



Futurelect

Bi-Weekly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for Electoral Engagement #6

IEC in Focus

Overview

- The online conversation around the upcoming elections and political climate received more than 300,000 mentions between 2 April and 15 April 2024. Two peaks were recorded during this period; the highest on 12 April with about 35,000 mentions and the second on 9 April with almost 34,000 mentions. High-engagement posts on 9 April were centred around former president Jacob Zuma, who won an appeal against the IEC which sought to disqualify him from standing as a candidate for the MK Party. Mentions on 12 April focused on the IEC's decision to appeal the Electoral Court's decision.
- Among the most retweeted posts in the conversation was by an individual criticising X users for being able to read a thread containing 30 posts, but not being able to channel the same energy into reading political party manifestos. This post received more than 4,000 likes and was reposted by more than 1,500 accounts. Responses to this post ranged from users stating that manifestos were not interesting enough to read; that they roughly focused on the same issues (jobs, housing, etc.) and that parties seldom delivered on their promises.
 - Our continued reporting on the election conversation has shown that while there is a general anti-ANC sentiment that stems from disappointment with how the governing party runs the country (issues such as loadshedding and corruption are at the forefront of that disappointment), there is also a "Who do we vote for?" sentiment from users who cannot decide which party best aligns with their values and priorities.
 - We recommend the use of tools and platforms that collect and distribute a wealth of information to voters to make informed decisions. Among these are [FuturElect's civics education platform](#), [SANEFs election portal](#), [News24's Elections Project](#), [YohVote](#), [People's Assembly](#) and [content submitted to Real411](#).
 - Alternatively, campaigns seeking to boost voter turnout, and media coverage particularly, could focus on promoting prosocial 'civic good' narratives by advancing norms around the positive outcome of casting one's vote and highlighting voter registration numbers through a positive value-laden lens, and soft social pressure, directed toward promoting voting and civic engagement as a positive addition to one's self-identity. As opposed to a lens highlighting youth voter apathy and low voter turnout historically. This perspective has received support in political psychology literature - (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4)
- Some individuals have expressed being 'anxious' over the country's uninterrupted power supply, with loadshedding being at bay for 21 days as of 15 April¹. The general sentiment is that loadshedding is being used for electioneering and will return after election day. This forms part of the general anti-ANC sentiment which was fuelled by the scrapping of e-tolls as well as a [video](#) of President Cyril Ramaphosa telling a young unemployed woman with a communications qualification to "keep searching" for a job.

¹ <https://loadshed.theoutlier.co.za/>

- In relation to e-tolls, individuals noted that there was a sense of irony in the celebration of the scrapping of something the government itself had implemented in prior administrations². Furthermore, individuals expressed their concern on the basis that no reference had been made to civil society movements, particularly OUTA³, which effectively led and mobilised action against e-tolls (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4) ; (5) ; (6) ; (7).
- President Cyril Ramaphosa received backlash after telling an unemployed young lady (who stated that she was a Communications graduate) to keep searching for a job, while on the campaign trail in Orange Farm. Sentiment in relation to this incident was predominantly negative, bolstered by a *Sowetan* headline which read “president dashed my hopes”: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4) ; (5)

IEC

- Under the broader conversation directed toward the IEC, the CABC has detected attacks and criticisms against the IEC and an IEC Commissioner, Janet Love, in particular.
 - The MK Party called for Janet Love to resign from the IEC - stating that she is biased toward the party and a close ally of President Cyril Ramaphosa: (1) ; (2). Notably, the commissioner was appointed to the IEC by former President Jacob Zuma⁴.
- Alongside the MK Party calling for her resignation, a variety of accounts have begun to mobilise against the commissioner. These narratives related to, among others, a previous call made by opposition parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who had accused the commissioner of legitimising a fraudulent election in the country.⁵
 - This took place against the backdrop of the 2023 Congo-Kinshasa general election which has been described as [shambolic](#) and [contested](#), and was characterised by [electoral disputes](#) and [violence](#). Commissioner Love in response denied the accusations made against her by Congolese opposition parties. It is this context which is now being highlighted by accounts online.
- A common sentiment across the posts alleged that the commissioner had been deployed as a “secret weapon” by Cyril Ramaphosa to steal the election: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4)
 - The [IEC](#) has reportedly responded (see [News24 article](#)) to the calls for Janet Love’s resignation. The IEC stated that the commission is impartial and that their decision to approach the constitutional court off the back of the electoral court’s decision to permit former president Zuma to contest the 2024 general election was to seek clarity on the electoral court’s decision, which had been issued without reasoning (for a deeper analysis see “[Zuma Candidacy](#)” - Daily Maverick).
 - Furthermore, EFF deputy president Floyd Shivambu has chastised the leadership of the IEC, including the commissioner, for ostensibly “[playing politics](#)”.
- Key narratives relating to the IEC’s decision to refer the Zuma matter to the Constitutional Court include:
 - A series of posts which sought to make the case that judgements from the electoral court are final and cannot be appealed to the constitutional court. These were predominantly from MK Party aligned accounts or accounts which sought to make the case that former President Zuma was being unfairly targeted: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4)
 - Alongside this, posts claimed that the IEC and Constitutional Court were working together to ensure that Zuma would not be on the ballot: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4)

² <https://www.news24.com/fin24/e-tolls-timeline-how-it-unfolded-20131202>

³ <https://www.oua.co.za/web/content/280324>

⁴ <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-jacob-zuma-appoints-janet-yetta-love-new-iec-commissioner-22-apr-2016-0000>

⁵

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-05-29-congolese-opposition-calls-for-withdrawal-of-ancs-janet-love-from-fraudulent-drc-voter-registration-audit/>

- We've noted a [perspective](#) that suggested that the IEC's appeal to the constitutional court may threaten peace and security during the election period.
- We recommend civil society organisations, campaigns, and the media to send out messaging that emphasises that the IEC is an institution and not beholden to a single person, that checks and balances are in place to ensure that abuse of power within the IEC can be mitigated against, and that the IEC has as strict code of conduct for its own members as it does for political parties.

Election Manipulation Claims

- The CABC has noted three high-engagement posts which spoke to threats of internal election manipulation:
 - [EFF Leader Julius Malema](#) alleged that load-shedding would be used as a tool to disrupt the counting of ballots and rig the election.
 - [Andile Mngxitama](#) referred to the need for MK party agents to be present at every voting station to ensure the votes are not rigged.
 - An anonymous account, '[Soldiers of MK Party](#)', posted text and an image from December 2022 which states that Cyril Ramaphosa has set aside R60 million to bribe provincial commissioners and the IEC to rig the elections.
- Further claims of foreign interference in the election were also detected:
 - A [high-traction](#) post contained disinformation which alleged that the ANC had been notified by the CIA that the EFF was set to win the general election and that this would not be a desirable outcome for the country.
 - The CABC noted content related to Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and the IEC's initiative to tackle [mis- and disinformation](#) during the election. An account posted numerous threads alleging that MMA and the IEC are funded as part of a "globalist" agenda to influence viewpoints in the country: [\(1\)](#) ; [\(2\)](#) ; [\(3\)](#).

Mis- and Disinformation

- We've noted ongoing attempts to shut down opinions and viewpoints that do not align with the pro-MK agenda. Individuals who criticise the party or former President Jacob Zuma are subjected to online vitriol. Former Public Protector Thuli Madonsela was targeted by the use of false and derogatory imagery, [\(1\)](#) ; [\(2\)](#) ; [\(3\)](#), accusing her of being a CIA agent, [\(1\)](#) ; [\(2\)](#) ; [\(3\)](#), and ally of the apartheid regime, [\(1\)](#) ; [\(2\)](#).
 - While differing perspectives and views are crucial for healthy democratic participation, the proliferation of unproven and untested conspiracist invective, mis- and disinformation can potentially harm democratic participation and unduly influence the outcomes of democratic processes.
 - We recommend monitoring and engagement related to the spread of disinformation and hate speech targeted toward individuals, alongside the promotion of engaging in healthy debate in online spaces which centre on holding space for differing opinions and perspectives rather than resorting to bullying, mis- and disinformation or hate speech.

Analysis & Commentary

- The CABC notes that conversation around interference in the election, whether foreign or domestic, has begun to mirror rhetoric deployed in the United States by supporters of Donald Trump as it became clear

that Trump was slated to lose the election⁶. This is evident through posts which allege that the [IEC is captured](#), stemming from a range of political parties and around Former President Zuma being [purposefully targeted](#) by [democratic institutions](#), that Zuma will [emerge renewed](#) after facing a [campaign of persecution](#), and that [Zuma](#) and the [MK party](#) have been ordained through divine right to lead South Africa into the future. Rhetoric of this nature, across the political spectrum but with a particular emphasis on the information ecosystem around the MK Party may sow [fertile ground](#) for [post electoral contestation](#) or the [outbreak of violence](#), as demonstrated by the [July Riots in 2021](#).

- The IEC has a duty to act within its mandate in the best interest of free and fair elections as it interprets it, but is not the final arbiter on these matters, hence concedes authority to the Concourt. The commission is currently receiving backlash for challenging the ruling, and it also appears that it would still be criticised if it had allowed it to stand. Furthermore, the conflation of individuals with the work of the commission fails to acknowledge the self-correcting nature of the IEC, as evidenced in the swift response actioned as candidate lists were leaked earlier in the [election cycle](#).

Summary of Recommendations

- We recommend civil society organisations, campaigns, and the media to
 - Send out messaging that emphasises that the IEC is an institution and not beholden to a single person, that checks and balances are in place to ensure that abuse of power within the IEC can be mitigated against, and that the IEC has as strict code of conduct for its own members as it does for political parties.
 - Monitor hate speech and disinformation targeted toward individuals, but further, counter these narratives and invite citizens to harness democratic self-efficacy and exercise their ability to hold power to account and defend our democracy.
 - Highlight voter education tools to assist and encourage individuals to explore the options available to them and alongside this encourage individuals 'in the know' to reach out, hold critical and constructive conversations in the spirit of 'each one, teach one'.
 - Promote narratives rooted in 'civic good' around exercising one's right to vote and engaging in the associated responsibility of promoting constructive dialogue and respecting each individual's right to associate themselves with representation whose values best align with their own.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/19/magazine/stop-the-steal.html>