



Futurelect

Bi-Weekly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for Electoral Engagement #7

'Anything' for votes!

Overview

- The online conversation around the upcoming elections and political climate received close to 350,000 mentions between 16 and 30 April 2024. The main topics of conversation included the launch of the EFF's Vuka! Vela! Vota! ad; reports¹ that the MK Party forged signatures in order to register with the IEC and that the party was experiencing internal leadership squabbles which led to the axing of co-founder Jabulani Khumalo.
 - The IEC has called on law enforcement to investigate allegations that the MK Party forged signatures to register for the elections.
 - Some supporters of the MK Party have accused the ANC of using both Lennox Ntsodo (who made allegations about the forged signatures) and Khumalo to destabilise the party. Examples of these can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- The CABC has noted sentiments from users who argue that political parties and their leaders will do "anything" for votes. These sentiments were inspired by the circulation of posts showing individuals wearing ANC regalia helping members of the public with plaiting hair and handwashing clothes. Examples of these can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- Online South Africans are also resonating with the notion that poor service delivery is intentional and that if government wanted to fix the country's socio-economic problems, it would. Some individuals agree with the notion that resources that could have been directed towards improving the lives of South Africans are wasted during the campaign season. Posts expressing variations of these sentiments can be found [here](#); [here](#) and [here](#).
- We have noted that individuals who make their political affiliations/alignments known are often criticised by others who do not align with similar parties. For example, individuals expressing their allegiance to the ANC are deemed deserving of suffering and unemployment, those supporting EFF are accused of being unpatriotic while those supporting the MK Party are deemed foolish for expecting change from a former president in his retirement years. Posts expressing this can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Zuma's Candidacy

- The Electoral Court has released the reasoning behind the controversial judgement which cleared former President Jacob Zuma to stand on the ballot for the MK Party². The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) relied largely on section 47(e) of the Constitution which provides, *inter alia*, that anyone convicted of an offence and sentenced to more than 12 months imprisonment, is not eligible to be a member of the Assembly. However, the section adds a further qualification, noting that no one may be regarded as

¹ [Zuma's Umkhonto weSizwe Party 'forged' signatures to meet IEC threshold](#)

² <https://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAEC/2024/5.html>

sentenced until an appeal against the conviction or sentence is determined, or waived. In terms of the judgement, former President Zuma is not disqualified from standing for office, due to his conviction being handed down by the Constitutional Court, which is the highest court of the land and as such, he is unable to appeal.

- The online conversation is polarised with pro-Zuma perspectives indicating that they believe Zuma and the MK party are being targeted by the Judiciary and IEC prior to the election and that Zuma's arrest in 2021 was unlawful and an act of persecution: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4) ; (5)
- Other individuals expressed that the IEC is acting within its mandate in seeking further clarity on the ruling of the Electoral Court in relation to Zuma's eligibility to form part of the MK Party list. We have also noted sentiments from users who feel that the Electoral Court ruling was unsatisfactory or biased: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4)
- For expert opinions on the judgement of the court, see the following [thread](#) and [opinion piece](#).
 - For perspectives on the judgement, see comments under the following highly engaged threads: (1) ; (2) ; (3).
 - The matter of Zuma's eligibility is still under consideration at the Constitutional Court³.
- In light of the above, we note that the conversation is polarised such that individuals question both the IEC approaching the Constitutional Court and the validity of the Electoral Court's judgement. We recommend messaging that affirms that trust is an essential component of a well-functioning democracy and that our democratic institutions act independently of political influence. We furthermore recommend messaging that accommodates the varying perspectives on the judgement of the Electoral Court, as well as the decision by the IEC to approach the Constitutional Court for further clarity.

IEC

- Conversation about the IEC's impartiality came to a head between 29 and 30 April. Mis- and disinformation as well as speculation was aimed toward the IEC after American Ambassador Reuben Brigety shared an image on social media of a meeting between the IEC and the American Embassy which centred on preparations for the upcoming election.
 - Concern and conspiracy around the role of the American ambassador was noted from both political actors and individual accounts, with EFF deputy president, Floyd Shivambu, describing the meeting as a "[serious cause for concern](#)".
 - Online influencers extended the narrative that the meeting was evidence of the IEC being captured by foreign interests: (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4) ; (5) ; (6) ; (7) ; (8) ; (9).
 - An account purporting to represent Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla indicated that the meeting was evidence of the need for [vote counting to be conducted manually](#). It is important to note here that vote counting is conducted manually in South Africa⁴.
- South African head of public diplomacy, Clayson Monyela (1) ; (2), and the [IEC](#) have addressed the speculation surrounding the meeting and dispelled mis- and disinformation-laden narratives stating that meetings between host nations and diplomatic officials are common practices internationally when elections are due to be held within a country.

³

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/concourt-to-hear-iec-challenge-to-zuma-eligibility-on-10-may-19-days-before-elections-20240428>

⁴ <https://www.elections.org.za/content/Documents/Voter-education/Continuous-Voter-Education/IEC-Factsheet--Counting/>

- In this respect, we recommend shoring up confidence in the IEC's independence, which it has demonstrated throughout South Africa's democratic history, by drawing attention to the strict protocols, processes and codes of conduct to which the electoral process - and hence the IEC itself - remains bound. Further, if IEC officials are found to be engaged in any form of corruption they will certainly be tried in the courts and punished with jail sentences, hence there is sufficient deterrence in respect of corruption in the IEC. By comparison, it is in the political sphere that we have witnessed a lack of accountability and consequences for corrupt behaviour, hence we should regard accusations of impropriety levelled at the IEC emanating from political figures with a fair measure of scrutiny.

Election Coverage

- The CABC has noted calls from civil society to protect the independence of the SABC (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4). These calls were made in response to a leaked audio clip in which President Cyril Ramaphosa can be heard discussing the ANC's plan to challenge and monitor media organisations [who report 'negatively' on the ANC](#). Alongside the audio clip, it has been reported that the State Security Agency had been instructed by an unknown actor to vet the head of [SABC News - Moshoeshe Monare](#).
- The CABC has noted that EFF president Julius Malema has indicated that the party will seek to take News24 to the electoral court, ostensibly for biased reporting: (1) ; (2).
- During the reporting period, we noted light-hearted conversations directed toward independent candidates, covered by NewzRoom Afrika : (1) ; (2) ; (3).
 - Posts and responses of this nature ridiculed the perspectives of the candidates and the way that they presented themselves, particularly with the shared usage of sunglasses while being interviewed on television.
 - It is important to remind the public that democratic representation is important and that independent candidates deserve the same level of respect as parties. We recommend messaging that also reminds the public that while a healthy democracy constitutes debates around various issues, it is important to respect the views or opinions of those we might not agree with.
- The CABC has noted, with concern, allegations of political interference by the SSA with regard to the functioning of the SABC. It is important to note that the public trust in the media is already being eroded by proponents of #VoetsekSAMedia online. We are encouraged to see the media reporting on instances of political interference and urge them to continue doing so. We also recommend civil society to join in defending the media and restoring trust in the public's main source of factual news, especially during elections, where mis- and disinformation peaks.

Mis- and Disinformation

- The CABC has further detected mis- and disinformation targeted toward Mozambican citizens, who are currently being registered, within South Africa, by their electoral commission ahead of general elections to be held in Mozambique (1) ; (2) ; (3) ; (4) ; (5).
 - The CABC has previously detected election manipulation narratives targeting Mozambican citizens⁵. AfricaCheck has recently [debunked](#) these claims.
- Claims of electoral manipulation were noted (1) ; (2) ; (3). These claims were attached to a video of individuals involved in a voter education program run by the [ANC](#). The program in question makes use of

⁵[Elections24 - Factsheet 2](#)

dummy ballots to inform and explain the new three-ballot system introduced for the 2024 National General Elections while canvassing support for the governing party.

- The [IEC](#) has responded and refuted the claim that pre-election voting was present in the video, noting that civil society, political parties and the IEC have a shared responsibility of engaging in voter education prior to the election.
- The CABC has noted an instance of manipulated political imagery targeted toward the EFF, by an account indicating their alignment with the #PutSouthAfricansFirst camp (1). In the photoshopped image, EFF president Julius Malema is pictured alongside a slogan stating, “putting South Africans first is xenophobic, I don’t want your xenophobic vote”.
- We recommend that the media, civil society and campaigns work toward the dissemination of information related to media literacy and critical media engagement while catering for the backdrop of a volatile media space and the proliferation of mis- and disinformation online. A general rule of thumb in the production of any such material is to encourage individuals to contrast and compare perspectives from differing media houses and on social media in relation to reporting on topics critical to the election. Moreover, reliance on social media solely as a source of news or information is not a panacea for distrust of legacy media and should be emphasised as but one component in relation to an individual’s media diet and responsibility as an active citizen. More specifically, relying on social media alone for one’s news is likely to result in being exposed to high levels of mis- and disinformation

Summary of Recommendations

- In line with the debunking and verification work conducted by a variety of organisations, we recommend that the media, civil society and campaigns seek to encourage and train individuals with regard to critical media literacy, the use of social media as a news source, and the identification and verification of mis- and disinformation.
- We recommend messaging that affirms that trust is an essential component of a well-functioning democracy and that our democratic and media institutions, inclusive of the IEC, organs of the Judiciary and the public broadcaster, act independently of political influence and are governed by regulatory bodies and legislation.
- It is important to remind the public that political affiliation and democratic representation are rights enshrined in the Constitution and it is thus important to respect the views or opinions of those we might not agree with.