



Bi-Weekly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for Electoral Engagement



Overview

- The CABC's snapshot of the conversation from 31 December to 30 January 2024, comprised nearly 500,000 mentions. The conversation was primarily retweet driven in this period, with 395,000+ recorded mentions or 83% of the conversation classed as retweets. This indicates a preference for the sharing of content from select voices, rather than the production of original content.
- Calls to register to vote were often shared alongside party materials, with non-partisan posts shared by the IEC and micro-influencers/individual accounts. Calls from political parties to register were predominantly attached to hashtags, for example. #RegistertoVoteX and VoteX2024.
- The most mentioned topics within the period were the ANC, the newly-formed uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party and former president Jacob Zuma (see Table 1). MK was also the most trending topic during the period (see Figure 1). Trending topics are affected by both time of posting within the date range and volume.
- We've drawn our segmentation model of voter behavioural drivers from a 2021 paper, which identified five main barriers to electoral participation in the 2021 local government elections¹. A percentage distribution of the five barriers within the online elections conversation can be seen in Figure 2. The sections below present our social listening findings corresponding to each of these non-voting segments.

Individual & Administrative Barriers

- Individual barriers include not registered, too busy, ill health or transport issues, while administrative barriers include no documents, long queues and polling distance. Our data shows little to no mentions related to individual and administrative barriers. We anticipate conversation on this topic to grow post the final in-person registration weekend on the 3rd and 4th February. We will report on this in our next report.

Disillusionment

- Our dataset reflects a small amount of mistrust in the electoral process, centred on assumptions and accusations around the independence of the IEC; the relationship between SADTU aligned electoral officials and the ANC; and the belief that corruption within the state reflects on the legitimacy of the IEC.
- We hence recommend that targeted messaging from Futurelect², as well as the broader spectrum of civil society organisations, should focus on instilling public confidence in South African electoral institutions and democratic processes.

Political alignment

¹<https://www.kas.de/en/web/suedafrika/single-title/-/content/analysing-voter-abstention-in-the-2021-local-government-election>

² Futurelect has developed a civic education platform designed to both encourage active citizenry and provide easily accessible factual information about South Africa's democratic institutions and processes. See more on this platform by following the link: <https://learn.futurelect.org/dashboard/home>

- Mentions within this category come from individuals who do not align with one or more parties. It is important to note that expressing an anti-ANC, anti-EFF or anti-DA sentiment, for example, does not appear to imply that the individual will not vote at all.
- Online sentiments indicate that the unity of opposition parties, for example the Multi-Party Charter, could be demotivating some people from voting.
- This indicates that messaging to promote voter turnout might benefit from raising awareness of the different policy and ideological positions of respective parties that are contesting elections.
- For example, messaging that boosts awareness of a novel new application “Yoh Vote”³, which enables South Africans to learn about different political party positions in a gamified manner that is fun and enjoyable, may be an innovative way of encouraging voters to explore their political alignment with parties that are standing for election.

Performance evaluations

- A significant number of individuals in this category have shared that they wouldn’t be voting for a certain party, however, this does not mean that they will not be voting at all.
- Among the main talking points are concerns that social grants could be stopped should the ruling party lose the elections.
- Loadshedding is also among the main concerns in this category, with some users expressing that electricity is now a “privilege” and a “gift”.
- We hence recommend that the messaging that revolves around ensuring improvement in public sector performance across a range of public goods - ranging from social security, to healthcare to electricity and water services provisions - provides an opportunity to target non-voters who are concerned about lack of state and government performance in respect of delivering public goods.
- Frustrations have been expressed online regarding fragile coalitions propped up by a large amount of smaller parties (<2 - 3 seats). Multiple accounts, some belonging to political figures, accused small, single parties of keeping the ANC in power in eThekweni.
- We hence recommend that messaging that highlights the role of the vote in ensuring political accountability of political parties - i.e., primarily to the people and constituencies that vote for them - can only be achieved through voting in an informed manner.

Mis/Disinformation and Unsubstantiated Allegations

- Mis- and disinformation trends online feature claims that the IEC is complicit in allowing “illegal” immigrants with fake IDs to vote.
- Accounts aligned with former president Jacob Zuma alleged that: Ramaphosa’s ANC was planning to assassinate Zuma.
- Further content related to Zuma was concerned with his eligibility to run for a seat in parliament. There were also notable sentiments that Zuma was not allowed to contest elections because of his criminal record. However, he already had a criminal record when he ran for president and so did Gayton McKenzie and Kenny Kunene of the Patriotic Alliance. In order to dispel this narrative, it is necessary to focus on provisions in the Constitution, such as Section 47(1)(e) in Chapter 4⁴, which restricts Zuma’s participation.

³ <https://www.yohvote.com/the-match-maker>

⁴ <https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996-chapter-4-parliament-07-feb-1997#47>

- The points made in this subsection refer to the manipulation of narratives to question the legitimacy of the 2024 election. While nascent, these narratives hold the potential to garner significant support, and to be amplified by narrative manipulation networks in the lead-up to the election. As shown in Figure 3, the MK party has the second highest number of mentions at 27% (behind the ANC at 40%), indicating that it is currently a high interest topic and conversation, which contains disinformation that may destabilise elections. This disinformation stream may in turn pose a threat to; (1) the elections themselves as they are proceeding, and/or (2) the acceptance of the election results after they are announced.
- Our recommendation is for Futurelect, the media and civil society organisations need to actively get ahead of this disinformation stream by raising public awareness of the constitutionally enshrined right for any party to contest elections in South Africa, and to share resources that build confidence in the IEC's independence and electoral processes. Getting ahead of mis- and disinformation related to the MK party and Jacob Zuma is especially important, given the unrest that occurred in July 2021, fuelled by beliefs that Zuma was being treated unfairly by democratic institutions, particularly the courts.

Miscellaneous Observations

- Our dataset reflects a concerted effort by micro-influencers and individuals to encourage voter registration. These actions are predominantly seen as replies to news about service delivery failures, calling on voters to get out and vote to remedy service delivery and other government failures. They also take the form of tongue-in-cheek responses, rooted in the sentiment of civic duty'. The micro-influencers appear to be growing their following and relevance by being in the conversation about elections.
- An opportunity to further mobilise micro-influencers into the conversation hence exists, and we recommend that innovative and imaginative ways of tapping into the pro- civic duty sentiment that characterises micro-influencer engagement be leveraged. Recruiting micro-influencers into the conversation hosts the potential to significantly amplify campaign messaging by Futurelect and other campaigns that are attempting to get the vote out.

Recommendations

- **Disillusionment:** The CABC recommends the implementation of targeted messaging, focused on instilling public confidence in our electoral institutions and democratic processes. Futurelect, as well as other campaigns, relevant civil society organisations and the media have a role to play in engendering confidence in South Africa's electoral institutions and democratic processes in both above-the-line and below-the-line media.
- **Political alignment:** Messaging to promote voter turnout will benefit from raising awareness of the need for voters to engage with and understand the different policy and ideological positions of respective parties that are contesting elections. For example, messaging that boosts awareness of a novel new application "Yoh Vote", which enables South Africans to learn about different political party positions in a gamified manner that is fun and enjoyable, may be an innovative way of encouraging voters to explore their political alignment with parties that are standing for election.
- **Performance evaluations:** Messaging that revolves around ensuring improvement in public sector performance across a range of public goods - ranging from social security, to healthcare to electricity and water services provisions - provides an opportunity to target non-voters who are concerned about lack of state and government performance in respect of delivering public goods.
- In respect of voter concerns regarding coalitions, messaging that highlights that ensuring political accountability of political parties - i.e., primarily to the people and constituencies that vote for them - can only be achieved through voting in an informed manner. Locating shared governmental responsibility within the framework of a healthy and functional democracy that is supported by free and fair elections is an important message for voters who are concerned with coalitions. Here, there is some overlap with the political alignment recommendation in the bullet above, indicating that an opportunity may exist to target

both non-voting segments simultaneously with targeted messaging on the theme of being thoroughly informed about the party one is voting for.

- **Mis- and disinformation:** Getting ahead of mis- and disinformation that seeks to portray the IEC as a factional weapon of the ANC's ruling faction, led by President Cyril Ramaphosa, is key to ensuring that the current disinformation stream that is embedded in the conversation around Jacob Zuma and the new MK party does not grow into a material threat to running of elections and their results. Raising awareness of provisions in the Constitution, such as Section 47(1)(e) in Chapter 4⁵ which restricts Zuma's participation, may be an effective way of approaching messaging. Moreover, sharing, disseminating and amplifying the reach of resources that contain factual information ahead of time may be necessary to ensure confidence in the IEC's independence.
- **Leveraging micro-influencer engagement:** Futurelect and other campaigns, civil society organisations and the like have an opportunity to engage with and share content by replying to micro-influencer conversation threads, or mimicking the messaging of micro-influencers to amplify messaging reach. Alternatively, partnerships may be possible between micro-influencers and civil society organisations working within the elections space.

Future Refinement & Watch List

- In future deliverables, where possible, a concerted effort will be made by the CABC to delineate engagement of individuals online by location e.g. province, metro, area etc.. This data may in turn be compared with registration and turnout statistics provided by the IEC in future phases of the project. This will help evaluate the extent to which social media engagement levels correlates with voter turnout.
- Imposters posing as IEC Chairperson Mosotho Moepya, or other employees and promising to 'rig' votes in favour of whoever pays a bribe. The IEC [responded](#) to this incident, but the CABC will be scanning for similar scams that aim to undermine the credibility of the IEC.
- A high-level view of the most active authors in the conversation highlighted a previously identified bot or sock puppet account within the conversation. Further monitoring of top authors within the conversation will serve as an early warning for the spread of disinformation in the lead-up to the elections.

Figures and Tables

⁵ <https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996-chapter-4-parliament-07-feb-1997#47>

Topic Name	Type	Mentions	Sentiment Score
ANC	Organisation	85977	-36
#votemk2024	Hashtag	60354	1
Zuma	Person	45461	-14
Africa	Location	39803	-22
South Africa	Location	34523	-23
EFF	Organisation	29525	-15
President Zuma	Phrase	21180	-6
Ramaphosa	Person	18934	-22
MK Party	Organisation	18754	-7
Black	Person	16464	-42
Israel	Location	13790	-44
South Africans	Phrase	13330	-26
Umkhonto Wesizwe	Person	12870	2
Jacob Zuma	Person	12235	-11
Cyril	Person	10669	-29

Table 1: Top hashtags, organisations, phrases, people and locations sorted by mention volume from 31 December to 31 January 2024 - sentiment scores reflect positive ($0 <$) or negative (< 0) sentiment relative to the overall use of the item. The items selected for inclusion were used more than 10,000 times in our dataset.



Figure 1: Trending and Fading topics within the elections conversation between 31 December - 31 January 2024.

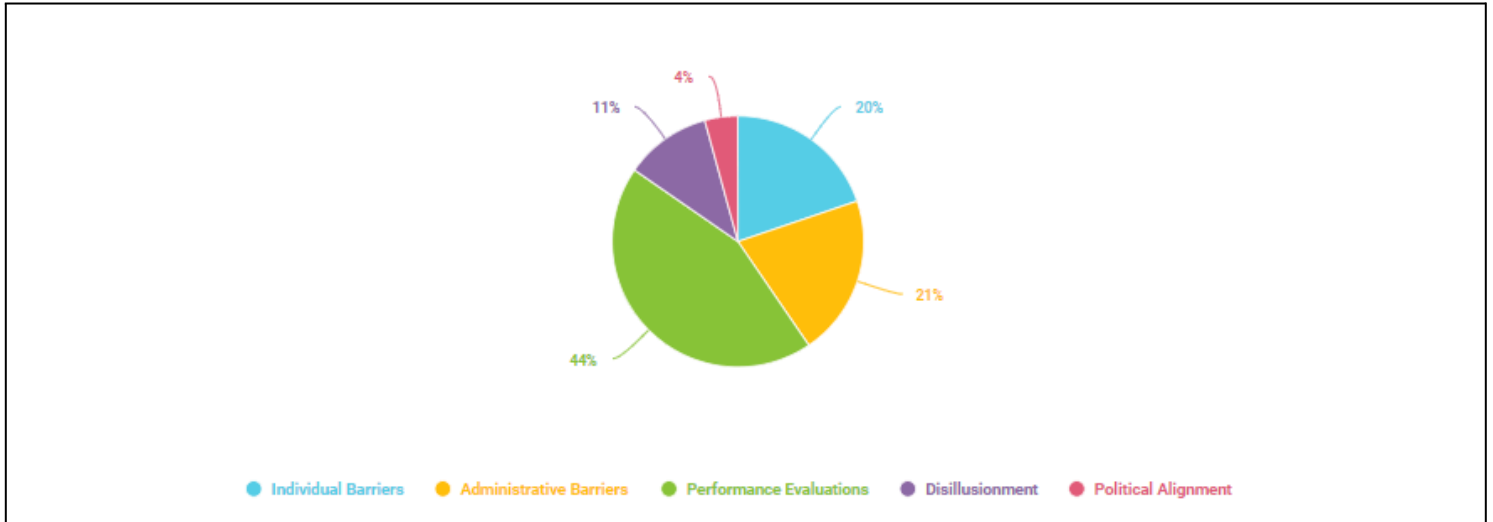


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of the five barriers between 31 December 2023 and 31 January 2024

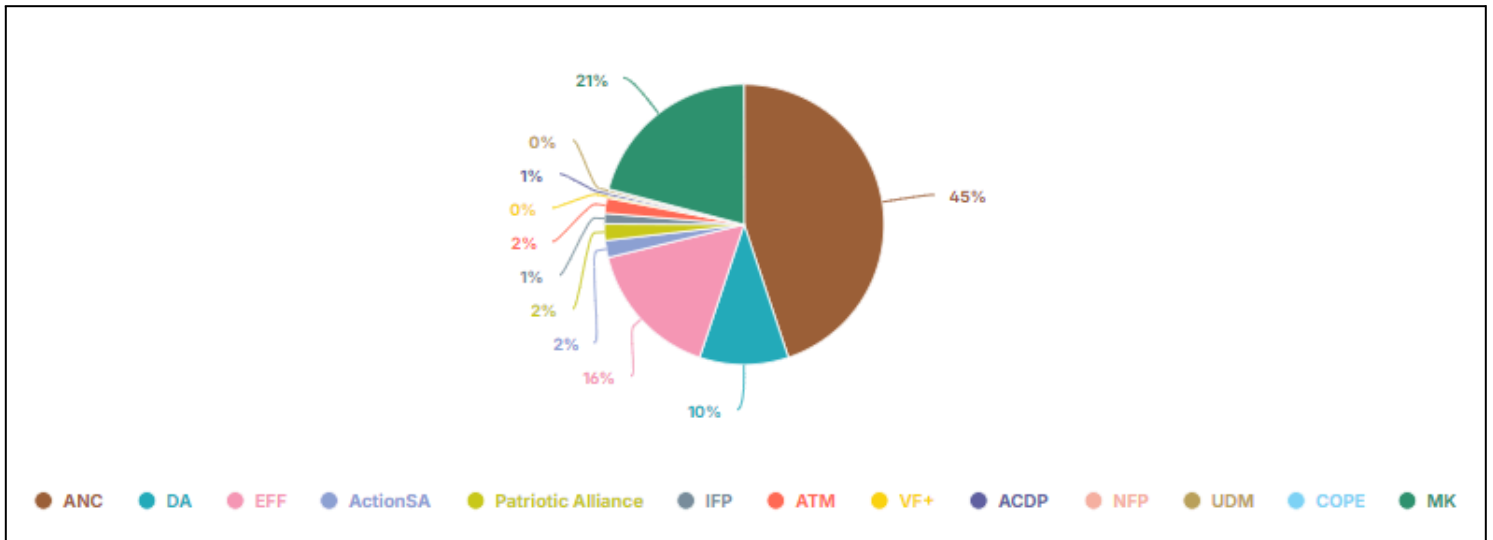


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of mentions containing political party names from 31 December 2023 to 31 January 2024