



Monthly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for online conversations about immigrants in South Africa #1

1 - 30 April 2024

Overview

This report provides an overview of conversations about immigrants in South Africa for the month of April 2024. As the country approaches elections on 29 May 2024, a concerning trend remains prevalent online: immigrants are increasingly being scapegoated for a range of socio-economic and political issues. This report looks at the conversation volume, key metrics, topics and which authors are driving the conversation. It also highlights instances of mis- and disinformation that occurred during the reporting period.

Conversation volume

For the month of April, the xenophobia conversation was made up of more than 311k mentions from more than 61k authors. (Refer to Figure 1.) The overwhelming majority of these mentions consisted of retweets (almost 240k), resulting in a retweet percentage of 77%. The [Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change](#) (CABC) regards this percentage as high and based on previous studies within the xenophobia conversation, the percentage is likely indicative of manipulation.

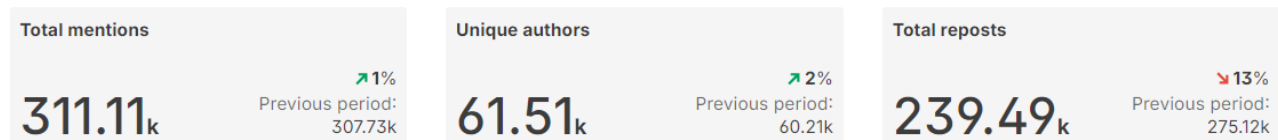


Figure 1: Key volume metrics

Key narratives:

- Politicians campaigning for votes on the basis of fighting illegal immigration. [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]
- Tweets/posts that critique the EFF's Pan-African stance i.e., that is inclusive towards African immigrants. [1]; [2]; [3]; [4]
- Retweeting about crimes that immigrants have been involved in. It is noteworthy that there are social media handles that portray themselves as news sources which curate this content, which is then amplified. [1], [2], [3]; [4] This speaks to the need to "be first" on social media, which in reality translates into a large amount of mis- and disinformation proliferating online because these sources don't have adequate journalistic protocols or screening processes in place - rather, they are often heavily biased and one-sided, engaging in confirmation bias styled 'reporting'.

Trending hashtags:

- **#Diepsloot:** 2 419 mentions about Diepsloot focused on a missing child, with Sbhonginkosi Mhlanga frantically searching for her abducted three-year-old daughter, Nosipho. The family reported her disappearance to the local police station, leading to community efforts to find the girl. She was grabbed from her mother at a spaza shop in Diepsloot. Social media, such as Twitter/X, is being used to raise awareness in the search for Nosipho. [1]; [2] Some users blamed immigrants for the kidnapping.
- **#PutSouthAfricansFirst:** There were 2 226 mentions of the hashtag 'PutSouthAfricansFirst'. These mentions included: condemnation of crimes committed by foreign nationals [1]; [2]; [3], hateful content adopting a 'proud xenophobe' stance boasting about holding a negative attitude towards immigrants [1], amplification of a story about police brutality against Zimbabwean vendors [1], and content about fake documentation being sold to immigrants [1].
- **#abahambe:** There were 539 mentions of the hashtag 'abahambe'. This term meaning 'go home' was popularised online in January 2024 when Gayton McKenzie and Patriotic Alliance members undertook a vigilante operation where they patrolled the Beitbridge border. In some videos, PA members can be seen shouting "abahambe!" to Zimbabweans who appeared to be trying to cross the border into South Africa illegally. The mentions, in April 2024, using this hashtag include content about Zimbabweans being arrested for committing crimes [1]; [2] and police brutality against Zimbabwean vendors [1]. The content overlaps with #putsouthafricansfirst as abahambe and putsouthafricansfirst were frequently posted together.
- **#Zabalaza [1]:** Relating to a bar fight incident in Stellenbosch where foreign bouncers fought with students. The tweet alleges that many bars in Stellenbosch employ immigrants. Questions were raised online about the legality of their work permits with calls to prioritise economic opportunities for South Africans in job sectors like hospitality and security.
- Further high-reach hashtags included: #crimewatch, #operationdudula, #vukamzansi, #massdeportation and #zimbabwe. #crimewatch is associated with posts about instances of crime. #operationdudula is used when content by the movement turned political party called Operation Dudula is posted and is frequently xenophobic content. Users posting #vukamzansi referred to immigrants using xenophobic names and complained about their cleanliness where they operate as well as a variety of other grievances. Notably there was discussion about voting preferences, particularly tweets/Xs about not voting ANC because they will give preference and benefits to immigrants again after the elections. Mass deportation is one of the election campaign calls that the Patriotic Alliance and some other parties including Operation Dudula have made. The content using this hashtag was largely generated by @PSAFLive. #zimbabwe reflects content that problematises the presence of Zimbabweans in South Africa.

Top reach content:

- **She is South African:** [1]; [2] SABC's Morning Live news anchor, Leanne Manas, interviewed Zimbabwean commentator and Chairperson of Zimbabwe Anti-Sanctions Movement, Rutendo Matinyarare. During the interview, she asked him why he doesn't go home to Zimbabwe if there are so many opportunities there. Some netizens came out

strongly in critique of her, saying that a white woman should not tell a black man in Africa to go home. Others defended her, saying she is South African and remarked that as a journalist she asked relevant questions.

- *Arrest of undocumented Malawians:* [1] A tweet/X about a minibus taxi fully loaded with more than 37 undocumented Malawian nationals being intercepted by SAPS members in Limpopo province received 687.5K views, was reposted 998 times, quoted 301 times and liked 1 541 times.

Author analysis

- Top 5 most mentioned Twitter/X posters:






Most Mentioned X Posters	POSTS ▼	REPOSTS	ALL POSTS	IMPRESSIONS
 @onsbaizanie	1659	3659	5319	17002786
 @gaytonmck	1579	2246	3826	7472779
 @africafactszone	1126	986	2113	8616233
 @matinyarare	492	359	853	2548353
 @galxe	479	26	506	54479

Table 1: Most mentioned Twitter/X posters

- Top 10 Twitter/X posters:










X POSTER	MATCHING POSTS ▼	SENTIMENT ☺			IMPACT ☺	X ☺
		POS	NEG	NEU	AVERAGE	FOLLOWERS
 @Samuel33861829	639	13	219	406	0.2	867
 @stephen78000	439	26	186	226	0	255
 @FuellevyHeist	426	6	293	126	5.2	1737
 @SekaoV	366	0	193	173	7.3	465
 @Nkalakathaaaaa	353	6	213	133	1.4	393
 @mrsmphuthi	346	13	199	133	13.3	736
 @Mpisekhaya3866	326	6	166	153	1.1	218
 @ODotywana	313	19	186	106	1.5	99
 @Rb_sa	306	6	99	199	52.3	104 492

Table 2: Top 10 Twitter/X posters

Mis- and Disinformation:

- Nedbank CEO Mike Brown's salary was topical due to his high salary and the announcement that he will be retiring. This tweet/X alleges that he is Zimbabwean. [1]
- Tweet/X that alleges foreigners control 99.9% of the spaza shop market. [1]

Proponents of the anti-immigrant narrative frequently blow statistics out of proportion to create the shock factor necessary for the amplification of mis/disinformation. This is a strategy to drive messaging which is resorted to on an ongoing basis. Another strategy is how often anonymous influencers question the nationality of certain individuals (as we have seen with Peter Ndoro and Naledi Chirwa) in an attempt to invalidate their opinions or mute their voices.

Analysis and commentary

This analysis offers an overview of the conversation on immigrants in South Africa in April, with a focus on online news stories, top hashtags, key narratives, and author analysis. Over 311k mentions from 61k authors were recorded, indicating a significant discussion on xenophobia. The high retweet percentage of nearly 77% raises concerns about potential manipulation. Key issues include border control, job opportunities, and crime involving immigrants. These issues are being heavily leveraged by politicians and political actors in the lead-up to the national elections. Politicians using xenophobic rhetoric for electoral gain highlights the need for responsible discourse and policy interventions to address the underlying challenges. Top Twitter posters and authors can provide insights into key influencers. In conclusion, while the analysis provides valuable insights into the xenophobia conversation in April, it also highlights challenges such as manipulation of the online conversation, political instrumentalisation, and the proliferation of mis- and disinformation that needs to be addressed through collaborative efforts from various stakeholders including government, civil society, media, and tech platforms.

Summary of Recommendations

We recommend civil society organisations, campaigns, and the media:

- Create and distribute communications that challenge xenophobic narratives, including emphasising the social and economic benefits that arise from diversity.
- Encourage citizens to engage in civic responsibility by exercising their democratic rights to hold those in power accountable. Politicians and aligned actors are laying the blame for socio-economic and infrastructural ills on foreign migrants, and there is a need to ensure that the citizenry are not duped by these decoy tactics. Instead, they need to be clear that those in power must answer for these ills.
- Monitor and address instances of hate speech and disinformation targeted towards individuals. Report such instances to [Real411](#). Make use of fact-checking organisation [Africa Check](#)'s website to determine if specific disinformation has previously been debunked.
- Develop media literacy programs to help the public critically evaluate and analyse information presented by politicians, enabling them to recognise and reject xenophobic rhetoric. Social media is not a reliable source of information and/or news. Moreover, that if it is the sole source of news and information, whoever is consuming it is far more likely to succumb to mis- and disinformation.
- Advocate for legislation and policy reforms that promote equality, non-discrimination, and protection of the rights of immigrants and minority groups as mandated in the South African Constitution.
- Communicate that immigrant and refugee rights are not merely malleable protections that can be revoked.



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