



# **Project: Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society**

## **Project Series: Xenophobia**

### **Social Media Analytics Report 8**

**01 January 2024 - 30 April 2024**

**Release date: 06 June 2024**

**This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of CABC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.**



**Funded by  
the European Union**

## Table of Contents

1. Findings Summary.....	2
2. Introduction.....	2
3. Background.....	4
4. Research Methodology.....	4
5. Results.....	5
5.1. Volume on X by news media.....	5
5.2. Volume on X by all users.....	6
5.3. Themes on X by news media.....	7
5.4. Themes on X by all users.....	12
5.5. Trends on X by news media.....	18
5.6. Trends on X by all users.....	19
6. Comparison of content by news media versus all handles on X.....	19
7. Discussion.....	20
8. Recommendations.....	21
9. Conclusion.....	22

## 1. Findings Summary

- Nigeria and Zimbabwe featured prominently on X in both media posts and in online conversation on X about immigration to South Africa and its governance.
- Posts by online news media on X:
  - Focus on specific events and systemic failures within the immigration system.
  - Government efforts to address these issues are highlighted.
  - There were some video clips of sensational statements from prominent figures, including those promoting xenophobia.
  - Posts on X typically lack examination of policy implications, legal frameworks, and administrative reforms.
- Posts by all users on X:
  - Tone is often impassioned and reactive, particularly among ordinary users and politicians.
  - Discourse on X for this conversation often highlights fear, prejudice, and divisive narratives, exacerbating societal tensions.
  - Certain accounts affiliated with Operation Dudula and Put South Africans First posted instances of hateful content and incitement to violence. Refer to Real411 assessments [here](#).
  - Calls for immediate action include deportation of undocumented migrants and comprehensive audits by the Department of Home Affairs.
  - Reflects growing frustration with perceived lack of accountability and effectiveness in governance.
  - However, some calls entail sustained scapegoating of immigrants for social issues not caused by them.
- Trends in the conversation by political parties:
  - Exploiting immigration issues for favourable positioning ahead of elections.
  - Immigration and border control are key talking points.
  - Parties offer divergent approaches from the extremes of mass deportation to open borders.
- Key governance issues include porous borders, ineffective border control, the issuing of fraudulent documents and changes in policy such as for permits and visas.

## 2. Introduction

The "Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society" report series is funded by the European Union (EU), with this particular part of the Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change (CABC) programme focusing on xenophobia. It offers regular analysis of troubling narratives and divisive

content relating to xenophobia on South African social media, specifically X (formerly Twitter). This report, the eighth in the series, focuses on how governance of immigration to South Africa is reported on by news media handles on X and how this compares to the social media conversation on X about it.

Governance involves the processes and systems used to efficiently operate an organisation or society, including resource allocation, relationship management, exercising authority, and tackling societal issues<sup>1</sup>. In this research, the concept of governance is operationalised with regards to how immigration (including asylum seeking) is being handled in South Africa.

In the Mo Ibrahim 2022 [governance index](#), South Africa scores 67.7 out of 100 in overall governance. South Africa ranked 6 out of 54 countries in Africa. In comparison, South Africa's neighbour, Zimbabwe scored 48.1 out of 100 in overall governance, ranking 29th in Africa. Nigeria follows Zimbabwe, scoring 47.7 out of 100 in overall governance and ranking 30th in Africa.

Against the backdrop of the South African election season, political parties' immigration stances underwent scrutiny. On the one end of the spectrum, the Patriotic Alliance's "Abahambe" campaign in January 2024 stirred up xenophobic sentiments towards immigrants and refugees in South Africa, particularly those hailing from African and Global South countries. On the other end, is the EFF which is pan-Africanist in its ideology. There were challenges to the EFF's open borders stance within Africa.

A high court ruling on 17 January 2024 held that the blocking of IDs was unconstitutional. This in light of the fact that the Department of Home Affairs had issued duplicate ID numbers to some and blocked these ID numbers to rectify their error, but this had negative implications for the ID holders.

On 22 February 2024, the Supreme Court of appeal dismissed the Home Affairs Minister's appeal of the ruling on the Zimbabwean Exemption Permits (ZEP)<sup>2</sup>. The court had ruled that the decision made in December 2021 to terminate the Zimbabwean Exemption Permit was invalidated. Additionally, an interim interdict was put in place to prevent the government from detaining or deporting any individual who holds the permit. The Minister had sought to have this ruling overturned, but failed to do so. On 01 December 2023, the South African government extended Zimbabwean Exemption Permits (ZEPs) by two years until 29 November 2025.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bevir, M. (2008). Key Concepts in Governance. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446214817>.

Klijn, E. (2008). Governance and Governance Networks in Europe. *Public Management Review*, 10, 505 - 525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030802263954>.

<sup>2</sup> The Zimbabwean Exemption Permit (ZEP) is a special type of documentation provided by South Africa to Zimbabwean immigrants. Essentially, it allows Zimbabweans to legally live and work in South Africa for a certain period. This permit aims to manage and regulate the number of Zimbabwean nationals in South Africa, recognizing the need for some flexibility due to social and economic circumstances in Zimbabwe.

Another key development during the study duration was that President Ramaphosa signed off on a proclamation for the Special Investigations Unit to conduct an investigation into the Department of Home Affairs. This and other events have meant that attention has turned to foreigners obtaining South African IDs and passports. There have been a number of arrests of undocumented persons and in which fraudulent documents and counterfeit goods were confiscated.

There have been calls for mass deportation, particularly by the Patriotic Alliance and Operation Dudula. Ongoing advocacy for the mass deportation of foreigners prompted discussions on the perceived unfair prioritisation of Zimbabweans in certain segments of the South African job market while calls for an audit of permits and residence documents intensified. This underscores the contestation in the terrain. Simultaneously, the Home Affairs Minister pushed for sanctions on those employing illegal foreigners.

Increased scrutiny of Nigerians living in South Africa coincided with the AFCON 2023, with Nigeria and South Africa facing off in the semi-finals match.

### **3. Background**

The Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC) has been monitoring online xenophobic content and disinformation campaigns since 2020. In 2020, CABC released a report entitled 'Here be dragons!' and identified, exposed and intervened upon a coordinated xenophobic network. It was the first expose of an influence operation seeking to amplify xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment on social media in South Africa. CABC has subsequently published a series of reports, including the [Lay of the Land](#) Report in June 2022, providing an overview of xenophobic micro-narratives in South Africa. In the first quarter of 2023, CABC initiated the "Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society" report series to combat hate speech and discrimination. [Report 1](#), released in March 2023, analysed xenophobia on social media, finding over 80% negativity towards immigrants. Subsequent reports ([Report 2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#) and [7](#)) focused on political mobilisation, key individuals, coordinated campaigns, social media trends, micro-narratives and discourse involving political leaders. The [Beyond Borders](#) Report in October 2023 revealed tactics used by anti-immigrant proponents, including mis- and disinformation, exaggerated statistics, and political parties leveraging these tactics for upcoming elections. In May 2024, the first short-form social listening report was released ([report 1](#)). This report will be produced on a monthly basis to allow CABC's dialogue facilitation unit and media team to respond quicker to problematic narratives.

### **4. Research Methodology**

The date range of 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024 was selected for the analysis period of this report. Data was collected using a social media analytics tool. Initial keywords were selected



through a qualitative process, combining existing knowledge, desk research, a literature review, and social media analysis. These keywords were further refined through manual checks.

For this analysis, two datasets were generated. One from the X handles of news media and journalists and the other from X.com. These datasets specifically cover reporting and conversations about immigration to South Africa.

The main research question is: What are the themes and trends on X about immigration to South Africa and its governance?

The following research sub questions are posed:

- What are the key themes on X from the handles of the media about immigration to South Africa and its governance?
- What are the key themes on X about immigration to South Africa and its governance?
- What are the trends on X from the handles of the media about immigration to South Africa and its governance?
- What are the trends in how governance of immigration is discussed on X in South Africa?

One aspect of the analysis is looking at media handles whilst the other is looking at what is on X more generally. This is reflected in the research questions.

## 5. Results

This section presents the results and structures them according to the research questions. First the volume of the datasets is discussed for context. Then themes on X for news media handles and all handles respectively are outlined. Lastly the trends on X and how messages are conveyed within the conversation by news media handles and all handles is discussed.

### 5.1. Volume on X by news media

The total number of news media mentions on X that have been tracked in this dataset is 2370. Refer to Figure 1 for a breakdown of the volume. The 48 unique authors represent the handles for official news media and journalists that are posting stories or updates on X. The total number of reposts of the posts was 23.17k. This means that the mentions were reposted an average of 10 times each. This is to be expected given that it is news content.

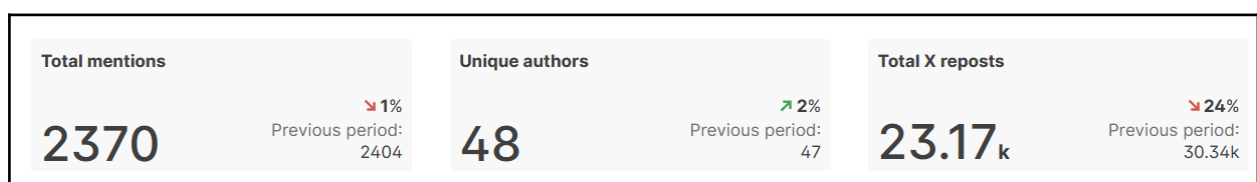


Figure 1: Volume metrics for 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024

The daily mention volume over time shows that these mentions were not made every day (see Figure 2). The peak in mentions was on 4 January 2024. On this day, SABC News posted a [video](#) showing the Patriotic Alliance pushing back border crossers along the Limpopo River.

On 29 April there was another peak which featured the Patriotic Alliance. A City Press [article](#) highlighted the Patriotic Alliance’s position on immigrants. The City Press article outlines PA’s call to fight crime by fighting ‘fire with fire’ by deporting illegal immigrants and bringing back the death penalty. Business Day covered the story too with an [article](#) titled ‘Gauteng to be a ‘no-go zone’ for illegal immigrants, vows PA’s Kenny Kunene’.

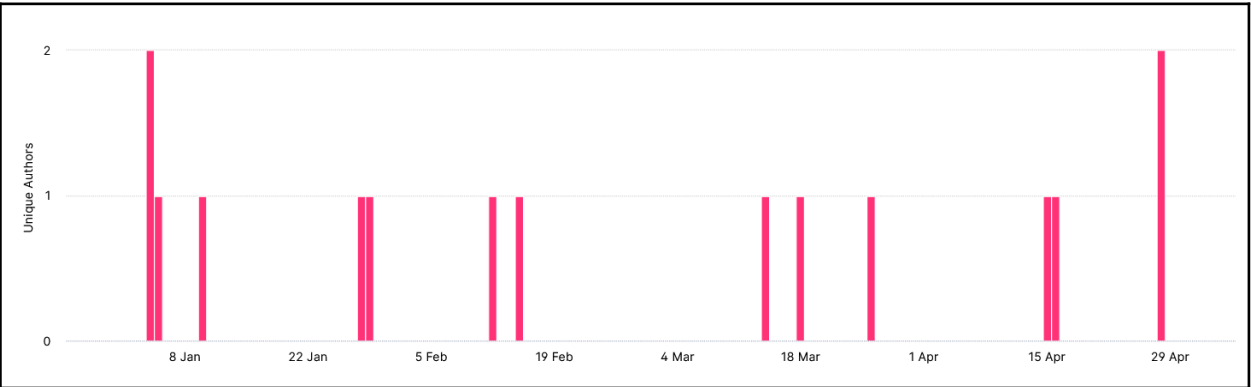


Figure 2: Daily mention volume over time from 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024

5.2. Volume on X by all users

From 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024, there were a total of 1.5m mentions on X discussing immigrants in South Africa (see Figure 3). These mentions were made by 206.06k unique authors. The total number of reposts was 1.43m.

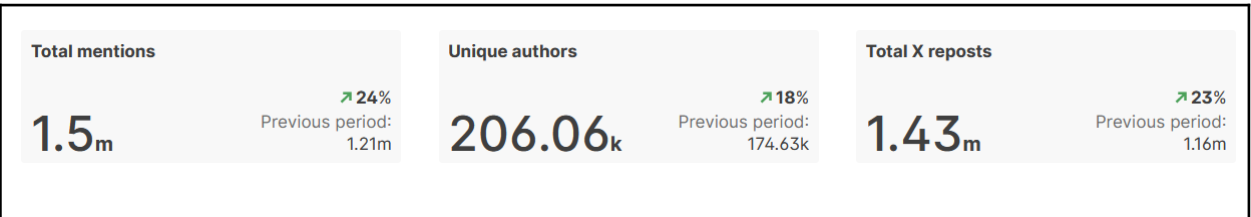


Figure 3: Volume metrics from 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024

The daily mention volume over time is shown in Figure 4 below. The highest volume of mentions on X occurred on 6 January 2024, when there were 1529 mentions made. This was driven by content related to the Patriotic Alliance going to patrol the Beitbridge border (with Zimbabwe) themselves.

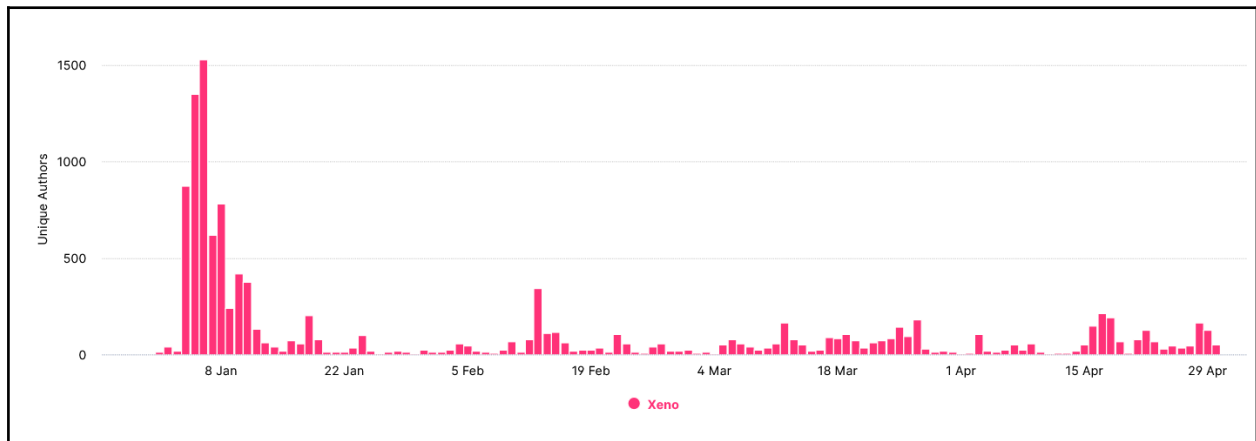


Figure 4: Daily mention volume over time for 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024

### 5.3. Themes on X by news media

This section focuses themes in the conversation by the media on X related to immigration to South Africa and its governance. The diagram in Figure 5 illustrates the primary topics (inner ring) and subtopics (outer ring). These topics consist of (1) Nigeria, (2) Zimbabwe, and (3) South Africa. The topics represent words that appear most frequently in the data set and what people are saying in relation to each of the topics in the sub-topics.

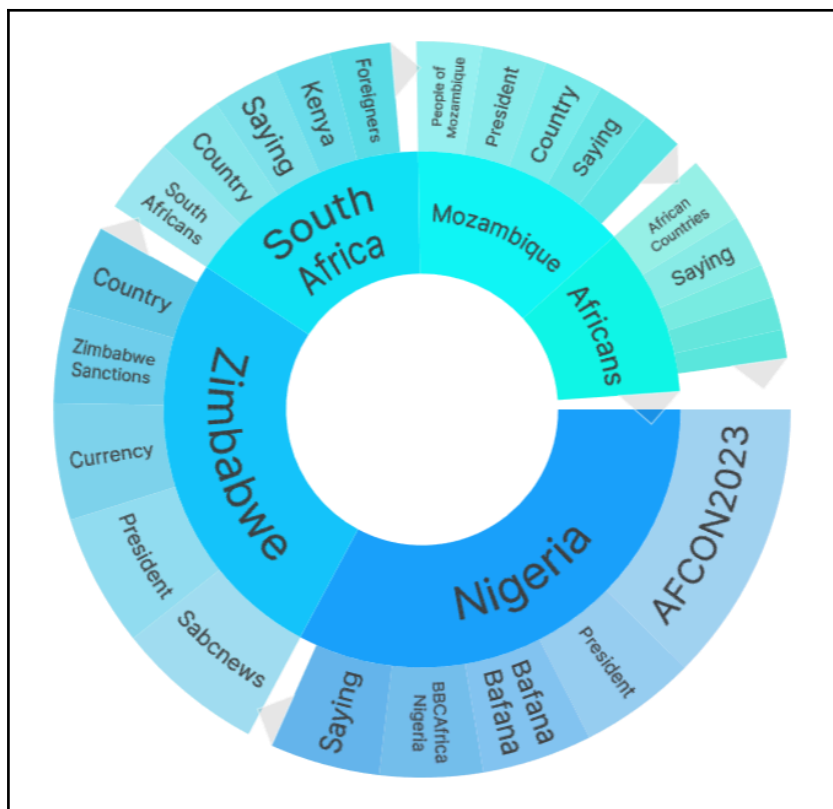


Figure 5: Topics wheel

Themes relevant to the governance of immigration within the topic wheel included:

- Consequences for hiring undocumented persons: News reports on calls by the Minister of Home Affairs for harsher sanctions against companies employing undocumented



immigrants, and action to be taken against unverified employment methods and safety of unevaluated goods. [1], [2], [3]

- Calls for tighter security: Numerous articles report on calls for improved security policies and border control measures to prevent illegal activity, involvement with hazardous products, and manufacturing defects that have come to light in various industries. [1], [2]
- Arrests: There were a number of news articles about arrests of undocumented persons and seizing of counterfeit goods and fraudulent documentation. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7]
- Political implications: The focus here is on ongoing tensions between different political parties and nations, with some trying to combat illegal immigration. Various major figureheads discuss ways to handle these controversies. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]
- Sporting achievements: Media congratulates Ronwen Williams and Bafana Bafana for their significant victories against Cape Verde and their advancement to the next stages of the AFCON 2023 tournament. [1], [2], [3]. There were news stories about the Nigerian High Commission in South Africa issuing an advisory to Nigerian citizens living in South Africa about potential violent backlash from certain South African groupings should Nigeria win against South Africa in the AFCON. [1], [2], [3]. This came after inflammatory posts on social media. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation criticised the Nigerian High Commission for issuing the warning. [1], [2]

Examples from within these themes are provided below. Figure 6 contains a [post](#) with a video in which Home Affairs Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi calls for harsher consequences for companies or individuals who employ illegal foreigners. The 36 second video is accessible to watch.



Figure 6: Dr Aaron Motsoaledi calls for harsher sanctions

Figure 7 below contains a video of politician Makhosi Khoza, now associated with the Abantu Batho Congress, questioning how the Head of Department of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs can be an individual from Zimbabwe. The video is 1 minute 40 seconds long and is in a mix of isiZulu and English.



Figure 7: Mentions within 'Zimbabwe' theme

A News24 [post](#) (see Figure 8) contains an article outlining that how South Africa's borders have been managed has given rise to a situation in which political parties can move against foreigners in the lead up to the elections. This [article](#) is behind a paywall.



Figure 8: Expert opinion: Ineffective border control leads to political opportunism

In another News24 [article](#), it is reported that a bus driver fled from the vehicle at a stop and search operation conducted in the North West. See Figure 9. In the article, the journalist writes that the driver and all the passengers were Zimbabwean citizens and were undocumented. This article is free to read.



Figure 9: Bus driver transporting undocumented persons flees

Figure 10 contains an eNCA X [post](#) calling Bafana Bafana captain Ronwen Williams a hero for his performance in the quarter-final match. This relates to the matter of immigration in South Africa in that the matches were between various African countries and some groups who have grievances with the presence of immigrants from specific countries in South Africa used the AFCON as a focal opportunity to air their complaints.



Figure 10: eNCA post about quarter-finals victory

The semi-final game was between South Africa and Nigeria. The comments from some South Africans online were inflammatory to the extent that the Nigerian embassy in Pretoria issued an advisory to its citizens living in South Africa. The Nigerian High Commission advised its citizens to be alert about the possibility of provocations and manage their conduct before, during and

after the match. It called on them not to celebrate loudly if Nigeria were to win. See article [here](#). Nigeria did go on to beat South Africa in the semi-final, advancing to the final (see [here](#)).

High reach news articles that were posted are shown in table 1 below. These articles are specifically about governance of immigration and give a sense of the events that occurred in the reporting period.

Publication	Date	Headline	Link
SABC News	17 January 2024	High Court declares blocking of IDs unconstitutional	<a href="#">Article</a>
Moneyweb	26 January 2024	Billions of rands at stake over 'swallow' visa backlogs	<a href="#">Article</a>
Newzroom Afrika	29 January 2024	Over 27,000 people deported while trying to enter SA illegally	<a href="#">Video</a>
Sowetan	20 February 2024	Girl 'detained for not carrying ID, accused of being foreigner': SAHRC opens investigation	<a href="#">Article</a>
SABC News	22 February 2024	SCA dismisses Motsoaledi's bid to appeal ZEP ruling	<a href="#">Article</a>
Daily Maverick	27 February 2024	Spooked tourists say SA visa fiasco has chased them away	<a href="#">Article</a>
News24	05 March 2024	Some Chinese nationals use fake addresses in visa applications, portfolio committee hears	<a href="#">Article</a>
Daily Maverick	11 March 2024	Former Helen Suzman Foundation chief granted court order to halt cyberbully after ZEP challenges	<a href="#">Article</a>
SABC News	17 March 2024	Motsoaledi welcomes decision to probe Visa-related issues	<a href="#">Article</a>
News24	01 April 2024	ON THE ROAD   Bertha Chiguvare seeks to bring peace in a Limpopo town where xenophobia is rife	<a href="#">Article</a>
Sowetan Live	08 April 2024	LISTEN   'Prison stats demonstrate foreigners are not the primary source of crime' — Cele	<a href="#">Article</a>
Sowetan Live	09 April 2024	Spouses are 'created' for visa applications, says Aaron Motsoaledi	<a href="#">Article</a>
SABC News	09 April 2024	Motsoaledi announces introduction of Remote Work Visa	<a href="#">Article</a>
Business Day	09 April 2024	Motsoaledi to redo work visa rules after 'ill-advised' premature gazetting	<a href="#">Article</a>
Sowetan Live	18 April 2024	WATCH   Spaza shops need to be audited and pay tax: Motsoaledi on new immigration proposals	<a href="#">Article</a>

*Table 1: High reach news articles about immigration*

#### 5.4. Themes on X by all users

This section deals with themes in the conversation by general users on X related to immigration to South Africa and its governance. The topics wheel in Figure 11 below shows the main topics (in the inner ring) and subtopics (in the outer ring). The three main topics are (1) Nigeria, (2) Zimbabwe and (3) South Africa / South Africans. This is fairly similar to the topics for the handles of the media.

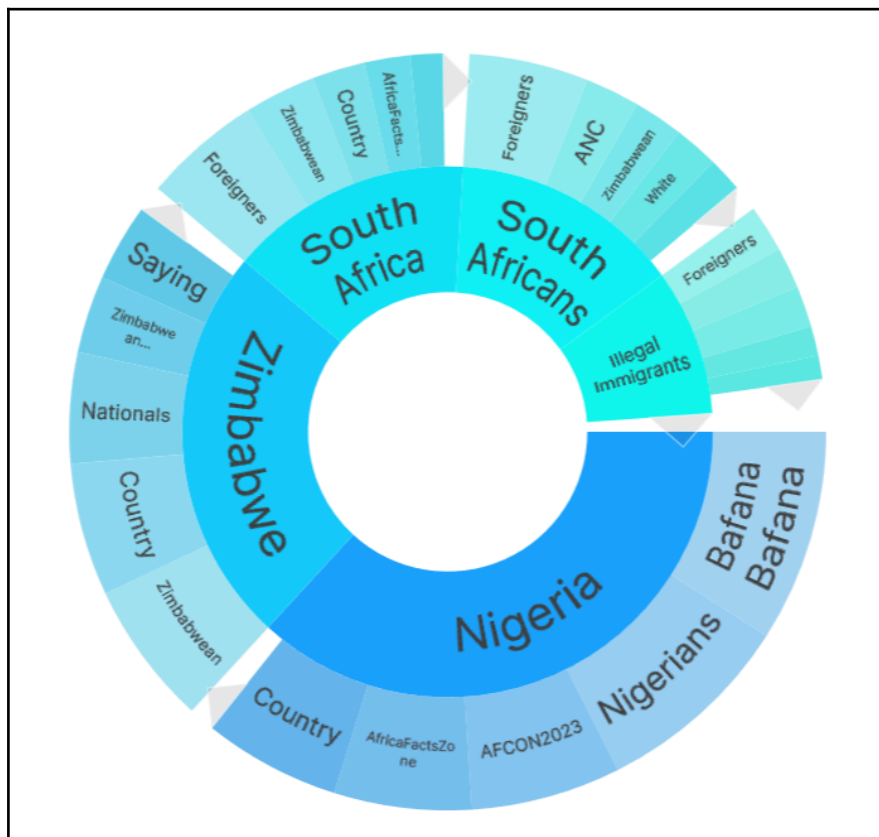


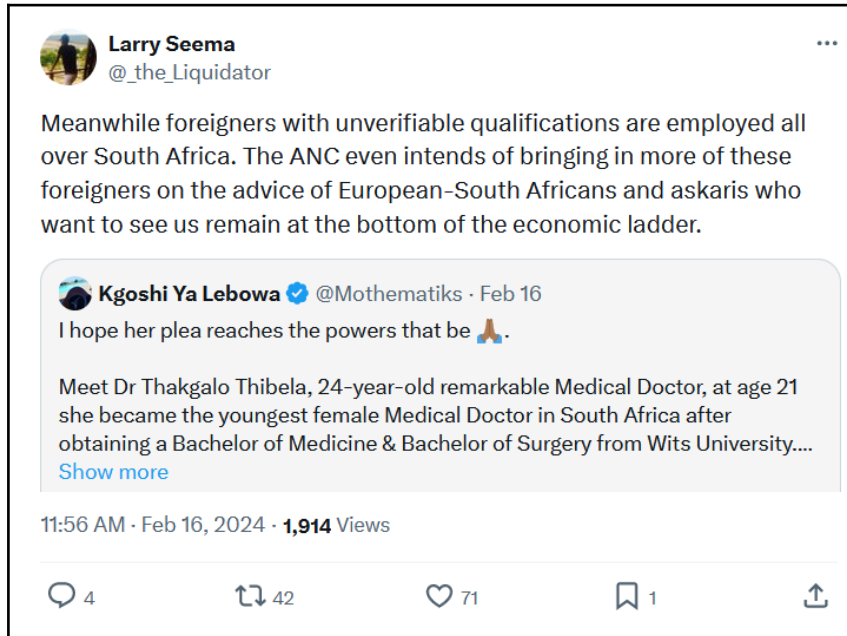
Figure 11: Topics wheel

The themes that are of relevance to governance of immigration were:

- Concerns about immigration in South Africa: Worries about foreign criminals, job allocation, and rights. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]
- Unfavourable sentiment towards ANC: Criticism of South Africa's ruling party for internal and foreign policy issues. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]
- Critique of EFF's Pan African stance: Criticism of opposition party, Economic Freedom Fighters for its position on immigration. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]
- Zimbabweans' presence in South Africa: Various encounters involving Zimbabweans and influencer accounts putting out strong opinions about Zimbabweans, particularly that they should return to Zimbabwe. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]
- Rivalry between South Africa and Nigeria: Sports matches and current tensions between citizens. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]

Examples of mentions that relate to these themes are included in the figures below.

Figure 12 contains an example of the criticism of the ANC over their handling of immigration. This post deals with South African doctors being unemployed in South Africa and says that the ANC will bring in foreign doctors while talented doctors here have no work.



*Figure 12: Critique of the ANC's handling of scarce skills*

On 02 January 2024, the Dudula News handle tweeted "DUDULA ISSUES A WARNING! Operation Dudula has bad news for all illegal immigrants who were celebrating last night hoping for a better 2024. South Africa is going to be a hell for them. Their future in SA is bleak!". See Figure 13. Real411 assessed this post and [ruled](#) that it entails incitement to violence. Real411 said the following in its ruling: "Such language, coupled with the group's history of vigilante xenophobic actions, raises serious concerns of incitement to violence against immigrants."





Figure 13: Operation Dudula issues a warning

An additional observation is how this handle (@dudulamedia) styles itself a news handle, while lacking journalistic credentials. Other handles that style themselves as media handles include [@DKNMOHAMMED](#), [@PSAFLIVE](#) and [@TheTruthPanther](#). See examples [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Figure 14 below shows content where tensions between Nigerians and South Africans are apparent. The poster insinuates that after being deported back to Nigeria, a Nigerian without documents will return to South Africa with falsified documents.

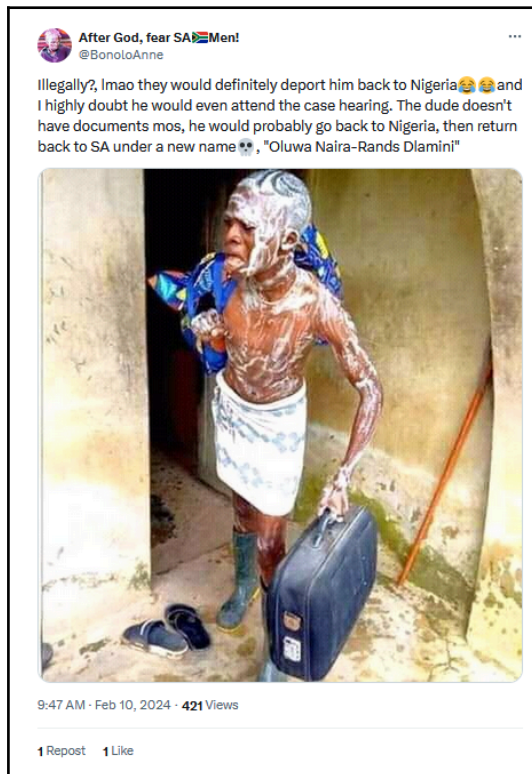


Figure 14: Post concerning deportation and fraudulent documentation

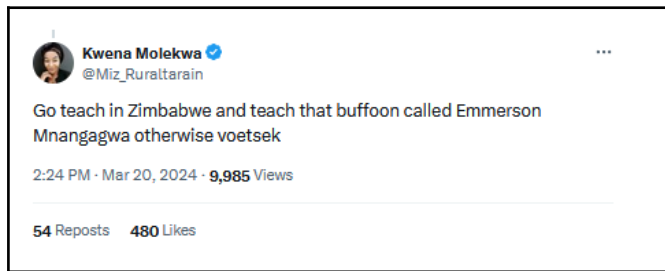
The post in Figure 15 below is a negative comment on the presence of Zimbabweans and Nigerians in South Africa. The poster, who has come up in CABC's research previously as an account that posts hateful content, says that "South Africa belongs to South Africans! Zimbabwe belongs to Zimbabweans! Nigeria belongs to Nigerians! If you are NOT a South African then you are a foreigner. Illegals must stop claiming SA. #PutSouthAfricansFirst". The reference "South Africa belongs to South Africans!" is a dog whistle<sup>3</sup> to an anti-Constitutional position. The Constitution says "South Africa belongs to all who live in it".



Figure 15: Post by @PatriotMarc

In Figure 16 below, the X post is by an account known to publish hateful content and entails being rude towards and about Zimbabweans.

<sup>3</sup> A dog whistle refers to employing veiled or implicit language in political communication to rally backing from a specific group while avoiding backlash. This strategy takes its name from dog whistles, audible only to dogs, not humans. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/dog-whistle-political-meaning>



*Figure 16: Derogatory post aimed at Zimbabweans*

A post by @PSAFLIVE focused on hijacked houses (see Figure 17). The post reads: “WATCH: Master Office in Johannesburg was shutdown by #OperationDudula following their involvement in the “Property Hijacking Syndicate” by both South Africans and illegal foreigners. Through a through (sic) investigation #OperationDudula lead (sic) by the founder of the party president Zandile Dabula discovered that more than 50 houses were hijacked by an illegal Congolese foreigner in Sandton aided by Deeds and Masters office, together with SAPS, while another 50 houses are hijacked by an illegal Nigerian foreigner in Sandton and surrounding areas. The president of Operation Dudula encourages all South Africans who are the victims of hijacked houses to contact them for help.” The handle frequently posts in the style of the news media. In this instance, the post says “WATCH”. A one minute 31 seconds video was posted. In the video Operation Dudula members can be seen in front of the Masters Office. Operation Dudula members are wearing combat uniforms that resemble the South African National Defense Force fatigues. Some members have the camo pants combined with Operation Dudula t-shirts. One man who comes into view can be seen wearing a bulletproof vest. The message being delivered with a heavy police presence to the Masters Office is that the Masters Office is causing people pain. The Operation Dudula leader who is speaking says that there is a guy called Pitso who is Congolese who has hijacked over 50 houses and Beatrice (presumably from the Masters Office) has deliberately not come back to Operation Dudula to say what she has done about Operation Dudula’s request. This suggests a prior interface with the Master’s Office. He continues saying that he hopes from here on, you are going to feel comfortable having a relationship with Operation Dudula and you are going to actually stop the rot in this place. He said that the police are helping but not particularly the Masters Office.



Figure 17: @PSAFLIVE post about Operation Dudula 'investigation'

The Operation Dudula march to the Masters Office was covered by the media. See [here](#).

The posts in Figure 18 refer to the Nigerian / South African AFCON semi-final game. Jollof is a type of rice, but in the conversation it has been repurposed to serve as an insult towards Nigerians.

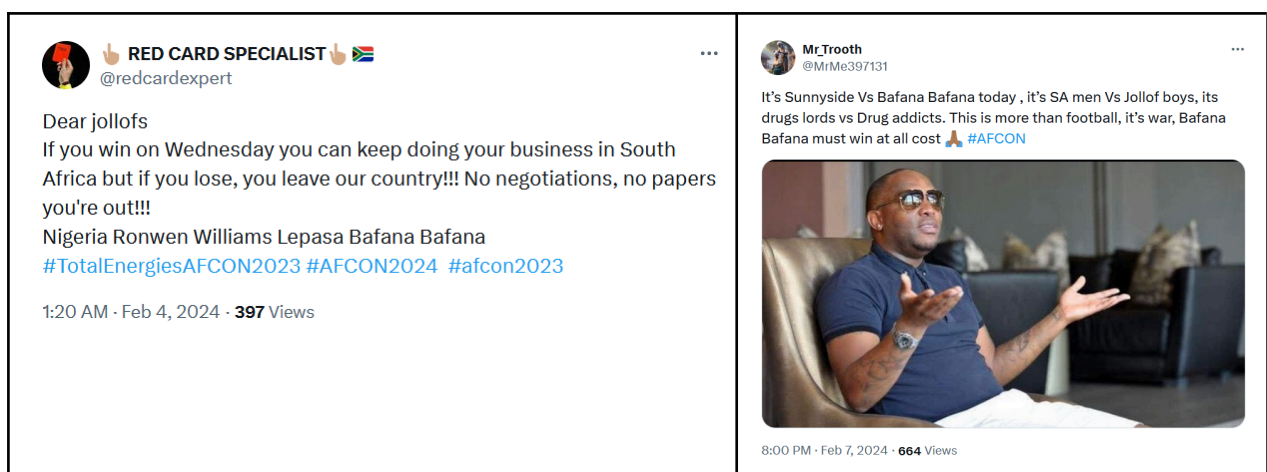


Figure 18: Posts about AFCON semi-finals

Undeterred by the Nigerian High Commission's advisory which included reference to insults referring to jollof rice, the account below (see Figure 19) posted "Today Bafana Bafana is gonna

dudula (beat) the Jollofs from Afcon hence why Nigeria.gov@gmail.com released that statement yesterday.”



Figure 19: Pre-match post insulting Nigerian team

### 5.5. Trends on X by news media

This section focuses on trends in how governance of immigration is reported on X by the media. Figure 20 contains the top hashtags used by news media handles on X. What is apparent is that the hashtags are largely of the newsroom’s name. #sabcnews had the greatest number of mentions, followed by #afcon2023 and #newzroom405. Hashtags that did not include the name of a newsroom included: #zimbabwe, #nigeria, #mozambique and #southafrica. This is consistent with what the topics wheel showed. Also making it into the top 30 hashtags are: #elections24 and #iec.

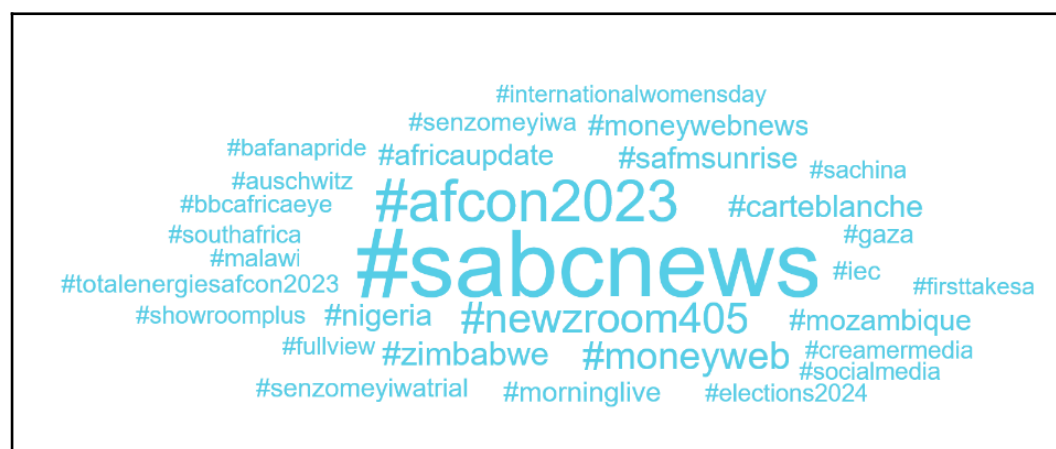


Figure 20: Top hashtags for the period 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024



## 5.6. Trends on X by all users

This section focuses on the trends in the conversation on X by general users by looking at the top hashtags. Figure 21 below shows the top hashtags. The larger the word size, the more times that hashtag was mentioned in the conversation. Consistent with previous reports, the most prominent hashtag was #putsouthafricansfirst. This was followed by #afcon2023, #operationdudula and #putsouthafricafirst.

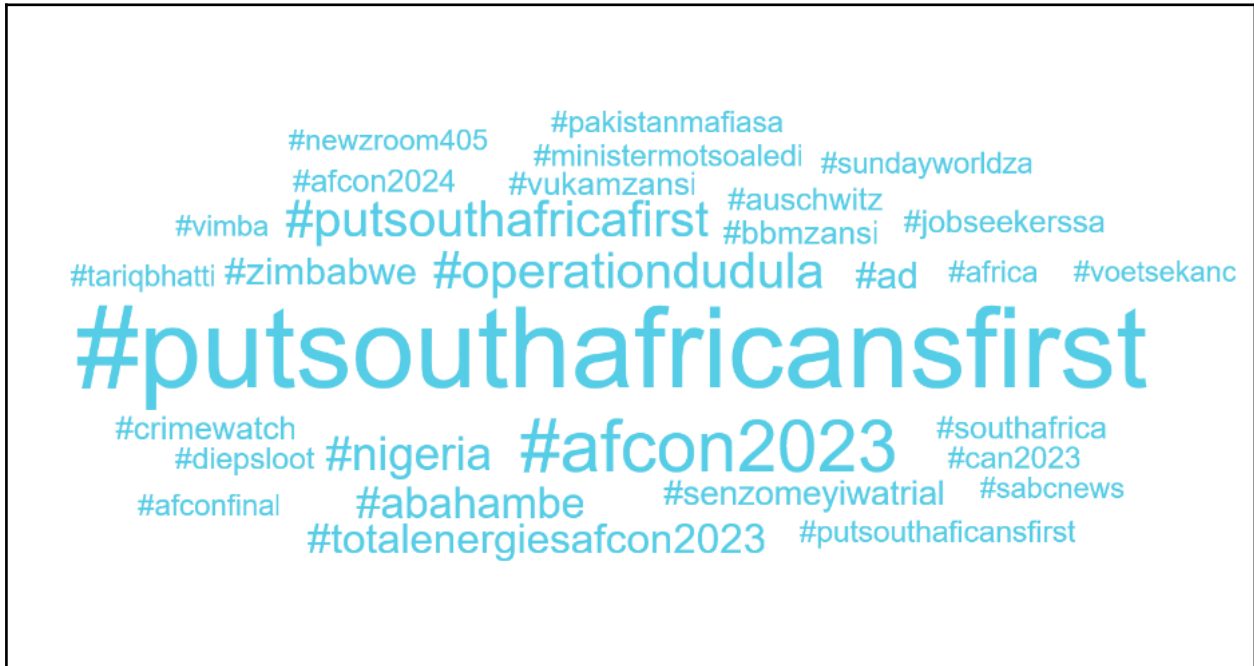


Figure 21: Top hashtags for the period 01 January 2024 to 30 April 2024

## 6. Comparison of content by news media versus all handles on X

Themes posted by media handles on X on immigration governance within the topics wheel include illegal immigration, calls for tighter security, news of arrests, political implications, and tensions surrounding the AFCON. In comparison, themes posted by users on X include concerns about immigration, unfavourable sentiment towards ANC, critique of EFF's Pan African stance, negative opinions about Zimbabweans in South Africa and tensions between South Africans and Nigerians.

Concerning the trends, the top hashtags used by news media on X in relation to immigration governance are mostly newsroom names, with #sabcnews mentioned the most. Other top hashtags include #afcon2023, #zimbabwe, #nigeria, #mozambique, and #southafrica. For all users on X, the top hashtags mentioned in the conversation about immigration governance were #putsouthafricansfirst followed by #afcon2023, #operationdudula, and #putsouthafricafirst.

Online news media approaches the topics with journalistic rigour, presenting reports in the sober, objective style characteristic of the newsroom. However, there is often a palpable sense



of urgency to break stories and capture audience attention. This rush to report can result in the dissemination of incomplete information, particularly when covering the inflammatory remarks of politicians or comments by groups that hold xenophobic positions. Furthermore, the media's reliance on sound bites from prominent figures, including those espousing xenophobic views, sometimes fails to provide adequate context or alternative perspectives, inadvertently lending legitimacy to divisive narratives. Thus, while the media serves as a disseminator of information, its coverage of immigration governance in South Africa occasionally falls short of fostering nuanced understanding and constructive dialogue.

In contrast, a substantial number of posts made on social media by non-media accounts contain inflammatory rhetoric. Accounts, both anonymous and openly affiliated, contribute to the volatile atmosphere, with some handles adopting the guise of legitimate news sources despite lacking journalistic credentials. The implications of this 'pretend news' tactic are that it reveals that there are efforts to manufacture consent for anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric.

Particularly alarming is xenophobic content by certain political figures, notably leaders of the Patriotic Alliance and groups with political aspirations such as Operation Dudula, whose incendiary remarks find resonance among a sizable portion of the online community. Such discourse on social platforms reflects a darker side of public opinion, where fear and prejudice often overshadow rational dialogue, perpetuating divisive narratives and exacerbating societal tensions. There are times when the weaknesses of media reporting, the prevalence of inflammatory online rhetoric and the exploitation of the issue by politicians; converges and reinforces xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment.

## **7. Discussion**

The governance of immigration in South Africa has become a contentious issue. Recent events have brought these issues into sharper focus. It is undeniable that there are significant challenges with how South African borders have been managed. Reports of porous borders, ineffective border control mechanisms, and corruption within the Department of Home Affairs have raised serious concerns about the country's ability to regulate illegal immigration effectively.

A glaring issue is the rampant falsification of documents within the Department of Home Affairs. This not only undermines the integrity of the immigration system but also poses security risks to the nation. The gravity of this situation has prompted President Ramaphosa to issue a proclamation to the Special Investigating Unit, tasking them with investigating allegations of corruption within Home Affairs. This move underscores the government's acknowledgment of the severity of the problem.

While there is a fair degree of overlap in themes between news media coverage and social media discussions on X, with the themes being Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, the divergence lies in the trends contained within the conversations. On one hand, News media often provide analysis and updates on major events in these countries, offering a broader contextual understanding of the issues at hand. On the other hand, social media users tend to highlight more specific incidents, personal anecdotes, and grassroots perspectives, driving discussions around trending topics, viral stories, and public sentiment.

In the content produced by the X handles of the online news media platforms, there are a number of reports that focus on specific events, the systemic failures within the immigration system and the government's efforts to address them. However, the posts made by the media tend not to go so far as examining policy implications, legal frameworks, and administrative reforms needed to rectify the situation. This could be due to the word limit on X.

On social media, particularly among ordinary users and politicians, the tone is often more impassioned and reactive. Accounts affiliated with groups such as Operation Dudula and Put South Africans First frequently post hateful content and incitement to violence (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Their messaging emphasises immediate action, such as deportation of undocumented migrants and a comprehensive audit of all documents issued by the Department of Home Affairs. These calls for decisive measures reflect growing frustration with the perceived lack of accountability and effectiveness in governance. However, there is an extent to which they entail scapegoating of immigrants for social issues which are not in fact caused by immigrants.

As the elections approached, various political parties seized on these issues to position themselves favourably in the eyes of the electorate. Immigration and border control became key talking points, with parties offering divergent approaches to addressing the challenges. Some advocated for stricter border controls and tougher enforcement measures, while others prioritised reforms aimed at streamlining the immigration process and addressing root causes of migration.

## **8. Recommendations**

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

- Promote fact-based dialogue through civil society platforms, fact-checking, and educational campaigns.
- Humanise the immigration narrative by sharing personal stories.
- Empower marginalised voices by including perspectives from immigrants themselves.
- Combat xenophobia, racism, and hate speech in online discussions.
- Leverage social media for advocacy on immigration issues.
- Support grassroots initiatives addressing immigration at the local level.
- Collaborate across sectors to address immigration comprehensively.

- Cover policy implications, legal frameworks, and administrative reforms when reporting on immigration.
- Provide balanced coverage that presents alternative perspectives, particularly when making use of sound bites that entail xenophobic views.
- Promote multilingual and accessible content.

## **9. Conclusion**

This report, the eighth in the "Promoting Democracy and an Equitable Society" report series analyses news media posts on X on governance decisions regarding immigration to South Africa, comparing it to social media discourse on X. The findings offer insights into the online conversation surrounding governance of immigration in South Africa during the specified period.

It is imperative for policymakers, civil society organisations, and communities to collaborate in promoting a narrative of tolerance, understanding, and cooperation. Addressing the root causes of xenophobia, such as socioeconomic inequality and competition for resources, is essential to building a more inclusive society where all individuals, regardless of their nationality, can contribute to the nation's development.

Ultimately, the governance of immigration in South Africa is a multifaceted issue that requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach. While addressing corruption and strengthening border control mechanisms are crucial, any solution must also consider the humanitarian aspects of immigration and uphold the country's commitments to human rights and international law.