Project: Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society

Project Series: Xenophobia

Social Media Analytics Report 7

01 November 2023 - 10 January 2024
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1. Findings Summary

- Between 01 November 2023, and 10 January 2024, there were 609,738 online mentions about immigrants in South Africa, a 9% decrease from the previous period. (Section 5)
- 81,818 individual users contributed to the conversation, averaging 7.5 mentions each. (5)
- The highest daily mention volume peaked on 05 January at 12 499, with further notable peaks around 07 December and 06 January. (5)
- In the discussion on immigrants in South Africa, political leaders and party handles dominate the most mentioned accounts, with @gaytonmck and @onsbaizanie leading. @advobarryroux, known for political satire, is third. (6)
- Accounts that have posted the highest volume of tweets/Xs are relatively unknown, showing that while politicians get more mentions, most tweets come from unidentified accounts. (6)
- The topics wheel delineates three primary themes: Nigeria, Zimbabwe/Zimbabweans, and South Africa/South Africans. (7)
- The top hashtags during the reporting period are #operationdudula and #putsouthafricansfirst. Other notable hashtags include #crimewatch, #zimbabwe, and variations of #voetsekanc. (8)
- The weekly mention volume for five political parties is depicted, with the ANC having the highest volume, followed by Put South Africa First, Operation Dudula, ActionSA, and the Patriotic Alliance. (9)
- The corresponding reach for the parties is shown, revealing that the ANC has the greatest reach, followed by the same parties as in the point directly above. (9)
- In terms of the share of mention volume for the five parties, the ANC has the greatest mention proportion of the mention volume (39%), in terms of the share of reach, the ANC has 68%. (9)
- Topic wheels per party highlight key topics for each party in the context of the conversation about immigrants in South Africa. Notably, the Patriotic Alliance's content emphasises voting for the PA. (9)
- In terms of key trends, the top keywords include people, SA, and government, while top locations are Africa and South Africa. Dominant phrases involve discussions on illegal immigrants, impending deportations, and corruption within the Department of Home Affairs. (8)
- Instances of xenophobic disinformation linked to political parties illustrate the hazards associated with disinformation within the electoral landscape. (10)

2. Introduction

The "Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society" report series is funded by the European Union (EU), with this particular part of the Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change (CABC)

programme focusing on xenophobia. It offers regular analysis of troubling narratives and divisive content relating to xenophobia on South African social media, specifically Twitter/X. This report, the seventh in the series, focuses on the role that political parties play in conversations about immigrants in South Africa. The dynamics surrounding migration are contributing to complex challenges globally that require careful navigation and consideration of the rights and well-being of all involved parties. 2024 will see a large number of countries including South Africa going to the voting booths.

The effect of disinformation campaigns on democratic processes, particularly elections, is a subject of ongoing concern in scholarly literature. Judge and Korhani[1] observe that electoral disinformation campaigns purposefully mislead voters and undermine the integrity of elections. Disinformation can have multifaceted effects, such as altering individual opinions[2], influencing election participation[3], and affecting the voting process[4]. In some cases, the spread of false or misleading information can even lead to acts of violence[5]. Significant attention has been given in the literature to the impact of disinformation campaigns in notable events like the Brexit and Trump elections. Bennett and Livingston[6] found that these campaigns disrupted democratic processes by targeting centre parties and undermining electoral procedures. The effects of disinformation on democratic processes has also been illustrated in the 2019 Indonesian election[7]. Additionally, Ferreira[8] researched Brazil's 2018 election and revealed how disinformation tactics were adapted to evade platform countermeasures, highlighting the ineffectiveness of regulatory measures. Overall, existing literature underscores the serious threat that disinformation poses to democracy.

[1] Judge, E., & Korhani, A. (2019). Disinformation, Digital Information Equality, and Electoral Integrity. *LSN: Election Law & Voting Rights (Topic)*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3518800.

[2] Sharma, K., Ferrara, E., & Liu, Y. (2021). Characterizing Online Engagement with Disinformation and Conspiracies in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election. , 908-919. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v16i1.19345.

[3] Benkler, Y., Tilton, C., Etling, B., Roberts, H., Clark, J., Faris, R., Kaiser, J., & Schmitt, C. (2020). Mail-In Voter Fraud: Anatomy of a Disinformation Campaign. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.3703701.

[4] Bader, M. (2018). Disinformation in Elections. *Security and Human Rights*. https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02901006.

[5] Tompkins, J. (2019). Disinformation Detection: A review of linguistic feature selection and classification models in news veracity assessments. *ArXiv*, abs/1910.12073.

[6] Bennett, W., & Livingston, S. (2018). The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European Journal of Communication*, 33, 122 - 139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323118760317.

[7] Yankoski, M., Weninger, T., & Scheirer, W. (2020). An AI early warning system to monitor online disinformation, stop violence, and protect elections. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 76, 85 - 90. https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2020.1728976.

[8] Ferreira, R. (2021). Liquid Disinformation Tactics: Overcoming Social Media Countermeasures through Misleading Content. *Journalism Practice*, 16, 1537 - 1558. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1914707.

3.   Background

The Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC) has been monitoring online xenophobic content and disinformation campaigns since 2020. CABC published a series of reports, including the Lay of the Land Report in June 2022, providing an overview of xenophobic micro-narratives in South Africa. In the first quarter of 2023, CABC initiated the "Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society" report series to combat hate speech and discrimination. Report 1, released in March 2023, analysed xenophobia on social media, finding over 80% negativity towards immigrants. Subsequent reports (Report 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) focused on political mobilisation, key individuals, coordinated campaigns, social media trends and micro-narratives. The Beyond Borders Report in October 2023 revealed tactics used by anti-immigrant proponents, including mis- and disinformation, exaggerated statistics, and political parties leveraging these tactics for upcoming elections.

4.   Research Methodology

The date range of 01 November 2023 to 10 January 2024 was selected for the analysis period of this report. The data was collected using a social media analytics tool. Initial keywords were selected through a qualitative process, combining existing knowledge, desk research, a literature review, and social media analysis. These keywords were further refined through manual checks. A social media analytics tool was utilised to track discussions about xenophobia in South Africa. This social media analytics tool collects data and enables analysis from various sources, with Twitter (now known as X) being the primary platform. Many South African politicians are active users of X, and media organisations heavily rely on the platform. The group analysis (see section 9) is only on X. It entailed setting up a search to find the party names within the account information and thereby develop a list of party leaders and members. The social panel for these lists of accounts was saved and applied separately to the conversation to determine what content each of five selected political parties were contributing to the conversation. The parties were selected on the basis of appearing prominently in the conversation.

5.   Conversation volume

From 01 November 2023 to 10 January 2024, there were a total of 609 738 online mentions discussing immigrants in South Africa (see Figure 1). This represents a 9% decrease compared to the previous period of the same length. These mentions were made by 81 818 different individuals, which was consistent with the number of unique authors in the previous period. On average, each account posted 7.5 mentions related to the topic of immigrants in South Africa during this approximately two-and-a-half-month period. This suggests a high average mention count as most users were found to post on average just once a month[9]. However, this

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[9] https://bloggingwizard.com/twitter-statistics/

information is based on a blog report from 2020 that is specifically about US accounts. Further research could be conducted to compare the average mentions on hot button topics across South Africa to determine what these averages imply when compared.
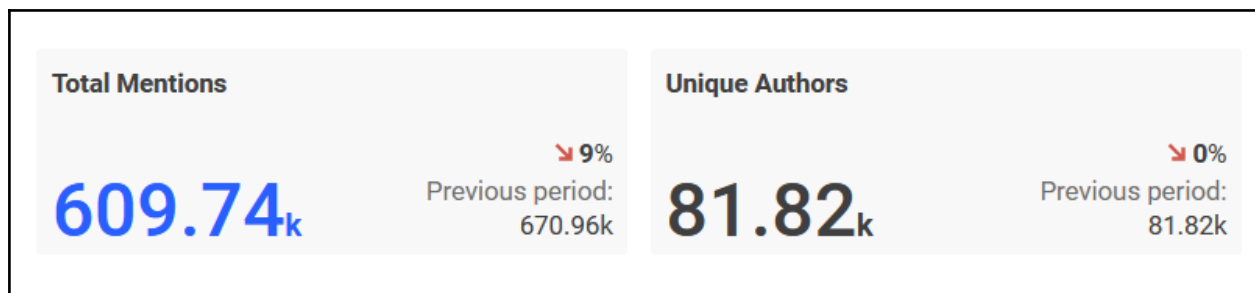

Figure 1: Volume metrics for 01 November 2023 to 10 January 2024

The daily mention volume over time is shown in Figure 2 below. The highest volume of mentions occurred on 05 January, with a total of 12 499 mentions. The second-highest peak in mention volume was on 07 December, with 12 446 mentions. This was followed by 06 January, which had a mention volume of 12 013, and 04 January, which had a mention volume of 11 871. This created a peak during the period of 04-07 January 2024. Other peaks also occurred on 07 December, with 11 948 mentions, and 14 November, with 11 628 mentions. The themes in these spikes are discussed below.
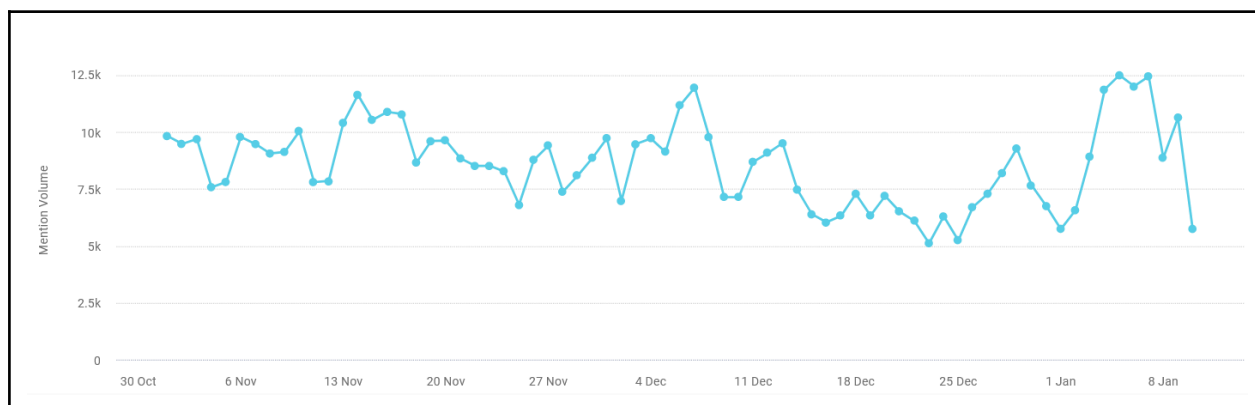

Figure 2: Daily mention volume over time for 01 November 2023 to 10 January 2024

On 05 January, the most common themes were xenophobia and tensions between different tribes/nationalities in South Africa and neighbouring countries, particularly Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Border control and immigration issues were topical, including the interception of undocumented foreign nationals and the sale of illegal identity documents. On 07 December there was a range of themes. This included topics such as open borders between Zimbabwe and Botswana, the deportation of illegal migrants, and the issue of illegal immigrants in South Africa. There are mentions of Botswana and Zimbabwe agreeing to scrap the use of passports for their citizens, allowing for easier movement between the two countries. Several headlines address the issue of illegal immigrants, with discussions about the strain they put on services, job stealing, and the need for mass deportation. Corruption within the Home Affairs department

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is mentioned, with claims of officials registering illegal immigrants under the names of South African citizens. There was a discovery of a significant gas field in Zimbabwe and the discussion revolved around potential job creation for Zimbabwean citizens.

6.   Authors

The majority of the most mentioned authors are political leaders and party handles. Most mentioned users refers to the accounts that other accounts tweet about or whose content they retweet when discussing a specific topic. See Figure 3. @gaytonmck is the most mentioned handle in the conversation, followed by @onsbaizanie - the Patriotic Alliance's handle. The third most mentioned handle was the popular influencer handle @advobarryroux which is known for its political satire. While it is not run by the well-known Advocate Barry Roux, known mostly for his role in the Oscar Pistorius case, the actual account holder does not make it clear in their bio who they are. The fourth most mentioned handle is @effsouthafrica, the Economic Freedom Fighters' official party handle. In fifth position is @myanc, the official African National Congress' handle. The tenth most mentioned handle is that of the Department of Home Affairs. Influencer accounts @miz_ruraltarain and @am_blujay also make the top ten most mentioned list. These accounts have frequently come up in the conversation over the course of CABC's reports.

Most Mentioned Tweeters	TWEETS ▼	RETWEETS	ALL TWEETS	IMPRESSIONS
👤 @gaytonmck	3836	3009	6845	31303428
👤 @onsbaizanie	3536	4717	8253	34423120
👤 @advobarryroux	1085	1479	2564	15850488
👤 @effsouthafrica	855	2231	3086	14831288
👤 @myanc	808	3019	3827	14797849
👤 @africafactszone	650	654	1304	7407251
👤 @xplusio	650	69	719	232437
👤 @am_blujay	638	1187	1825	11242429
👤 @miz_ruraltarain	626	796	1422	5440930
👤 @homeaffairssa	607	2714	3321	27908575

Figure 3: Most mentioned accounts

The top tweeters in the conversation are shown in Figure 4 below. What stands out about these accounts is that they are relatively unknown. The handles are not well-known influencers or political figures. As we have seen in other reports, specifically on the topic of the energy transition in South Africa, those users who are most mentioned also tend to be the ones who post most frequently on a topic, so this stands in contrast to other datasets that have been analysed and is worth exploring further.

| TWEETER | MATCHING TWEETS | SENTIMENT | | | IMPACT | TWITTER | DEMOGRAPHICS | | REACH |
		POS	NEG	NEU	AVERAGE	FOLLOWERS	ACCOUNT TYPE	GENDER	AVERAGE
@JosephOgbuke	1 715	10	554	1 151	0.1	606	Individual	Male	8
@Samuel33861829	1 218	49	457	712	0.1	645	Individual	Unknown	5
@stephen78000	888	31	407	450	0	206	Individual	Unknown	0
@Dib0130	862	2	3	857	0	37	Individual	Unknown	0
@SekaoV	772	15	434	323	3.4	258	Individual	Unknown	222
@MaiMatwins35zwe	753	86	273	394	0	1 568	Individual	Female	762
@1Pan_Africanist	746	48	286	412	0.9	1 737	Individual	Male	945
@mpofu_billy	705	36	311	358	0.4	1 107	Individual	Male	217
@LemonadeLe5065	688	16	305	367	0.1	443	Individual	Unknown	6
@DKMTOPERES	680	70	279	331	1	528	Individual	Unknown	86

Figure 4: Top tweeters

While politicians obtain the most X mentions in the conversation, the largest number of tweets are made by accounts where the account holder's identity is unknown. The top account @JosephOgbuke is an exception. The account's biographical page lists the location as Chad. Their content is critical of the Nigerian government. The user's content expresses dissatisfaction with the Nigerian government, highlighting issues such as corruption, human rights violations, and a lack of justice. There are several mentions of violence and insecurity in Nigeria, including mentions of torture, killings, and the activities of Islamic herdsmen. The user is a proponent of Biafra independence and calls for a Biafra referendum.

The account with the second-highest mention volume is @Samuel33861829. The most common themes in this user's X content are political controversies and debates in Zimbabwe, including discussions on Zimbabwe's relationship with other African countries, the current administration's foreign policies, and the role of political parties such as the EFF. The account engages in discussions and critiques about immigration and xenophobia, particularly directed towards Zimbabweans and other African nationals. It also focuses on business deals, investments, and economic activities in Zimbabwe, including mining and handmade products. They also discuss general political discussions about Africa, including elections in different countries, the African Union, and visa policies within the continent. This account's biographical page lists the user's location as South Africa.

7. Themes

The topics wheel in Figure 5 below shows the main themes (in the inner ring) and subthemes (in the outer ring). The three main themes are (1) Nigeria, (2) Zimbabwe/Zimbabweans and (3) South Africa/South Africans.
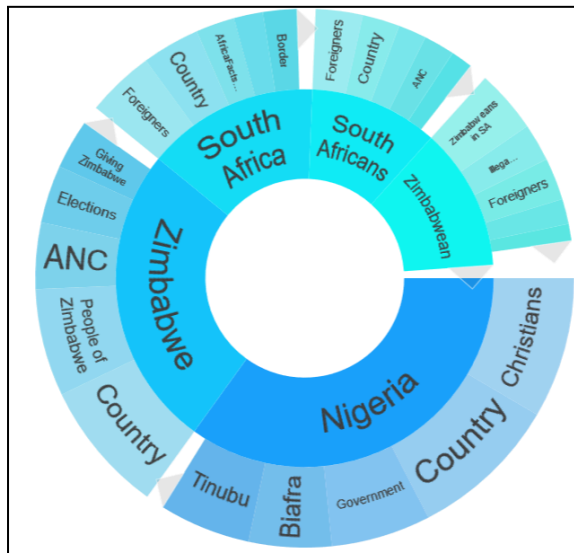
Figure 5: Topics wheel

The main theme according to the topic wheel is Nigeria. This is based on the number of times the word is found in the dataset. The conversation is mainly about economic concerns. There are numerous mentions of Nigeria's budget, debt, and the country's transition from consumption to production. There are references to a football match between Zimbabwe and Nigeria, as well as the Zimbabwean coach announcing a squad for upcoming World Cup qualifiers against Nigeria. Libya is mentioned in relation to sending illegal migrants back to Egypt and Nigeria, and there is also a mention of South Africa in relation to killings and violence. Headlines touch on topics such as broadcasting laws in Nigeria, criticisms of political figures, and social issues like suicide and women's rights. A sample of this content is contained in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Headlines and mentions within 'Nigeria' theme

In the Zimbabwe/Zimbabwean theme, the main conversation was about Zimbabwean Affairs and Politics: Several headlines discuss Zimbabwe's political situation, including comments about South Africa, the opposition in Zimbabwe, and controversial by-elections. There are headlines

addressing xenophobia and discrimination against Zimbabweans in South Africa, as well as negative comments and stereotypes about Zimbabwe. On an international relations level, some mentions were about bilateral engagements between Zimbabwe and other countries, such as South Africa and Mozambique, regarding electricity imports and water supply. A few headlines touch on social issues in Zimbabwe, such as the high cost of living, lack of medical aid, and religious practices involving payment for anointed oil. Examples of these mentions and headlines are contained in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Headlines and mentions within 'Zimbabwe/Zimbabwean' theme

In the theme, South Africa/South Africans, the most common topics were immigration and xenophobia. Several headlines discuss the issue of illegal immigrants and the negative impact they have on South Africa. There are also mentions of xenophobic attacks. South Africa's relationship with Zimbabwe is mentioned multiple times, particularly in relation to issues such as invasion, colonisation, and the Zimbabwean government's engagement with South Africa. There are references to concerns about the influx of foreign workers and the impact it has on South Africa's job market and skills shortage. Diplomatic relations related headlines touch on South Africa's engagements with other countries, such as Mozambique, Nigeria, and India, in areas like electricity imports and water supply. Some headlines highlight criminal activities linked to illegal immigrants, as well as the need for secure borders and law enforcement measures. Figure 8 shows a selection of these topics.
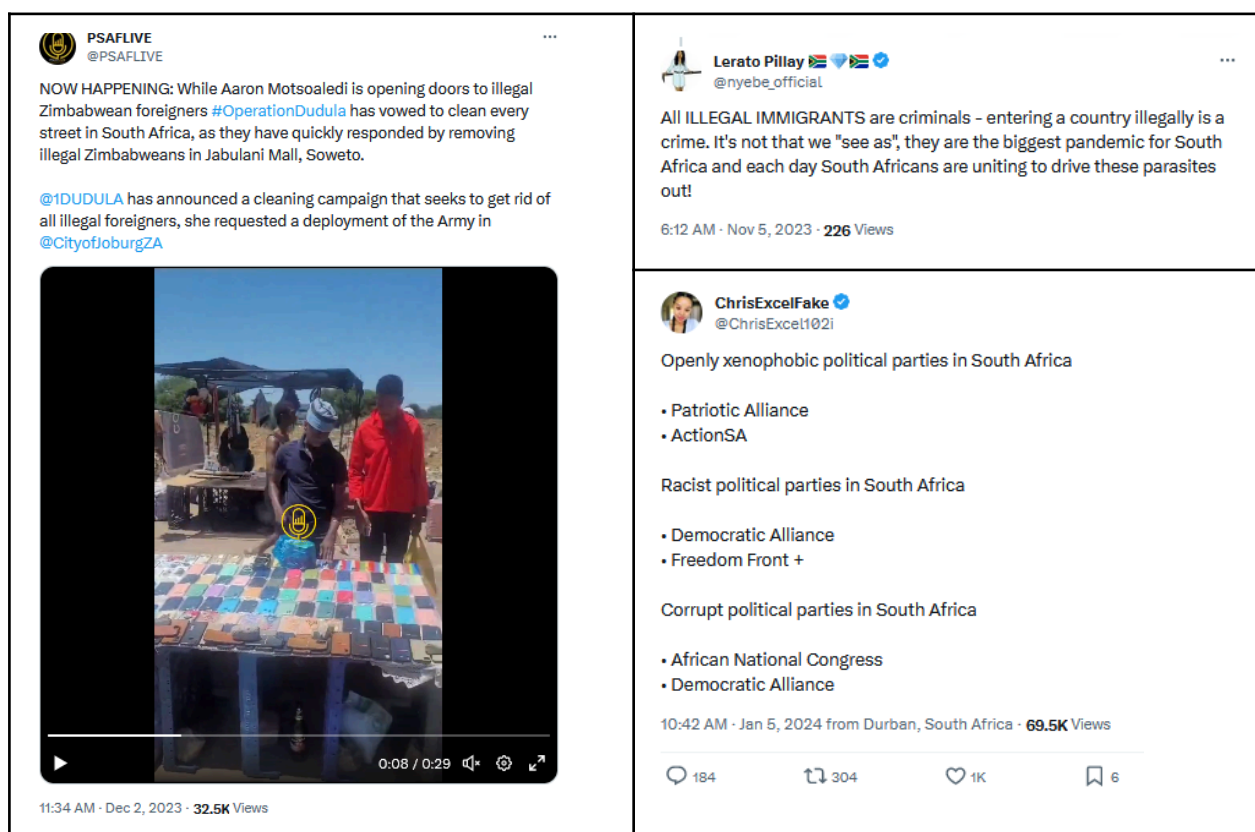

Figure 8: Headlines and mentions within 'Zimbabwe/Zimbabwean' theme

8. Group comparisons

In Figure 9 below, the mention volume per week for selected political parties and groups is shown. The parties and groups that were selected are parties that have frequently shown up in the conversation and are not exhaustive of the political parties that are involved in the conversation. The mention volume per political party is the highest for the ANC, followed by Put South Africa First, Operation Dudula, ActionSA and Patriotic Alliance[10].

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[10] Mention volume in this figure entails how many mentions are being made on social media by users who are leaders or members of a particular party are making. An example of a mention can be an X or Facebook post.
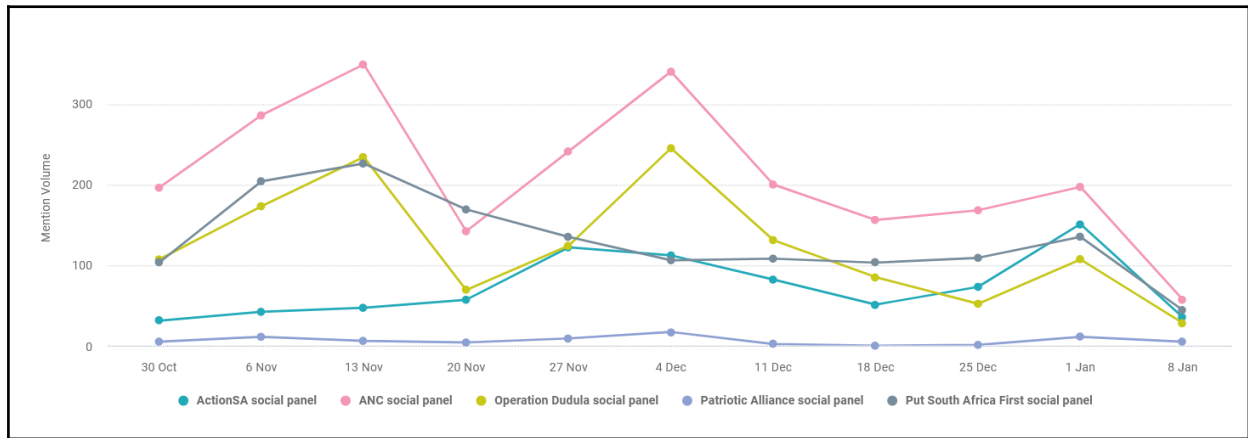
Figure 9: Mention Volume per week by party

When it comes to reach (see Figure 10), the ANC has by far the greatest reach, followed by Put South Africa First, Operation Dudula, ActionSA and Patriotic Alliance - the same order as for the mention volume (Figure 9). The reach is significantly more than the mention volume. Reach measures how many people are likely to have seen the content (Brandwatch, 2024). Refer to Figure 10.
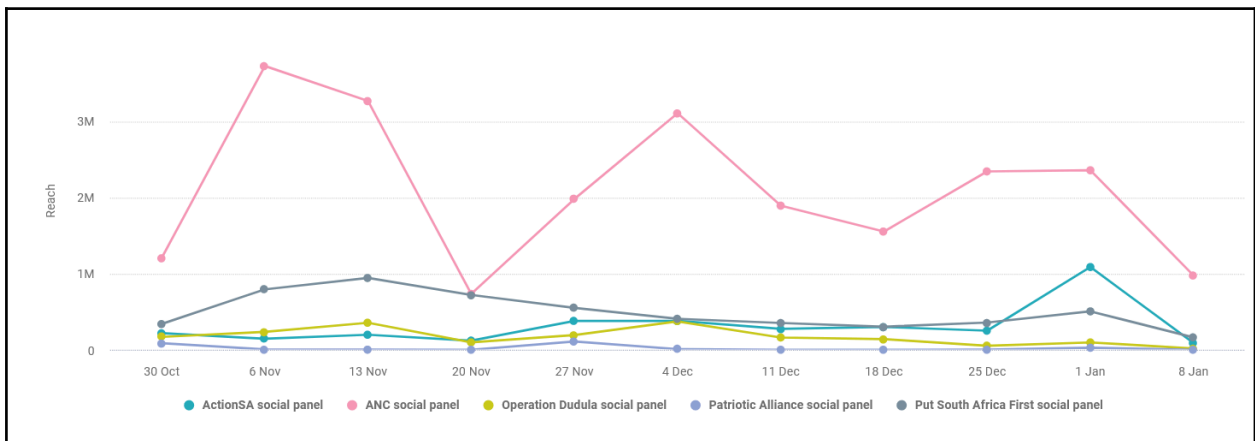
Figure 10: Reach per week by party

Figure 11 shows the share of mention volume by party/movement. Note that this is not comparing share of voice to the whole conversation, but for each of the selected parties in comparison to each other. The ANC created 39% of the mention volume (2 332 mentions), Put South Africa First 24% (1 442 mentions), Operation Dudula 23% (1 355 mentions), Action SA 13% (803 mentions) and Patriotic Alliance 1% (71 mentions).
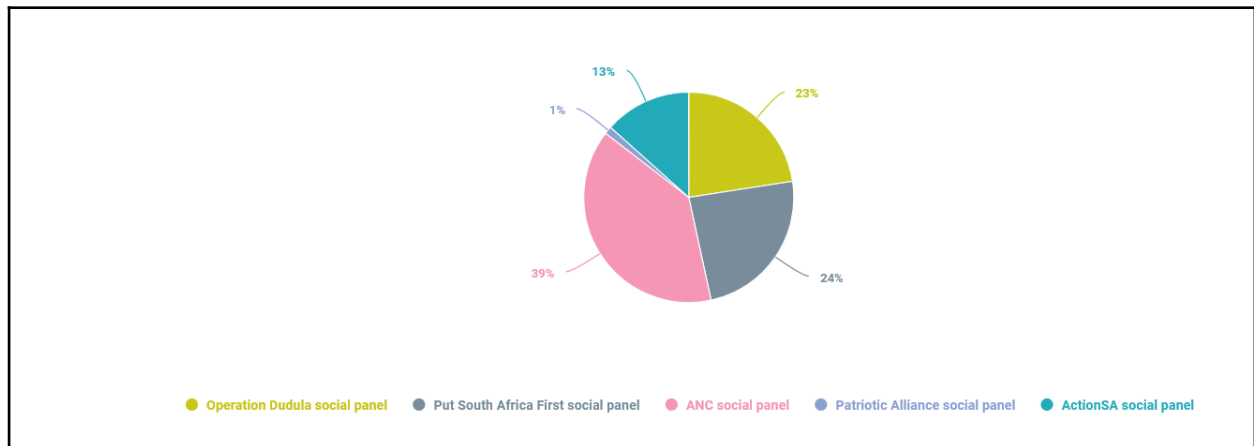
Figure 11: Share of mention volume by party

The reach for these five parties/movements is 34 123 229. That is a considerable amount. The ANC obtains 68% of the reach (23 128 467), Put South Africa First 16% (5 428 000), Action SA 10% (349 219), Operation Dudula 5% (1 885 414) and Patriotic Alliance 1% (242 149). Refer to Figure 12 below. What stands out is that the ANC gets good reach compared to the proportion of mentions it makes.
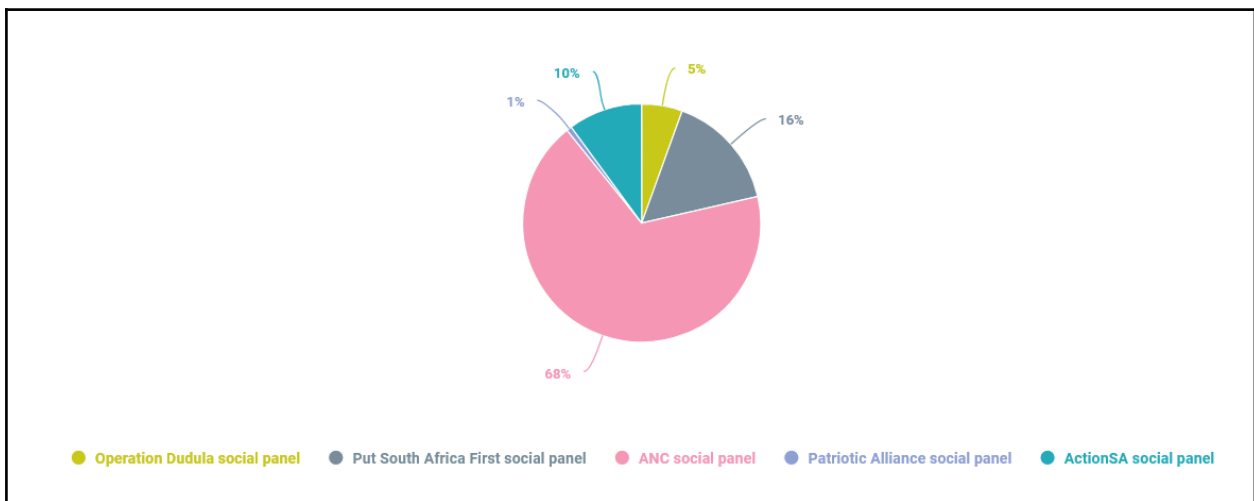
Figure 12: Share of reach by party

The topic wheels in Figures 13 and 14 show the key topics for the Patriotic Alliance and Operation Dudula. Note that the topics are mentions of these parties' within the conversation about immigrants in South Africa. They may also be speaking about other topics online.

Operation Dudula and Put South Africa First (see Annexure A, Figure A1) have a distinct similarity in the themes in their content. Figure 13 below shows the topics that Operation Dudula engaged in.
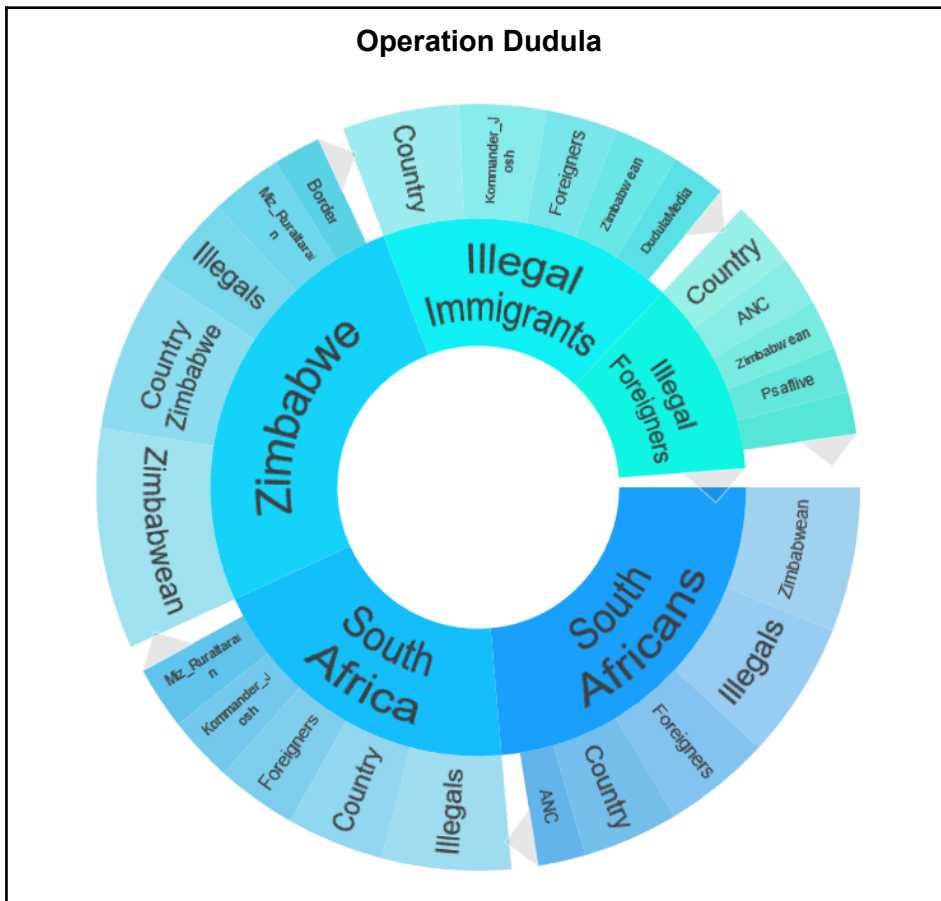
Figure 13: Topics wheel for Operation Dudula

In the ActionSA topic wheel, Herman Mashaba's name is prominent, which is consistent with the party's brand being attached to his individual brand. See Annexure A, Figure A2.

As the incumbent ruling party, the ANC (see Annexure A, Figure A3) is not necessarily campaigning on a xenophobic appeal, it is more pushed into a corner by other parties since it has failed to manage the borders and issuing of documentation effectively.

What stands out is the extent to which the Patriotic Alliance's content is about voting for the PA. See Figure 14.
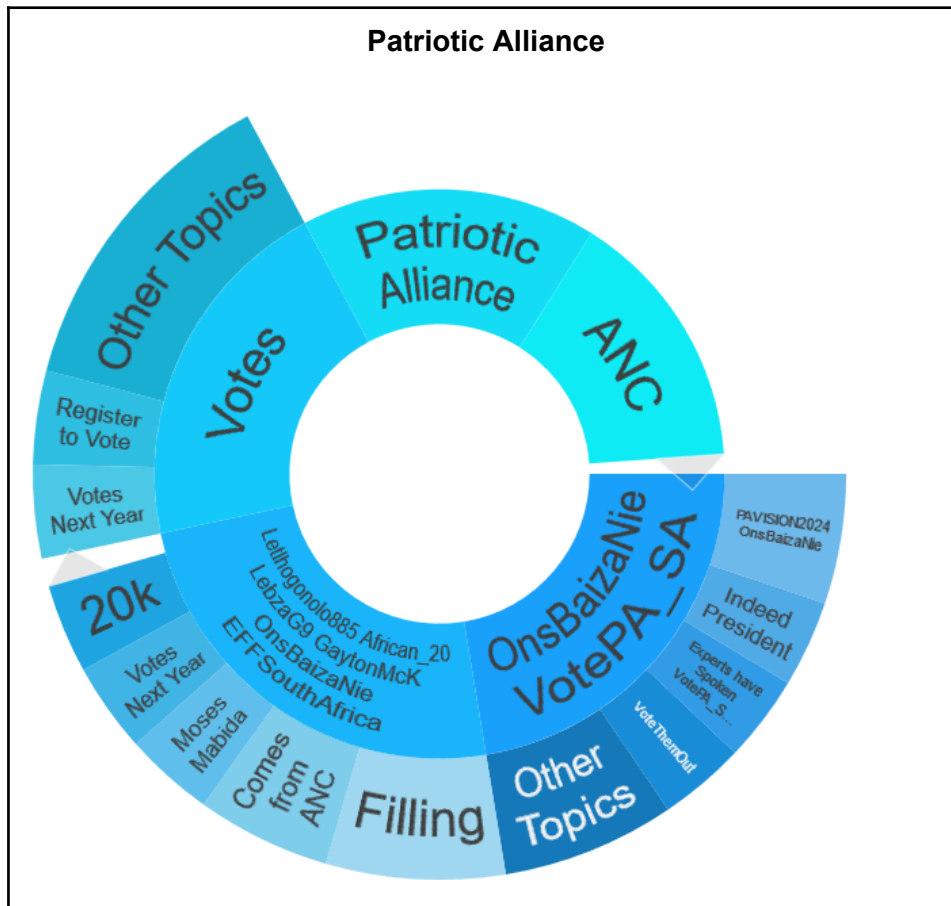
Figure 14: Topics wheel for Patriotic Alliance

After the Patriotic Alliance went to the South African and Zimbabwean border, Gayton McKenzie thanked various parties for putting pressure on illegal foreigners. See Figure 15. It is noteworthy that he mentions Patriotic Alliance, ActionSA, ATM, IFP, Operation Dudula and Put South Africa First.

Figure 15: Tweet by Gayton McKenzie

9.   Conversation trends

This section focuses on the trends in the conversation by looking at the top hashtags and top locations, phrases and keywords during the reporting period. Figure 16 below shows the top

hashtags. The larger the word size, the more times that hashtag was mentioned in the conversation. Consistent with previous reports, the most prominent hashtags are #operationdudula (1 548 mentions) and #putsouthafricansfirst (1 469 mentions).

Figure 16: Top hashtags for the period 01 November 2023 to 10 January 2024

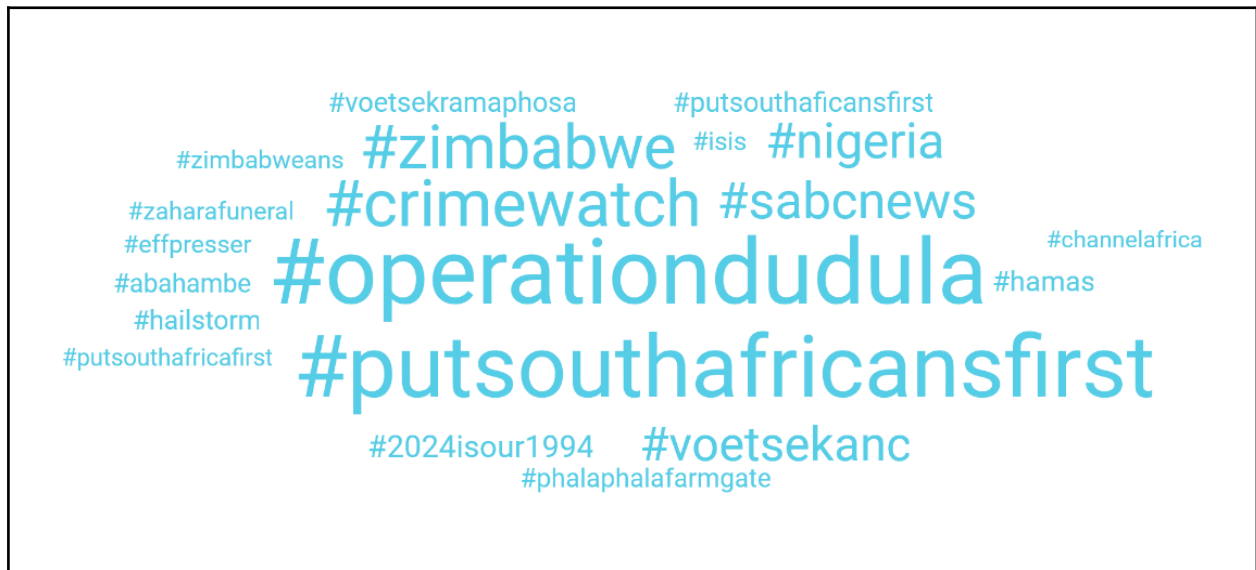The content that relates to Operation Dudula consists of the group's concerns about the impact of illegal foreigners on South Africans livelihoods. Operation Dudula, now registered as a political party, has been running an ongoing campaign aimed at combating illegal immigration in South Africa frequently through vigilante actions. The campaign under #operationdudula focuses on exposing the presence of illegal Zimbabwean foreigners in the country and alleged facilitation by authorities. There is a recurring theme of concern and frustration regarding the negative effects that illegal immigrants, specifically Zimbabweans, have on job opportunities for South Africans. A further characteristic of the conversation under this hashtag is opposition to political figures and parties, particularly the ANC, EFF, DA, and Julius Malema, in relation to the issue of illegal immigration. There is a critical tone towards these figures and parties, with accusations of hypocrisy and failure to address the problem effectively. There is frequently a negative portrayal of foreigners, particularly Nigerians, by associating them with criminal activities including selling drugs and fake, expired, and poisonous foods. Some of the content deals with violent clashes and attacks related to #OperationDudula. In the reporting period, this included instances where members of #OperationDudula clashed with private security companies owned by immigrants. These incidents appear to have resulted in the destruction of vehicles belonging to #OperationDudula members.

With regard to #PutSouthAfricansFirst, this movement continues to advocate for prioritising the interests of South Africans over foreigners. It includes discussions about employment, illegal immigration, and government policies. Many mentions criticise the African National Congress (ANC), accusing them of not caring about South Africa and its citizens. There are also mentions

of corruption within the ANC. Put South Africans First is consistent in its opposition to immigration, particularly from Zimbabwe and Nigeria. It expresses concerns about job opportunities, crime rates, and cultural differences. Several mentions encourage South Africans to prioritise their own country and fellow citizens. They emphasise the need for unity and assert that patriotism should come before political parties. Some mentions discuss violent incidents, such as the killing of South Africans and the need to fight against crime. There are also mentions of individuals being poisoned or bewitched.

Variations on Put South Africans First similarly appeared in this reporting period - #putsouthaficansfirst (with no r in Africans) and #putsouthafricafirst. The third most mentioned hashtag is #crimewatch (1 016 mentions). Among the most commonly retweeted incidents associated with the hashtag Crime Watch, were the arrest of a Zimbabwean national in Sandton JHB for practising as an advocate with fake credentials, police seizure of 40 undocumented and unlicensed firearms from a gun shop in the Germiston area, the intercepting of 500 'illegal foreigners' trying to enter South Africa from Zimbabwe and a shooting incident resulting in the death of a Chinese national in City Deep JHB. Fourth most mentioned is #zimbabwe (938 mentions).

A secondary theme, which has been repeatedly observed over the course of the report series, is #voetsekanc (meaning 'go away ANC!') and #voetsekramaphosa ('go away (President) Ramaphosa!). This implies that the Put South Africans First and Operation Dudula movements have a strong political angle in their content that aims to discredit the ruling party and incumbent president.

Interestingly, the hashtag #abahambe (meaning go away) started trending after videos of the Patriotic Alliance patrolling the Beitbridge Border between South Africa and Zimbabwe went viral. In one video (see Figure 17), Patriotic Alliance members, including leader, Gayton McKenzie, could be heard shouting abahambe to Zimbabweans who they claim are attempting to cross a river to enter South Africa illegally. This video was widely shared on TikTok and as shown in Figure 17 below, in this instance the video obtained 18 400 likes and 1 913 reposts. In an SABC news interview with Iman Rappetti, an official from the Border Management Authority explained that the men with the boats in the video facilitate the movement of people across the border. During the interview, Rapetti asked if the actions of the Patriotic Alliance are illegal and whether the party is breaking the law while grandstanding for political reasons. The official from the Border Management Authority did not want to be drawn into politics and focused instead on outlining the mandate of the Border Management Authority.
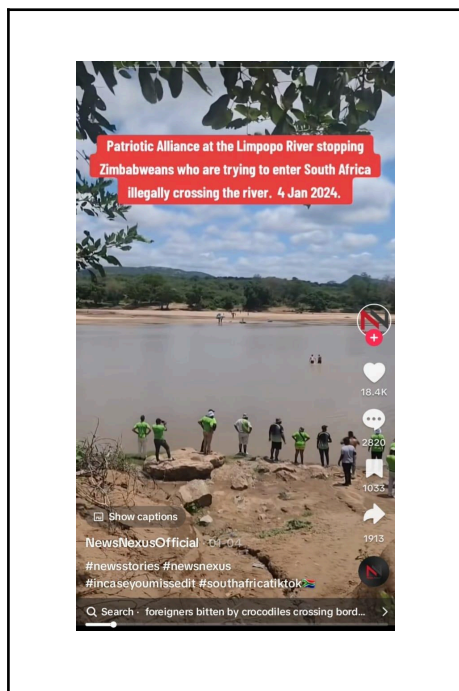
Figure 17: Patriotic Alliance stopping Zimbabweans from entering

In another video, some of the PA members were armed with guns (see Figure 18.1 and 18.2) with some members wearing shirts with the words 'WAR' and 'Patriotic Alliance' emblazoned on the back (Figure 18.3). In this video, Gayton McKenzie can be heard saying "let's catch only three", referring to the Zimbabweans who he believed were trying to cross illegally into South Africa.
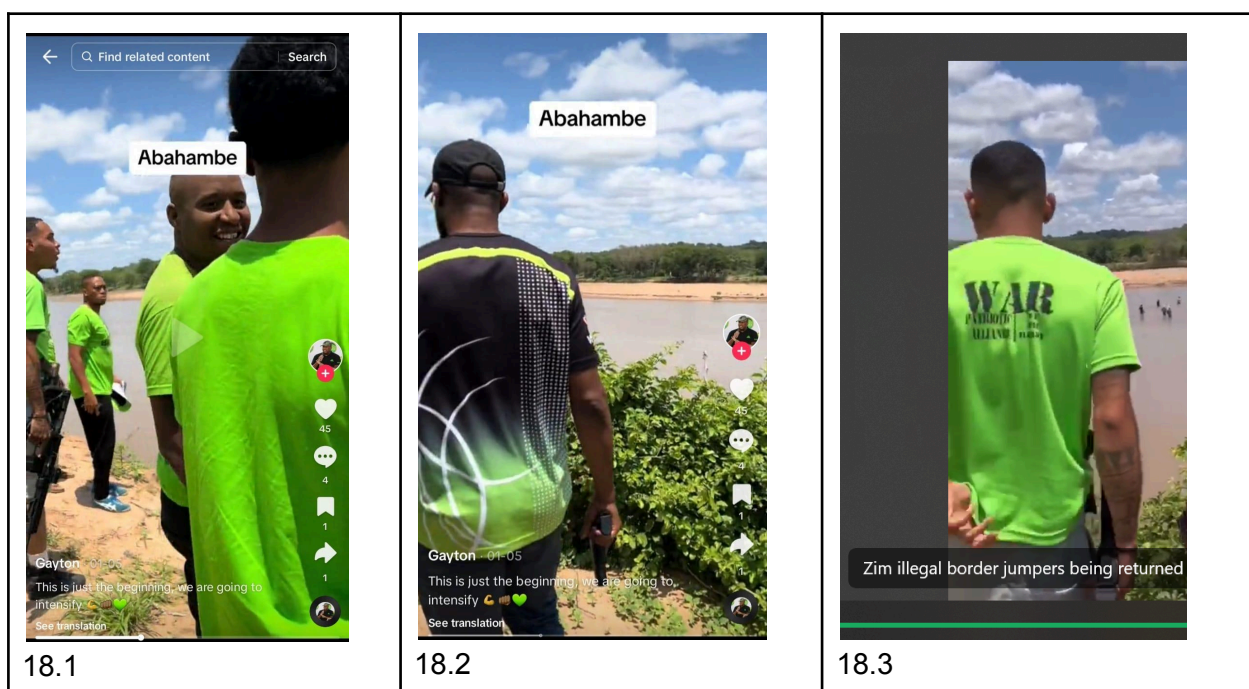

Figure 18: TikTok videos of PA members armed at South Africa / Zimbabwe border

This particular video was shared on TikTok and via WhatsApp among other social media platforms. When shared by Gayton McKenzie on TikTok it got 46 likes, 2 shares and 4

comments (see Figure 19). The commenters recognise that the elections are approaching. Some are supporters and others are critical of what they see as the PA's electioneering ploy.
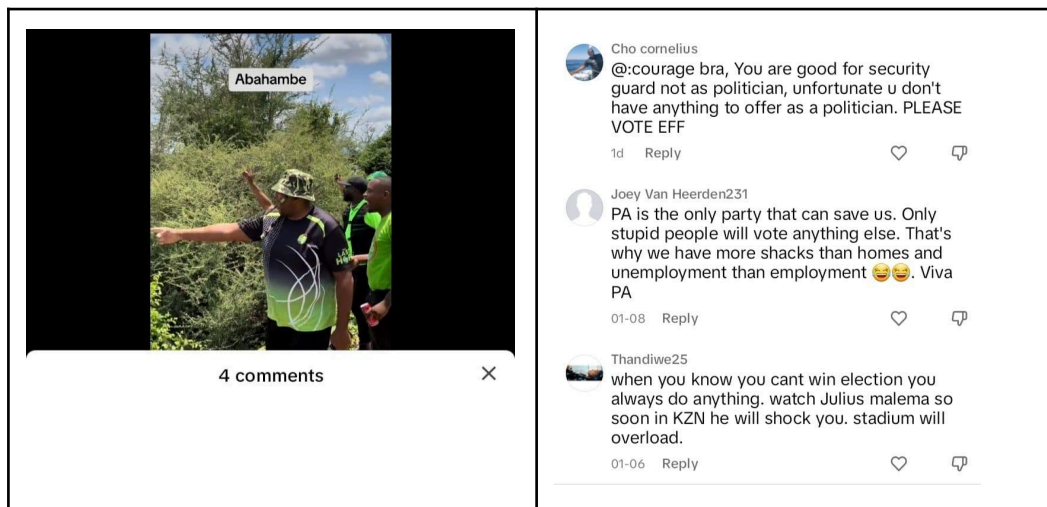

Figure 19: Comments on the video

In Figure 20, the video is of Gayton McKenzie making an appeal to President Ramaphosa to deal with the illegal crossings over the border. The Tiktok handle @sapatriot4life has 48 000 followers.

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"I'm part again of the nightshift team. We've got hundreds of people on this border. There's no one here from the Border Management Authority. We don't see soldiers here. There's no one here. Our country is naked. Forget politics for a second, tonight I want to make a call on the President of our country, His Excellency, Cyril Ramaphosa. Just forget politics for a second. We have a problem.

People were literally standing there with boxes and boxes, trying to bring that into South Africa. We didn't know what was in there. That's why we decided we're not leaving. People might bringing guns. People might bringing contraband. People might bringing dynamite for all that we know.

So we are asking of you, there are people that are being paid big money to guard our borders. They are not here. They are sleeping. None of us are getting paid, but this country has given me a second chance. This country has given me everything. I am asking you to please treat this as a matter of urgency.

We don't wanna embarrass nobody. All we are asking is that there's no one here. We've got a stretch here, the whole stretch, we've got patriots standing the whole stretch. There's absolutely no soldiers, there's absolutely no police, there's absolutely no security, so I'm from the bottom of my heart, this is not the way to run a country. Can you please do something about it? Our country is naked. Terrorists are entering, bombs might enter one of these days. Please do something about it. Please do something about it. You are putting the people of South Africa in great danger as a leader if you don't make them aware of dangers facing them. Salute.**"**

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Figure 20: Gayton McKenzie's appeal to President Ramaphosa

In the days following, Gayton McKenzie posted on X: "I love Zimbabweans, I love them enough to tell them the truth, there will be no place to hide after the election and the current politicians who supports (sic) your stay here will abandon you at the power sharing table. Go home now instead of fleeing home after May". See Figure 21 below.

Figure 21: Tweet telling Zimbabweans to go home

This tweet with its clear indication that PA intends to negotiate at the post-election coalition politics table on the basis of a xenophobic policy position. It obtained 1 360 likes, 215 reposts and 35 quote tweets. In this manner, content containing xenophobic ideas asserted by politicians spreads rapidly on social media. Subsequent to the Patriotic Alliance going to Beitbridge Border, Operation Dudula announced that it too would go to the border to oppose the entry of Zimbabweans without valid documents (see Figure 22).
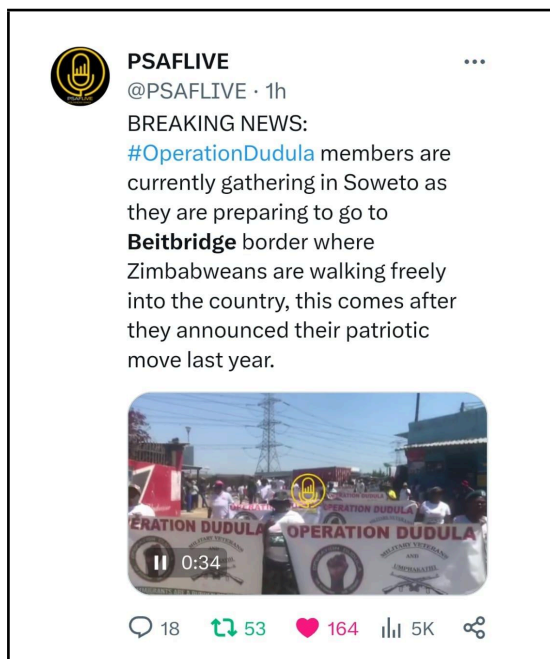

Figure 22: Operation Dudula going to the border

Figure 23 depicts the top keywords, locations and phrases. The top keywords were people (37 390 mentions), SA (18 824 mentions) and government (16 458 mentions). The top locations were Africa (26 617 mentions) and South Africa (21 622 mentions). The top phrases were illegal immigrants (14 420 mentions) and illegal foreigners (9 524 mentions). There are several mentions discussing the imminent deportation of illegal immigrants in South Africa, with mentions of high numbers of arrests and the desire to secure borders. Corruption within the Department of Home Affairs was also topical, specifically with regard to officials allegedly selling South African documents to illegal immigrants. Some mentions entail xenophobic attitudes towards illegal immigrants, with calls for them to leave the country and accusations of them committing crimes. Efforts by law enforcement to address the issue of illegal immigration and crack down on illegal activities were part of the conversation. A few mentions are made of political figures and parties, such as Julius Malema and the EFF, in relation to their stance on illegal immigrants and their impact on South Africa.

Figure 23: Top keywords, locations and phrases

10. Xenophobic disinformation

Figures 24 to 27 contain a selection of content which entails xenophobic disinformation. This content is of a political nature in that it is either created by leaders of political parties or directed to leaders of political parties. If users believe the disinformation they may hold certain parties in lower regard based on their policy position on immigration. These rulings are by Real411. Real411 offers a platform to report instances of digital harm, including disinformation. This

allows for the evaluation and resolution of complaints about online content in a manner that is unbiased, open, transparent, and aligned with the country's legal and constitutional principles. Special attention is given to issues concerning subjects such as complaints related to elections[11].
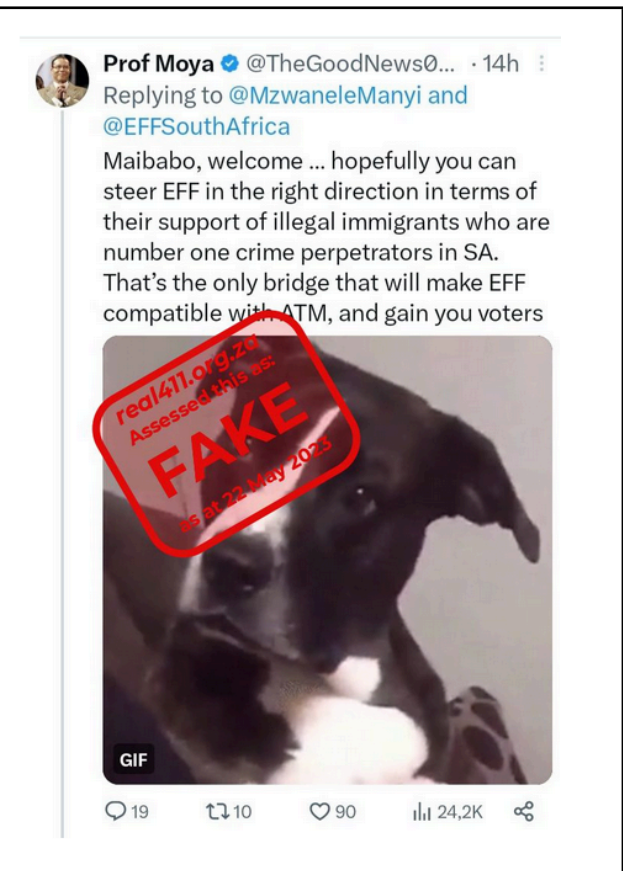

Figure 24: Fake X on election rigging

Figure 25: Fake claim about crime

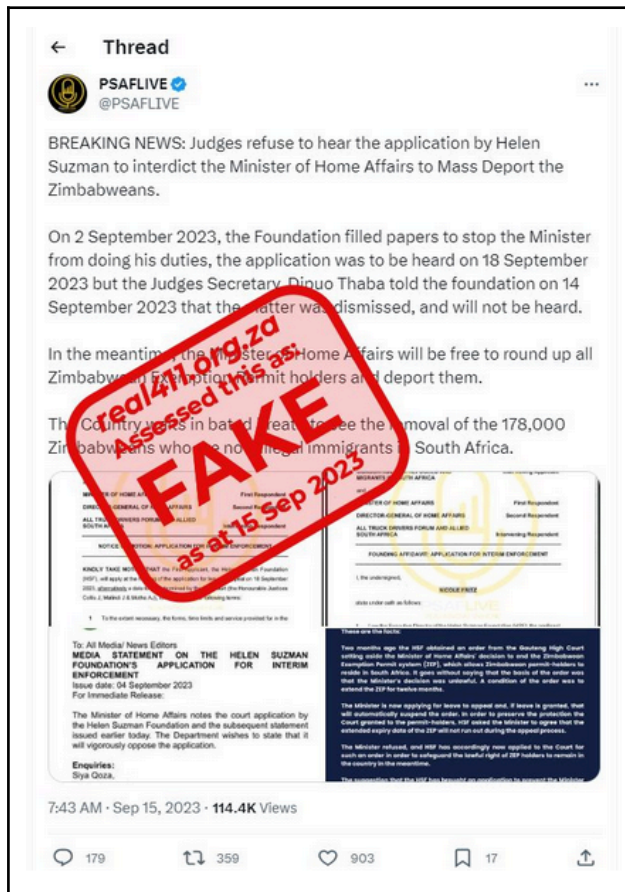[11] Real411. 2024. https://real411.org.za/

Figure 26: Fake claim about case & deportation 　　　*Figure 27: Fake claim and dehumanisation*

11. Discussion

The findings offer insights into the online discourse surrounding immigrants in South Africa during the specified period. The discussion is broken down by metric type:

Quantitative Trends:

- There was a significant amount of online discussion about immigrants in South Africa during the specified period, with 609 738 mentions.
- This represented a 9% decrease from the previous period, suggesting a fluctuation in interest or attention.

User Engagement:

- The conversation involved a diverse group of 81 818 individual users, with an average of 7.5 mentions per user.
- This indicates a relatively broad and engaged online community discussing the topic.

Daily Peaks and Notable Dates:

- The highest daily mention volume occurred on 5 January, with other notable peaks around 7 December and 6 January.
- These peaks are linked to specific events or developments that led to increased online activity.

Dominant Accounts:

- Political leaders and party handles, including @gaytonmck and @onsbaizanie, were the most mentioned accounts.
- @advobarrieroux, known for political satire, ranked third. News24 linked the discussion to Zambian blogger Csho Chilala.

Tweet Quantity vs. Account Recognition:

- While political figures received more mentions, most tweets came from relatively unknown accounts.
- This suggests that while politicians drive the conversation, a significant portion of the discussion is generated by influencers and anonymous accounts.

Primary Themes:

- The topic wheel delineates three primary themes: Nigeria, Zimbabwe/Zimbabweans, and South Africa/South Africans.
- There is a division into distinct nationalities in this thematic breakdown.

Top Hashtags:

- The top hashtags, such as #operationdudula and #putsouthafricansfirst, indicate specific parties/movements associated with the discussion.
- Other notable hashtags like #crimewatch, #zimbabwe, and variations of #voetsekanc provide additional context.

Group comparison:

- ANC dominates both mention volume and reach, indicating widespread discussion and a substantial audience for its content.
- Put South Africa First, Operation Dudula, ActionSA, and Patriotic Alliance follow in both mention volume and reach, maintaining a consistent order.
- Reach surpasses mention volume for all parties, suggesting that the content is reaching a larger audience than the number of mentions might imply.
- ANC's reach, in particular, is notably higher compared to its mention volume, indicating a broad impact. ANC holds a significant share of mention volume (39%) and reach (68%), reinforcing its prominence in the online conversation.

- Other parties, while influential, have a lower share.
- Topic wheels for each party reveal distinct focuses within the conversation about immigrants in South Africa.
- Patriotic Alliance's emphasis on voting stands out, and ActionSA is linked prominently with Herman Mashaba.
- Gayton McKenzie's tweet in Figure 15 acknowledges pressure on the ANC government from various parties, indicating collaboration and concerted efforts to make immigration a burning policy issue.

Key Trends:

- Top keywords include people, SA, and government, while top locations are Africa and South Africa.
- Dominant phrases involve discussions on illegal immigrants, impending deportations, and corruption within the Department of Home Affairs.

Xenophobic disinformation:

- A selection of instances of xenophobic disinformation that are linked to political parties illustrates the dangers of disinformation in the context of elections.

12.   Conclusion

This report, the seventh in the "Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society" report series with a focus on immigrants in South Africa, has examined the role of political leaders in the narrative about migrants. These findings shed light on the dynamics of the online conversation regarding immigrants in South Africa, encompassing user engagement, influential accounts, prevalent themes, and key trends. Analysing such data is crucial for understanding public sentiment, identifying major concerns, and recognising influential voices in the digital discourse. The analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of the immigration discourse in South Africa, involving political leaders, influencers, and various thematic concerns.

A xenophobic stance by political leaders not only harms individuals and communities but also has broader societal, economic, and diplomatic repercussions. Ongoing scholarly concern surrounds the impact of disinformation campaigns on democratic processes, notably elections. Studies highlight disinformation's role in misleading voters, undermining election integrity, and influencing opinions, participation, and the voting process. Notable cases like Brexit, Trump, the Indonesian, and Brazilian elections emphasise disinformation's serious threat to democracy.
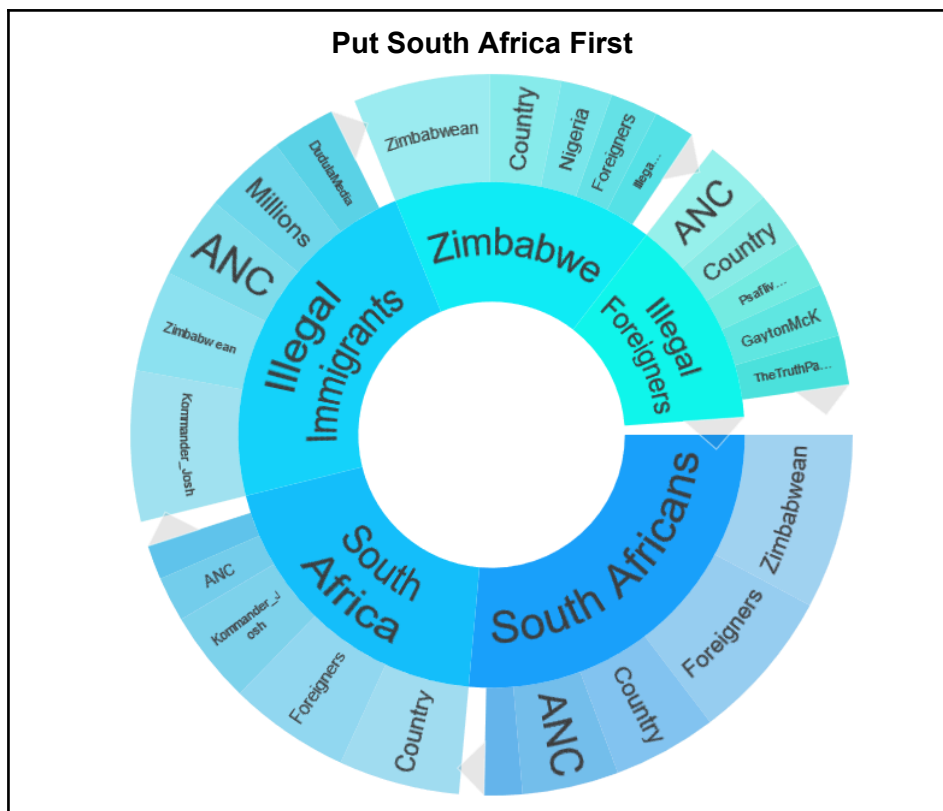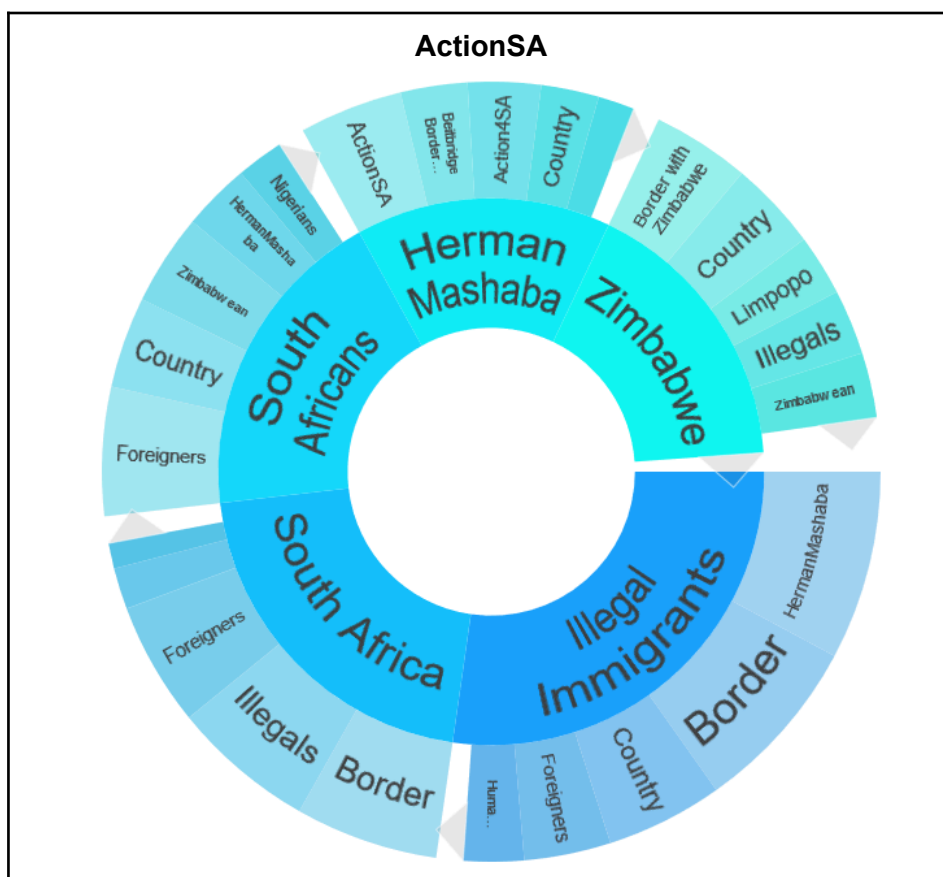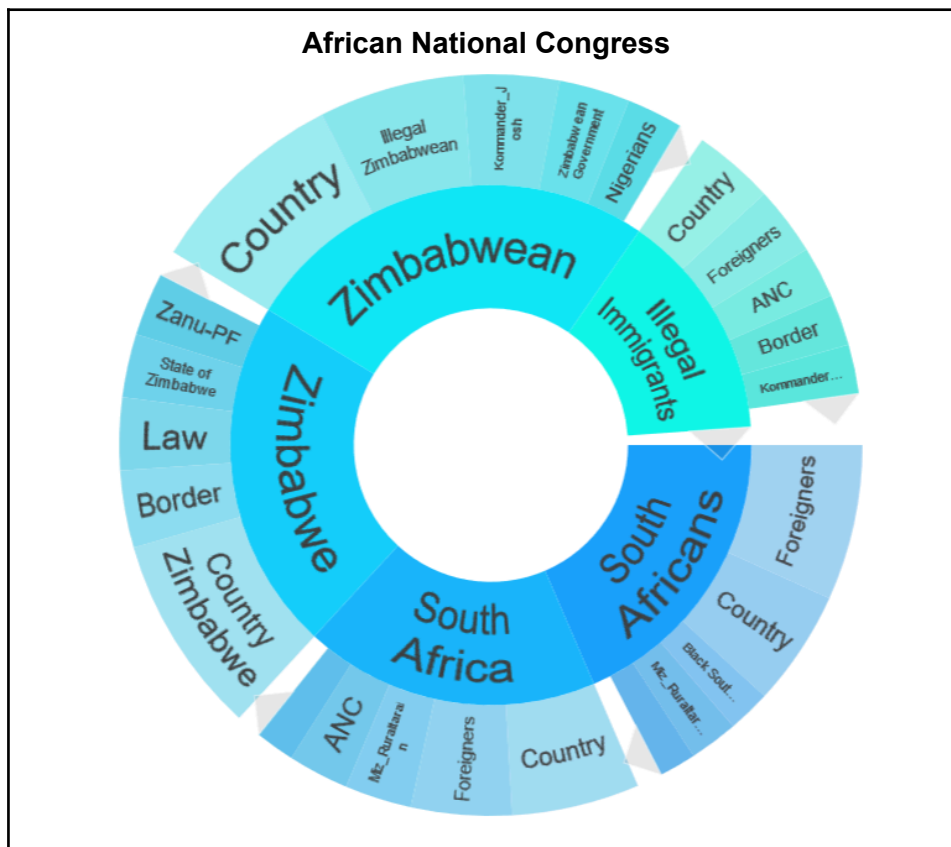
Figure A1: Topics wheel for Put South Africa First

Figure A2: Topics wheel for ActionSA

Figure A3: Topic wheel for ANC