



Futurelect

Bi-Weekly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for Electoral Engagement #2

Tintswalo: The Dream Deferred?

Overview

- The CABC's sample of the online conversation on social media platform X regarding South African politics, registration and voting intention in the lead-up to the 2024 national elections comprised more than 250,000 mentions, created and shared by around 50,000 unique accounts between 1 and 11 February 2024. We continue to note the dominance of retweets over original posts, with about 90% of the conversation being classified as retweets.
- Among the main talking points of this period are the State of the Nation Address (SONA), delivered on 8 February 2024 by President Cyril Ramaphosa, the EFF manifesto launch on 10 February 2024 and countrywide loadshedding that was pushed to Stage 6.
- Top hashtags were led by #VoteMK2024 followed by #registertovoteeff, #effmanifestolaunch, #sona2024 and #2024isour1994 (which has been used online by two political parties: the EFF and Rise Mzansi). Despite a notable anti-ANC sentiment in the elections conversation, #registertovoteanc became the sixth most used hashtag, having been mostly used by ANC leaders and provincial party accounts (see Figure 1).
- We've drawn 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.
- Compared to the previous reporting period, from 31 December 2023 to 30 January 2024, there has been an uptick in concerns around political alignment (4% to 15%) and a decline in conversation concerning administrative barriers (21% to 13%), with all other barriers holding steady as a proportion of the conversation (see Figure 2). This finding must be interpreted in the context of a shorter date range, as well as with regard to cross loading of posts between categories². Nonetheless, the increase in political alignment as a barrier may indicate a dynamic shift in sentiment following the recent SONA and implementation of Stage 6 load-shedding.
 - The EFF have emerged as a dominant force in the conversation post the launch of their 2024 manifesto, with the party's mention proportion increasing from 16% to 28%.

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

² Cross loading is when one post is present in multiple categories. Cross loading may occur when retweets, quote tweets or original posts which share keywords that have been used to segment content contain one or more different keywords within different categories, for example 'drive' and 'distance'. In this particular case, excluding uncategorised mentions, 304,111 mentions have been categorised on a total mention volume of 253,000+ mentions. This indicates that around 17% of mentions which have been categorised, have been duplicated across categories.

- Balancing the increase garnered by the EFF is a halving of mention volume related to uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the recently launched political party aligned to former president Jacob Zuma, who saw their proportion of the categorised conversation decrease from 21% to 12%.
- Furthermore, other political parties retained a relatively steady proportion of the conversation, ranging from 0% to 2%. This indicates that the DA (10%), EFF (28%), MK (12%) and ANC (43%) hold a strong position in the political landscape of the CABc's sample (see Figure 4).
- Bracketing these findings is the proportion of conversation which could not be categorised as pertaining to a specific political party. This uncategorised proportion accounted for 64% of the conversation. This indicates that the majority of the conversation is not focused on any one party but may reflect broader conversation around voting intention and the state of South African democracy.

Individual & Administrative Barriers

- A post, which received 15,000 views and garnered 500+ engagements (40 replies, 193 retweets and 341 likes), encouraging South Africans living abroad to register through the IEC's online platform saw individual expressions of concern around the timing of the proclamation of the election as well as the distances required to travel to an embassy for voting, both of which mandate planning and travel expenses. These factors constitute barriers for the South African diaspora in exercising their right to vote.
 - Concerns around the distances which must be travelled to reach a voting station in a foreign country were raised by the Democratic Alliance earlier this month, with the party indicating that they would launch a legal challenge against the IEC and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)³.
 - In response, the IEC has indicated that the amount of voting stations established abroad is restricted through legislation⁴.
- A significant volume of responses to the IEC on their official account continues to centre on individuals expressing the barriers they face in their journey to register, alongside requests for information on the process. While we have yet to find individuals sharing these barriers directly through original posts, the clustering of these experiences under IEC posts showcases how individuals may use social media to air their frustrations and open a line of communication with the IEC.

Disillusionment

- Disillusionment has remained a constant in conversation around registration. In the time period, posts that voting will not stop load-shedding nor put an end to corruption were most commonly reflective of disillusionment.
- One [post](#) emerged which utilised images of the battle of Isandlwana to put forth the idea of democracy as a colonial construct⁵. This is a reflection of a broader trend that calls democratic institutions into question as Western inspired and ill-suited to the African socio-cultural and political context. While it is too early to tell how significant this sentiment is or how it may evolve in the lead-up to the elections, it is worth noting.

³ <https://www.da-abroad.org/da-abroad-news/court-action-for-more-voting-stations-abroad>

⁴ <https://www.polity.org.za/article/voting-abroad-da-threatens-court-action-if-govt-iec-do-not-increase-voting-centres-for-expats-2024-01-24>

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battles-of-Isandlwana-and-Rorkes-Drift>

Political alignment

- The CABC noted high engagement on a post stating that corruption is embedded in the spirit of South Africans, and that therefore, voting the ANC out will not mean an end to corruption. Other individuals expressed that corruption is a ‘morality issue’ and that voting the ANC out could lead to it either getting better or worse. There was a strong sentiment that South Africans only hate corruption only if they are not the ones benefiting from it.
- The CABC further noted mixed reactions to a high engagement post on coalitions. Notable sentiment exists from individuals who believe that the collaboration of opposing parties, including minority ones, is needed to vote out the ANC. Some individuals believe that the elections are about saving South Africa (hence a collaborative approach would be best) and others believe that coalitions only work for a certain period of time and that once the goal of removing the ANC is achieved, each party will lapse into serving its own interests.
- Both the observations described above indicate a strong sense of cynicism towards efforts to address corruption in government and the state, as well as efforts to establish reliable political coalitions that can govern effectively.

Performance evaluations

- We observed strong sentiment that loadshedding serves as a reminder to South Africans to vote the ANC out or that voting for the ANC means voting for corruption, unemployment, loadshedding etc. Users who often express support for the ANC are also heavily criticised online.
- We observed mixed reactions from South Africans who criticised President Cyril Ramaphosa’s rendition of Tintswalo’s life since 1994 in the state of the nation address. Ramaphosa described Tintswalo as a child born at the dawn of democracy, living in a house provided by government and having access to free basic education, water and electricity. While some described Tintswalo’s reality as similar to their own, others accused Ramaphosa of failing to mention the deterioration of public services under a democratic South Africa.

Mis/Disinformation and Unsubstantiated Allegations

- Recurring sentiments that the ‘ANC is giving illegal foreigners IDs so they can vote for them’. This could cause some contestation during the post-election/results period, especially if the ANC wins.
- The DA shared a post in which they indicated that their party had outperformed the ANC in terms of new registrations. This post prompted calls from concerned citizens for the IEC to dispel the contents of the post as misinformation from internal political research, as no party affiliation must be expressed when registering. In response, the IEC indicated that registered voters are not required to disclose who they will be voting for.

Miscellaneous Observations

- Posts have been detected which encourage the public to make voting an event and bring “braai stands” and “hubbly” to voting stations. In addition to encouraging the youth to vote through messaging that reminds them that ‘the future of this country is in their hands’, messaging that makes voting fashionable or appealing to the youth is recommended. This may in leverage sentiment that the atmosphere that

accompanies voting can be joyful, even carnival-like, where citizens gather together in their numbers to celebrate their country.

- Loadshedding and unemployment are critical touchpoints that can be leveraged to motivate the citizenry to make their voices heard through the vote so that politicians know they will be held to account for their lack of delivery.
- We observed a small set of accounts encouraging other individuals online to hide their grandparents' IDs so 'they don't go and vote ANC'. The duality of this messaging is that people are encouraged to vote the ANC out. On the other hand, there is misinformation that 'if you are not registered to vote, ANC people are going to vote on your behalf'. Voter turnout is both encouraged and discouraged, depending on how old a voter is. In this respect, we recommend messaging that clearly articulates the importance of hosting free and fair elections so that the outcomes are legitimate is critical to electoral success and socio-political stability.
- Last week, we noted sentiments from accounts aligned with former president Jacob Zuma stating that President Cyril Ramaphosa's ANC was planning to assassinate Zuma. During this period, Zuma told supporters at a mini-rally that he knew who wanted to "kill" him. Without evidence, these allegations of "murder" or "assassination" from both Zuma and his supporters could cause reputational damage to those accused.

Recommendations

- **Individual & Administrative Barriers:**
 - Noting that the establishment of voting centres abroad is constrained by legislation, interventions in this area may seek to highlight responses from the IEC which dispel concerns around the disenfranchisement of the South African diaspora, a concept which may see emphasis in political campaigning. Emphasising the independence of the IEC from decisions taken by the legislature or executive branch of government, while not serving to circumvent barriers experienced by voters abroad, may concretise trust in the institution.
 - Key recommendations in respect of anticipated administrative barriers to voting, both locally and abroad, is that messaging focus on; (1) providing timely clarity on when and where voters will be able to vote, so that they can plan in advance, appealing to their sense of civic duty to participate fully, and (2) getting ahead of accusations that inadequate numbers of voting stations are being provided abroad by making the public aware of legislative restrictions.
- **Disillusionment:** Key recommendations in respect of political disillusionment are that messaging focus on:
 - (1) for a democracy to work for its people an active citizenry that participates in all democratic processes, whether elections or civic engagement is an unequivocal requirement;
 - (2) that democracy is in essence a collectivist system that marries well with African socio-cultural customs and traditions (in essence, that this is "our" hard won democracy, and is precisely what we fought to establish in opposition to colonial and Apartheid systems);
 - (3) encouraging space for individuals to reflect on what democracy means for them and what alternative systems or adjustments could look like, an example here could be conversation on direct democracy as opposed to proportional representation and internal caucusing.

- **Political alignment:**

- As recommended in the previous report, messaging that unpacks the positives and negatives of coalition governance will allow individuals to come to their own conclusions and in turn may support them in identifying a party who can motivate them to come out to the polls on election day. In addition to these previous recommendations, there is a need to highlight the opportunity in the 2024 elections to vote for independent candidates who can enter parliament without any party affiliation⁶.
- Key recommendations for messaging in this respect are that messaging to promote voter turnout might benefit from encouraging voters to make efforts to inform themselves about which parties and party coalitions have governed effectively in the face of corruption (in a sense, promoting the sentiment that rather than giving up, voters need to be more informed). Moreover, as recommended in the previous report, messaging that boosts awareness of a novel new application “Yoh Vote”⁷, which enables South Africans to learn about different political party positions in a gamified manner that is fun and enjoyable, may be a particularly innovative way of encouraging youth voters to explore their political alignment with parties that are standing for election.

- **Performance evaluations:**

- We recommend 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.
- We also recommend messaging that encourages people to freely vote for whichever party speaks to their line of focus, emphasising that voting is a democratic right which every citizen can exercise as they wish. It may also be prudent to put out messaging that one’s vote is confidential and that nobody is obliged to reveal who they have voted for.
- There is an intersection with disillusionment that can be capitalised on. Hence, we recommend that messaging that encourages voters to inform themselves about which parties and party coalitions have governed effectively in respect of anti-corruption initiatives and ensuring service delivery, can be used to target citizens that are concerned about performance and are disillusioned.

- **Mis- and disinformation:**

- Noting the similarities in narratives being shared online. Getting ahead of claims that foreigners are being mobilised to skew the vote is essential. Hence, we recommend that messaging that speaks directly to this particular issue is of paramount importance, given the history of - often fatal - xenophobic and anti-immigrant violence that has periodically flared up in South Africa.
- Moreover, as recommended for performance evaluation, emphasising that an individual’s vote is confidential and that they are under no obligation to reveal their choice of party, whether before or after the election.
- We furthermore reiterate the following recommendation from our first report, namely:
 - The need to dispel the current disinformation stream that is embedded in the conversation around Jacob Zuma and the new MK party to ensure this does not grow into a material threat to running of elections and their results.

⁶ <https://www.vukuzenzele.gov.za/independent-candidates-contest-south-africas-2024-elections>

⁷ <https://www.yohvote.com/the-match-maker>

Future Refinement & Watch List

- Cross loading of conversation between segmented categories of the conversation indicates the need to revisit how these categories have been constructed. Alternatively closely related categories, such as individual and administrative barriers, could be combined.

Figures and Tables

TOPIC NAME	TYPE	MENTIONS
#votemk2024	Hashtag	16489
#registertovoteeff	Hashtag	8559
#effmanifestolaunch	Hashtag	5825
#sona2024	Hashtag	5477
#2024isour1994	Hashtag	4888
#registertovoteanc	Hashtag	3326
#voteeff	Hashtag	3138
#elections2024	Hashtag	2548
#saelections24	Hashtag	2495
#rescuesa	Hashtag	2372

Figure 1: Top 10 hashtags within the elections conversation between 1 and 11 February 2024

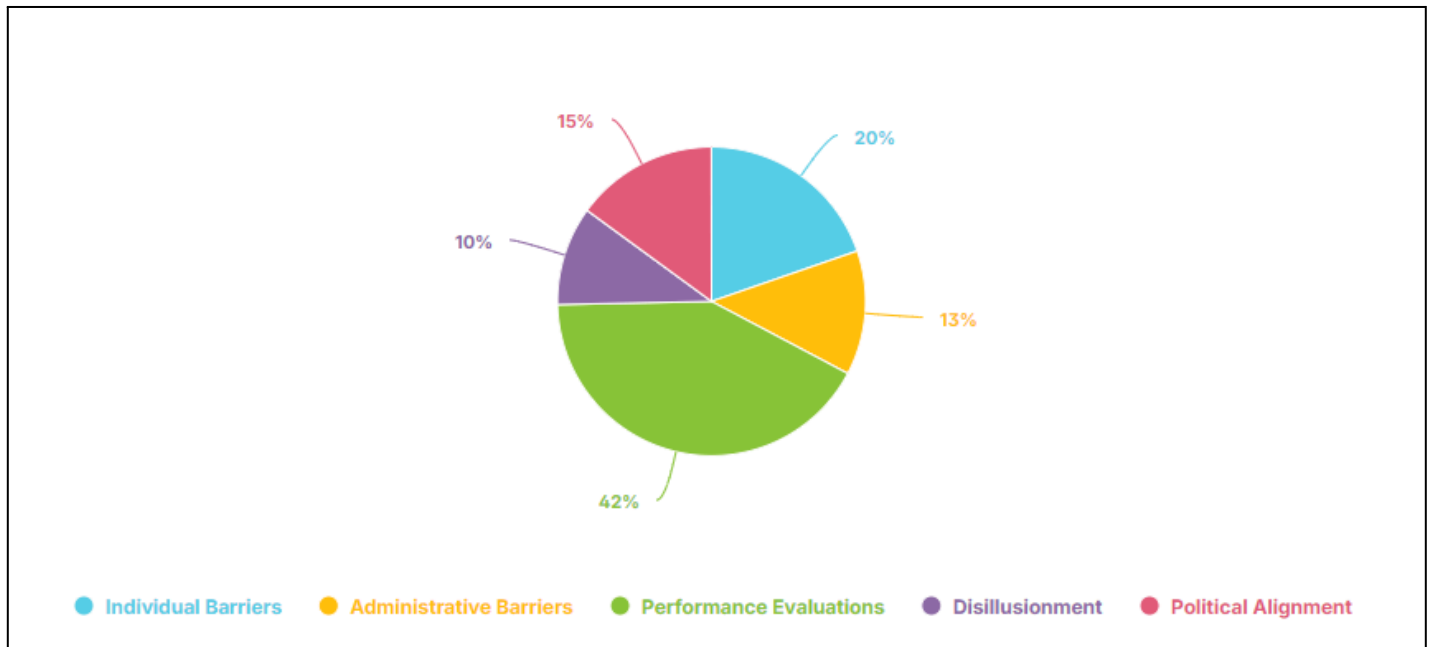


Figure 2: Proportional distribution of non-voter behavioural drivers from 1 February - 11 February 2024

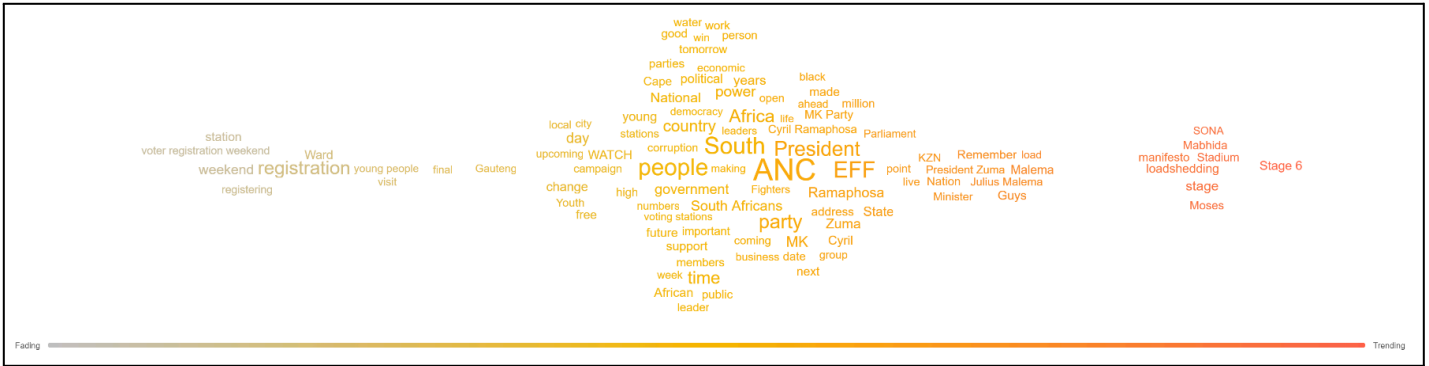


Figure 3: A trend graph which charts high-volume topics which were popular at the beginning of the period (fading) and closer to the end of the reporting period (trending)

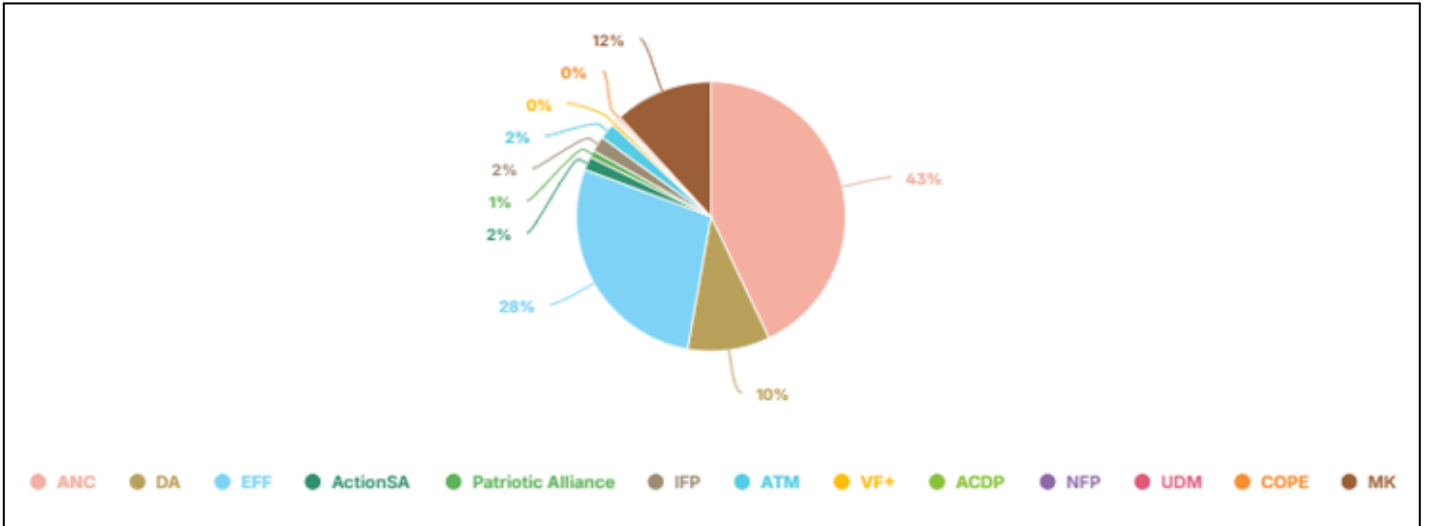


Figure 4: Percentage distribution of mentions containing political party names from 1 February 2024 to 11 February 2024 (98,075 mentions).