags like #zimbabwe and #nigeria are not necessarily related to xenophobia and much like the word Mozambique that is returning content that is not relevant to the purpose of this project, these country names must also be reviewed in greater detail in order to filter out data that creates an overrepresentation of topics that are not relevant to understanding the issue that migrants, particularly African, face.

Figure 5: Trending and fading topics

7. Themes

In the topics wheel in Figure 6 below, the countries that are featured in the conversation are predominantly Zimbabwe and Nigeria. The topics wheel contains frequently used words and phrases and shows how the main themes (the inner ring) relate to sub-themes (the outer ring).

Figure 6: Topics wheel

As has been the case in previous reports, there are numerous mentions of concern over the number of illegal immigrants in South Africa and their impact on the country's economy and security. There is ongoing discussion around the issue of illegal immigrants, particularly Zimbabweans and Nigerians, in South Africa, with some advocating for mass deportations and others opposing the idea. There is a concerning subtheme about how immigrants must be deported - i.e., in ways that are dehumanising, for example; they must be dropped off at the border and offered no assistance because they got themselves here. Figure 7 below contains a tweet by Dudula News that speaks to the topic of deportation. This is but one of the revealing undercurrents that mobilises un-Constitutional rhetoric in an increasingly radicalised conversation.

Figure 7: Tweet about deportation

Another consistent subtheme in the conversation revolves around expressing concerns about crime and murder as being committed by foreigners. Figure 8 contains an example. The tweet in Figure 8 also contains a recurring topic, which is the notion that individuals from other countries are growing in numbers in South Africa and are going to take over while South Africans do nothing about the situation. In effect, this sentiment could well be deployed precisely to communicate that South Africans should be doing something about it themselves, outside of the law, even though not explicitly stated as such.

Figure 8: Example tweet about crime

A further frustration is often generated in the conversation to say that South Africans are not prioritised in South Africa - that various political parties, NGOs and the media display bias in their views towards those who are 'patriotic'. In the tweet in Figure 9 below, there is a generalisation that all the major political parties and 'foreign sponsored NGOs' have sold South Africa to illegal immigrants and also to foreign investors. The tweet obtained 22000 views. By linking xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment to civil society organisations that take up immigrant and refugee rights within the ambit of the Constitution, it may well be that this conversation is being mobilised towards a more sinister objective i.e., undermining civil society so as to engender sympathy for a more anti-democratic right-wing political force to gain momentum in South Africa. Indeed, this mirrors the rhetoric that has accompanied the rise of the right in countries such as Hungary and India, which target and constrain civil society.

Figure 9: Example tweet about undocumented immigrants

There is a prominent trend of calling for amendments to the South African Constitution, specifically the section that states "all who live in the country," as it is deemed problematic by some individuals who are in favour of deportation. This perspective is accompanied by a disregard for democratic institutions and norms (see example here, here and here).

Xenophobic rhetoric is being framed in the conversation as patriotism. A subtheme that is prevalent is of South Africans joining patriotic groups and being prepared to defend their country. This continues to be associated primarily with the hashtags #PutSouthAfricansFirst and #OperationDudula. This drive to garner patriotic (in reality, ultranationalist) sentiment is likely a deliberate attempt to cultivate a sense of unity between South Africans in opposition to outsider groups, exploiting national pride and identity for political gain at the electoral polls. This may turn out to be a particularly effective tactic, given how deeply polarised and divided South Africans have been in recent history; this unifying message may well resonate with those who feel a strong need for connection and belonging.

In September, BBC's Africa Eye released a documentary entitled 'Fear and loathing in South Africa". The documentary saw BBC Africa Eye gaining access to members of Operation Dudula and following some of the member's activities in which they go to confront foreigners who are running informal businesses in South Africa, which Operation Dudula is well-known for shutting down. The documentary found that their hate towards foreigners is rooted in the belief that foreigners are responsible for selling drugs and causing economic

hardship in South Africa. In Appendix A, details about Operation Dudula, their party leader and political aspirations and the top comments on the YouTube BBC documentary can be found.

"Proudly Xenophobic"

Some tweets mention that South Africans who raised concerns about immigration in the past were labelled as xenophobic and there is a growing number of accounts that refer to themselves as 'proudly xenophobic'. There is a subtheme that those who are 'proudly xenophobic' do not bother about the insult because they have a genuine concern and are not being heard/being dismissed through the use of the word xenophobia. This narrative is frequently paired with the idea that citizens are ignored.

The impact of uncontrolled immigration on South Africans is a repeat subtheme. For example, this tweet highlights the view that the ANC government is bringing in "foreigners" into the country, leading to profits for rent lords and White Monopoly Capital while South Africans suffer. Another tweet makes an appeal to farmers to stop hiring immigrants as cheap labour:

"Dear SA farmers, especially white South African farmers: The reason why most farm attacks and murders aren't solved is because the police can't trace illegal immigrants. Therefore, stop hiring illegal immigrants for cheap labour. It is for your own safety and protection."

During the reporting period there was discussion about the statistics on youth unemployment rates in South Africa and Nigeria, compared to other countries like Spain, Finland, and Iran, highlighting the economic challenges faced by African nations and the need for solutions to address high unemployment rates. Political challenges in Nigeria, Niger, Zimbabwe and South Africa were among the discussion points in the conversation.

In terms of tensions between South Africans and Nigerians, several headlines mention the strained relationship between Nigeria and South Africa, addressing issues such as the cancellation of Burna Boy's show due to South Africans rejecting it and discussions on xenophobia and crime.

A significant part of the crime discourse about Zimbabweans centres around the perception that Zimbabweans are involved in illegal mining activities characterised by the zama zama phenomenon, and that they are bringing explosives into South Africa. Consequently, there is a call to drive zama zamas out.

One narrative centering on Zimbabweans - espoused by South Africans who regard themselves as patriots - is to say that there is no war in Zimbabwe. This in turn is used to state that it is the responsibility of Zimbabweans

to go home and address the issues in their own country. There was a strong call on Zimbabweans living in South Africa to go home and vote in the Zimbabwean elections. Following the release of the election results, there has been a prevailing narrative on social media suggesting that Zimbabweans residing in South Africa did not return home to vote, thereby contributing to the outcome. SADC observers reported that some aspects of the election did not align with the constitutional requirements of Zimbabwe and the Electoral Act. After the election outcome, Zimbabweans living in South Africa planned to march to the Zimbabwean embassy over their concerns about whether the elections were free and fair. Patriotic Alliance leader, Gayton McKenzie called on South Africa's Department of Home Affairs to arrest and deport the Zimbabweans who planned to march to the embassy (see Figure 10). The march did not go ahead.

Figure 10: Gayton McKenzie calls on Home Affairs to deport Zimbabweans

There are concerns among Zimbabweans about the political situation in Zimbabwe, with calls for justice and accountability in the country being made regarding cases of enforced disappearances, abductions, and torture, with demands for the authorities to treat these crimes seriously.

There is criticism of both the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and ZANU PF in Zimbabwe, with claims that they have failed their respective countries and have not addressed the concerns of their citizens.

This appears to be a critique of the historical "soft diplomacy" approach South Africa has taken towards the situation in Zimbabwe, calling for a more hardline approach towards the embattled neighbouring country.

8.   Key events

8.1.   **Johannesburg fire**

On 31 August, a fire broke out at the Usindiso building at 80 Albert Street in Marshalltown Johannesburg. This was an unprecedented is a significant humanitarian disaster in which 77 people died, the majority of them initially assumed to be immigrants at the time. More than 500 previous tenants of the premises were left without accommodation.

This is included in the report because of the response of numerous political leaders to events surrounding the fire. The response was oriented towards blaming foreign nationals and NGOs who litigate to prevent the eviction of residents of hijacked buildings without alternative accommodation being provided. Here again, anti-civil society rhetoric was opportunistically mobilised in the wake of the tragedy. It quickly became a political football.

Speaking to SABC News in an interview, former Johannesburg mayor and leader of ActionSA, Herman Mashaba, asserted that the tragic fire incident could have been prevented if city officials had taken the matter of neglected buildings seriously. Mashaba went on to say that during his tenure as mayor, he faced backlash for advocating for the issue to be addressed.

When briefing the media (see news article here), Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, said in response to a question: "And whether it is an indication of a housing problem, it is not because the majority of those people who stay and reside in hijacked buildings are not South African and they are not in this country legally and the government cannot provide housing to illegal immigrants."

The Johannesburg Fire Response Action Group, led by members of civil society, conducted thorough interviews with survivors to assess fire victim's needs and the humanitarian response. The data indicates that the greatest number of individuals impacted by the fire are South Africans. Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia highlighted in a media release that this information contradicts the prevailing narrative advanced by politicians and other government officials who have gone to great lengths to shift blame onto migrants and social justice NGOs in order to evade responsibility for the deteriorating condition of Johannesburg's urban structures.

A week after the fire at Albert Street, there was another fire 100m away at a nearby apartment block in Delvers Street (see article here). There has also been a recent gas explosion in Lilian Ngoyi Street (previously Bree Street), Johannesburg, with infrastructure failures becoming commonplace.

An inquiry into the Marshalltown fire will be done by former Constitutional Court Judge, Sisi Kampepe. The start of the inquiry has been delayed due to budgetary challenges. The inquiry's focus will include assessing the extent of hijacked buildings in Johannesburg (see news articles here and here).

8.2. Sizokthola /Sizokuthola

Two words that featured prominently among the hashtags of this data set were #sizokthola and #sizokuthola. Collectively they appeared 8 640 times over the reporting period. Sizokuthola is a crime reality show in which the host, Xolani Khumalo, claims to target drug dealers who are living in South Africa. While recording an episode for the show, Khumalo and his crew allegedly beat a local drug dealer, Robert Varrie, in a confrontation. Khumalo is charged with murder after Varrie later died.

A picket and march were arranged in support of the popular host. Put South Africans First were key proponents of the march. South Africans First members became disenchanted with Xolani when he invited immigrants to join the march, as he said that he did not have a problem with foreign nationals, but that the problem was with crime. The march in September in support of Xolani also became politicised and PSAF was sidelined (see Figure 11). The support for Xolani then evaporated. As can be seen in Figure 12, PSAFLIVE tweeted that Xolani's boss, Bokani Moyo, is a Zimbabwean foreigner and this is why he invited foreigners to the march. The tweet also says she is in contravention of the immigration act. Note that this claim is not verified.

Figure 11: March in support of Xolani Khumalo

Figure 12: Tweet about Xolani's boss

Several journalists who have reported on news items involving foreign nationals have been subject to targeted harassment and trolling online. In Figure 13 below, PowerFM host Lerato Mbele is trolled about what she said during her show when speaking about the incident involving Varrie's death.

Figure 13: Lerato Mbele being trolled

In the X post below (Figure 14), a listener agrees with what Lerato Mbele had said on PowerFM about the danger of ignoring the rule of law when it comes to combating drug dealing. It however received far fewer views than the tweet (Figure 13) in which Mbele was trolled.
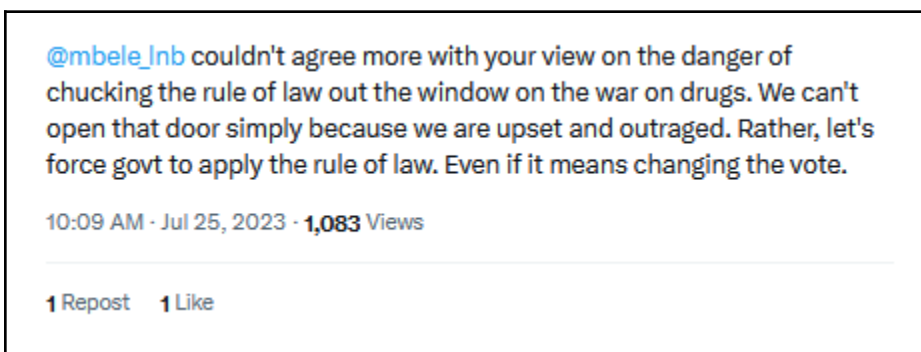

Figure 14: A listener agrees about upholding the rule of law

9.   Opportunities for intervention

It is essential to address both individual and systemic factors to effectively reduce prejudice and promote tolerance. In this section we identify interventions more broadly through which xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric can be addressed in South Africa. These include:

- **NGOs and Civil Society**: Support organisations that work to combat xenophobia by providing them with an overview of social media trends through establishing a dissemination strategy for the report series.

- **Interfaith and Intercommunity Initiatives:** Promote interfaith and intercommunity dialogues and initiatives that foster understanding and unity among diverse groups.

- **Addressing socio-economic challenges:** Examine the key challenges that citizens are faced with and develop interventions to acknowledge and address the challenges for which immigrants are being scapegoated.

- **Raise Awareness**: Educate the public about the use of xenophobia in political campaigns. Highlight the tactics employed by politicians to exploit fear and prejudice for electoral gain. Educate voters about the importance of making informed decisions based on policies and candidates' qualifications rather than falling for xenophobic rhetoric.

- **Hold politicians accountable:** Voice opposition to xenophobic election campaign tactics and call for more responsible and ethical politics. Call on the Independent Electoral Commission to ensure that the Electoral Act and Electoral Code of Conduct are observed. Understanding the candidates who stand for election through the formation of newly formed political parties is also important as is an understanding of who supports them and the rationale behind giving militant opportunists like Operation Dudula a platform on local and international news media channels.

- **Law Enforcement**: Conduct research which explores what the social media conversation reveals about the ways in which law enforcement responds to address hate crimes and discrimination against immigrants. Outline ways in which the response can be improved and promote legal consequences for those who engage in xenophobic acts.

- **Media and Communication**: Encourage responsible reporting in the media to avoid sensationalising incidents or ascribing the blame to immigrants when the facts are not clear. These efforts can include pre-election training on how to approach reporting incidents where political parties campaign on the basis of xenophobia.

- **Policy Reforms**: Monitor policy reforms related to immigration and migrant rights to ensure they are fair and transparent. Policies that support integration and inclusivity can help reduce xenophobia.

- **International Cooperation**: Work with neighbouring countries and international organisations to address the root causes of migration and share best practices for combating xenophobia.

- **Citizen monitoring**: Undertake a citizen monitoring initiative to assess the implementation of the [National Action Plan to combat xenophobia, racism, and discrimination](#). This could include issuing an interim report card assessing implementation against the plan.

10. Conclusion

This report examines xenophobic and anti-immigrant narratives in South African social media discourse during the third quarter of 2023. It underscores the importance of monitoring and addressing harmful narratives, which have the potential to perpetuate stereotypes, incite violence, and harm the well-being of immigrants and the broader society.

The findings presented here emphasise the role of social media in shaping public opinion, as well as the impact of political campaigns and socioeconomic factors in driving these discussions. The interconnectedness between traditional media and social media platforms further highlights the urgency of addressing xenophobia on multiple fronts.

Efforts to combat xenophobia should include raising awareness, promoting humanising conversation, and fostering constructive dialogue within communities. Education and media literacy initiatives are essential to empower individuals to critically evaluate information and question their own biases.

Appendix A

"Top comments" to the BBC documentary based on the number of likes and comments are shown in Figure 10 below and reflect that South Africans and foreigners who live or have lived in South Africa are intolerant of Dudula's views in the documentary.
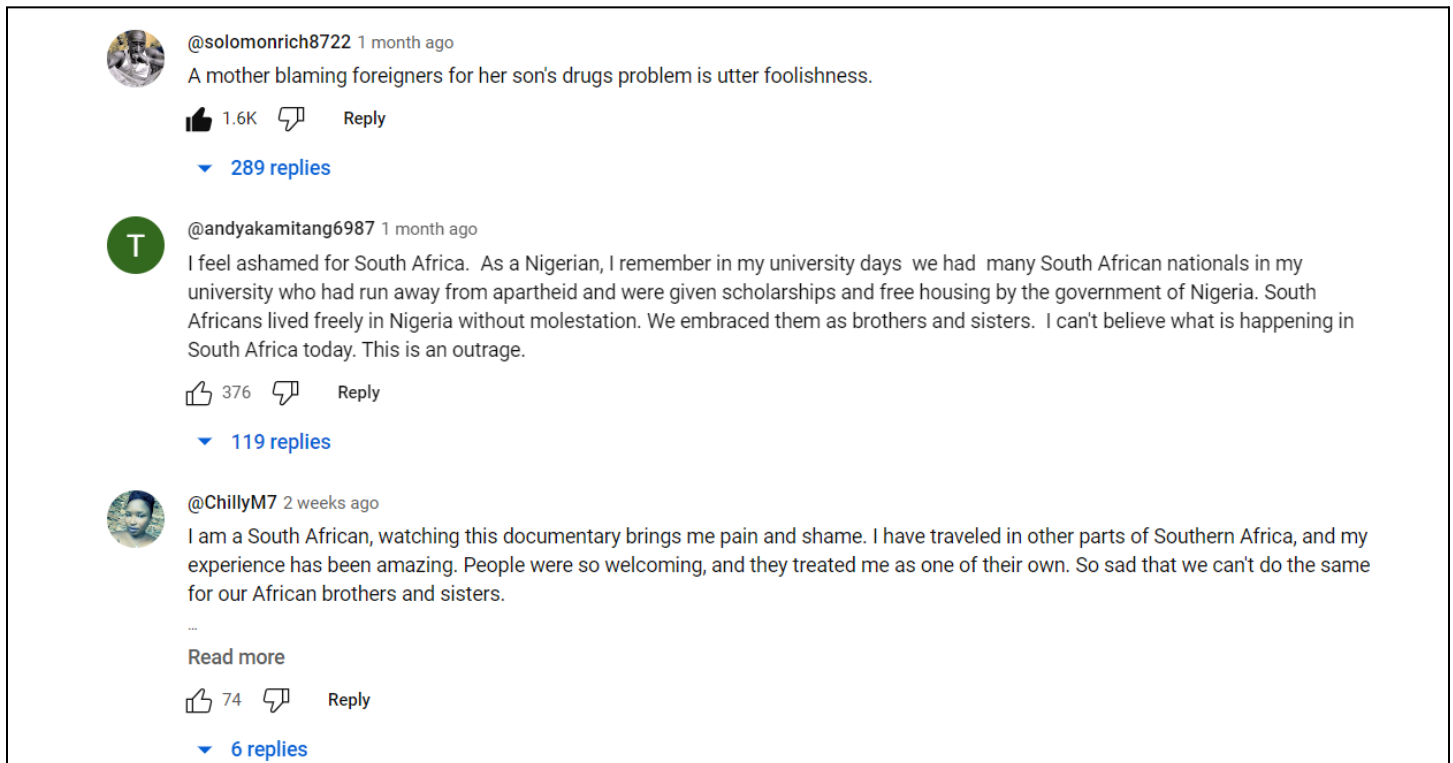

Figure 1: Top comments to BBC documentary that features Operation Dudula

At the time the documentary was released, Operation Dudula had ambitions to become a national political party and contest the upcoming general election. The group denies promoting violence but believes that action must be taken to prevent the country from being taken over by foreigners. A BBC article, Inside South Africa's Operation Dudula: "'Why we hate foreigners'" provided further contextual information. The hashtag about the documentary in the conversation is #BBCAfricaEye. Some of the responses to the documentary from people associated with Operation Dudula - or sympathetic to its views - were predictably xenophobic and/or anti-immigrant (see here and here).

During the reporting period, the IEC gazetted a list of parties that had registered to contest the 2024 elections. Operation Dudula was among the newly registered parties (see articles here, here and here). This adds more credence to previous observations that the scapegoating of immigrants and a continued campaign of xenophobia is being used as part of an electioneering tactic. In reality, a party that is as new and as small as Operation Dudula is not likely to have built enough momentum to garner any meaningful number of votes -

meaningful in the sense of acquiring an appropriate number of seats in parliament - to drive the change the party claims they will. Hence, voting for Operation Dudula out of anger towards foreigners is likely not going to solve the infrastructural issues that South Africans face. It will, however, likely serve to dilute the general vote, increasing the prospects for coalition governments.

To explain this point more precisely, Table 1 below represents the political parties that received enough votes to win seats in parliament in the 2014 and 2019 national general elections. The party name is shown along with the number of seats they won in parliament, the percentage of votes and the year in which the party was created.

Table 1: Results of 2014 and 2019 National General Elections[6]

2014				2019			
PARTY	SEATS	% OF VOTES	Year Formed	PARTY	SEATS	% OF VOTES	
ANC	249	62.15%	1912	ANC	230	57.50%	1912
DA	89	22.25%	2000	DA	84	20.77%	2000
EFF	25	6.25%	2013	EFF	44	10.79%	2013
IFP	10	2.50%	1975	IFP	14	3.38%	1975
NFP	6	1.50%	2011	FF PLUS	10	2.38%	1994
UDM	4	1.00%	1997	ACDP	4	0.84%	1993
FF PLUS	4	1.00%	1994	UDM	2	0.45%	1997
COPE	3	0.75%	2008	ATM	2	0.44%	2018
AIC	3	0.75%	2005	GOOD	2	0.40%	2018
ACDP	3	0.75%	1993	NFP	2	0.35%	2011
AGANG SA	2	0.50%	2013	AIC	2	0.28%	2005
PAC	1	0.25%	1959	COPE	2	0.27%	2008

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[6] The 2014 and 2019 results table excluding the field labelled "year formed" has been taken from the Parliamentary Monitoring Blog - https://pmg.org.za/blog/ElectionResults

APC	1	0.25%	2007	PAC	1	0.19%	1959
				ALJAMA	1	0.18%	2007

The notable outliers in Table 1 ahead of the 2014 elections are the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) and Agang SA (Party name translates to "let us build South Africa") i.e. 2 out of the 14 parties that won seats in parliament that were formed in 2013. The EFF was created by former head of the ANC youth league, Julius Malema, who had for years before the 2014 elections gained the support of many due to their radical, populist left-wing rhetoric that mobilised voters who felt let-down by the ANC's (African National Congress) centrist policies. AGANG SA was formed by an even more prominent figure than Julius Malema, Mamphela Ramphele. She was an anti-apartheid activist and the Vice Chancellor at the University of Cape Town. Even with this clout in the political arena, Ramphele's party didn't perform well enough and lost all its seats in the 2019 election.

The outliers ahead of the 2019 elections were the ATM (African Transformation Movement) and the GOOD political party formations. The founder of the GOOD party is Patricia De Lille who has a long-standing history in South African politics and is well known for leaving the PAC when she formed the Independent Democrats who were dissolved into the DA after the 2014 elections. De Lille has held office as the mayor of Cape Town and is currently the incumbent Minister of tourism. The most notable outlier from the results of the 2019 election was the ATM party, headed by Vuyolwethu Zungula, a young candidate with an Honours in Business Management. Despite his lack of popularity and activity in the public sphere up until the 2019 elections (compared to his counterparts), Zungula's ATM was backed by the South African Council of Messianic Churches in Christ, which has millions of congregants.

The analysis of how newly formed parties have fared when created the year before national general elections is to draw attention to the ambitions of Operation Dudula who appear to drive xenophobic narratives for a politicised agenda.

What do we know about Operation Dudula and its party leadership?

As a movement, Operation Dudula was formed with Nhlanhla Mohlauli (who went by the name Nhlanhla Lux Dlamini when Operation Dudula began) as its leader and appeared to be a quasi-militant organisation. From the outset, Lux appeared duplicitous based on the image he portrayed as a militant leader compared to his upbringing and the CABC wrote about this in April 2022. In 2022 Lux was issued with charges for a house raid in Soweto - the MO of Operation Dudula at the time i.e. to enter and ransack any house, while dressed in military regalia, if they believed that house to be selling drugs or connected in some way to illegal foreigners.

Operation Dudula as a political party, if any.

The new leader of Operation Dudula, Zandile Dabula, may be receiving a platform through documentaries like that of BBC Africa and through local news provider the SABC, but little is known about her. A search on LinkedIn shows that she is presently the Sustainability Coordinator of MOTUS, a leading business in South Africa's automotive sector, and that she has worked at Afrika Tikkun (an NPO in the past). The image of the person on the LinkedIn profile appears to be the Zandile Dabule who now adorns military regalia as the head of Operation Dudula (See figure 11 below). However, MOTUS and Afrika Tikkun have not yet been contacted to verify this information.
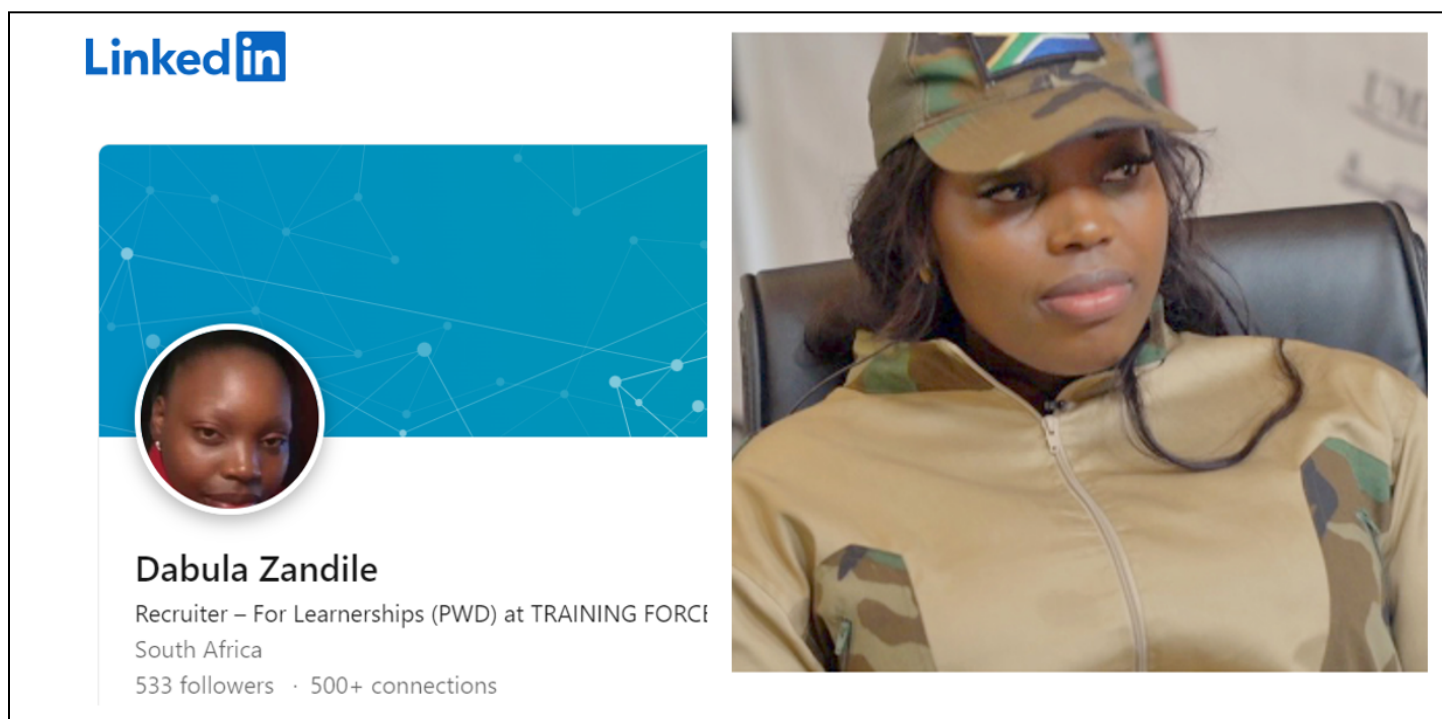

Figure 2: Zandile Dabula, leader of Operation Dudula.

More research and enquiry is needed to confirm who Zandile Dabula is and how she became the head of a political formation. Dabula appears to lack a clear political background and the extent of her support is unknown.