



Monthly Social Listening Updates & Recommendations for online conversations about immigrants in South Africa #2

1 - 31 May 2024

Overview

This report provides an overview of online conversations about immigrants in South Africa for the month of May 2024. This report looks at the conversation volume, key metrics, topical events and which authors are driving the conversation.

Conversation volume

For the month of May, data points that made reference to xenophobia - i.e. based on the keyword approach that is used to track the conversation - consisted of 452.46k mentions from more than 92.73k authors. (Refer to Figure 1.) This represents an increase of 33% compared to April 2024. The overwhelming majority of these mentions consisted of retweets (419.09k), resulting in a retweet percentage of 92.6%. The [Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change](#) (CABC) regards this percentage as high and based on previous studies within the xenophobia conversation. A high retweet percentage is one indicator that the conversation may be subject to narrative manipulation, as heavy retweeting is generally used to amplify particular narratives online.

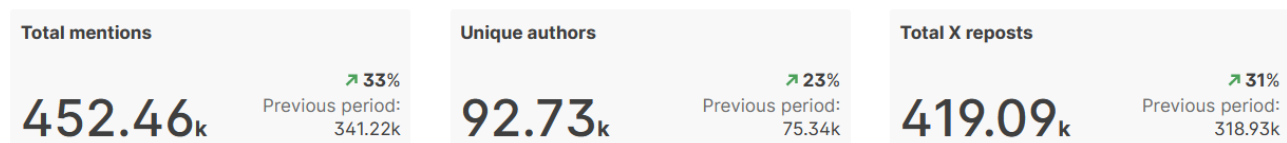


Figure 1: Key volume metrics

Key narratives:

- The topic of illegal immigrants is causing conflict among political parties, with some supporting deportation and others advocating for the Constitutional rights of immigrants, whether they be residing in South Africa legally or illegally.
- There were discussions surrounding the impact of illegal immigrants on the local job market, businesses, and the economy, highlighting tensions and competition between immigrants and local residents.
- There is strong opposition to immigrants, particularly when they are perceived as being prioritised over South Africans. Concerns include immigrants taking local jobs and working illegally. There is a contention that South Africans must be first in line for job vacancies and be supported to own and operate businesses. And that South Africans' needs and protections should be prioritised over those of immigrants.
- Concerns also abound about crime rates, exploitation of immigrants for cheap labour, implications on the quality of life for citizens, and the strain on law enforcement to handle illegal immigrants.

- The discussion around illegal immigrants often revolves around government policies like the National Health Insurance Bill and land ownership laws, which may affect immigrants' rights.
- The issue of illegal immigration and the selective application of laws are a recurrent topic of discussion.

Topical events:

- The National and Provincial Election occurred on 29 May. Several political parties, such as the Patriotic Alliance, African Transformation Movement (ATM), ActionSA, and Operation Dudula, outlined their proposed approaches towards immigrants residing in South Africa during their campaigns.
- Operation Dudula announced that it had made an agreement with the Patriotic Alliance on key issues and urged its supporters to vote PA on the national elections ballot and vote Operation Dudula on the provincial ballots in provinces where it was listed.
- The EFF faced criticism for their Pan-Africanist oriented policies on open borders and the employment of foreigners.
- A motion submitted by the ATM in 2019 to reserve certain sectors of the economy for ONLY South Africans was rejected by political parties in Parliament.
- Illegal immigrants were found dead in the #GeorgeBuildingCollapse, fueling xenophobia and exposing the exploitation of foreign labour. A number of netizens commented that this incident reveals that white-owned companies are employing illegal immigrants for cheap labour in South Africa, while South Africans remain unemployed.

Trending hashtags:


- #putsouthafricansfirst [1]; [2]; [3]: There are common themes discussed under this hashtag. These have been consistently discussed over an extended period of time:
 - Theft and robbery by illegal foreign nationals in South Africa.
 - South Africans being urged to take back control of their economy, particularly in townships and informal businesses.
 - Ongoing debate about racism, xenophobia, and treatment of both foreigners and South Africans.
 - Calls for anti-corruption measures and stronger enforcement of the rule of law to address government corruption.
- #abahambe [1]; [2]; [3]: Abahambe is a hashtag that is associated with the Patriotic Alliance. The following themes were observed:
 - Patriotic Alliance supporters demonstrated their support of the Patriotic Alliance's anti-immigrant position by tweeting using the hashtag #abahambe.
 - Widespread concerns about illegal immigrants causing crimes and fostering xenophobic attitudes.
 - Prioritising South Africans over foreigners in public services and job opportunities is a recurring theme.
 - Growing momentum and fanbase for the Patriotic Alliance party shown through fan enthusiasm, large turnouts at rallies, and global support.
- #operationdudula [1]; [2]; [3]: The following themes were the most prevalent when this hashtag was used:

- Participants call for prioritising South African interests over foreign immigrants.
- Political rivalries emerging between ANC, EFF, and DA due to #OperationDudula and election impacts.
- Tragic incidents of violence between South Africans and foreign shop owners escalating tensions.
- Call for voter advocacy to support policies benefiting South African interests over illegal immigrants.

Top reach content:

The X posts in Table 1 were the top four highest-reach tweets. Among the highest reach X posts, a number of them were critical of the EFF, particularly after party president, Julius Malema, stated that if a voter does not like their pan-African stance, they can go to hell and he would rather not have their vote.

Table 1: Highest reach tweets

<p>Dear @Julius_S_Malema i come to you as a supporter and believer of the EFF Not putting South Africans first has cost us Telling South Africans to go to hell cost us South Africans are starving they needed you to make them feel important but you made foreigners feel more...</p> <p>1:58 PM · May 31, 2024 · 1.2M Views</p> <p>581 1.7K 9.9K 644</p>	<p>JULIUS MALEMA BUSTED!!! FOREIGN SECURITY GUARDS GUARDING JULIUS MALEMA HOUSE Over the last few weeks on the campaign trail Julius Malema has said that under an EFF government security guards salary will be R17500 per month plus medical aid and pension fund. To test if Malema... https://t.co/YevmVsg31b</p> <p>6:46 AM · May 20, 2024 · 727.3K Views</p> <p>813 1.3K 3K 338</p>
<p>Open Border policy, this is your final answer then siyay'vala for good 🙏🏾🙏🏾🙏🏾🙏🏾</p>  <p>From EFF Gauteng</p> <p>8:37 PM · May 22, 2024 · 715.3K Views</p> <p>300 2.4K 5.6K 1.8K</p>	<p>My brother misplaced his ID, went to the voting station with his passport. He was told a passport is not sufficient. Went to Home Affairs to get a temp ID. Got back and went to vote. This is all under an hour. So it means this country is capable of actually functioning</p> <p>10:59 AM · May 29, 2024 · 363.5K Views</p> <p>69 2.8K 14K 167</p>

Author analysis

- Top 10 most mentioned Twitter/X posters:











Most Mentioned X Posters	POSTS ▾	REPOSTS	ALL POSTS	IMPRESSIONS
 @onsbaizanie	14188	20431	34619	130831417
 @gaytonmck	10166	8690	18856	50651312
 @action4sa	1998	1765	3763	18441988
 @effsouthafrica	1643	1571	3214	8500252
 @our_da	1195	1469	2664	12856518
 @kenny_t_kunene	1188	1257	2445	9879836
 @godpenuel	1099	113	1212	3374613
 @buildonesa	1078	559	1637	6707453
 @myanc	1034	1383	2417	14992582
 @julius_s_malema	981	2530	3511	16959662

Table 1: Most mentioned Twitter/X posters

- Top 10 Twitter/X posters:











AUTHOR NAME	MENTIONS ▾	MENTIONS ⓘ			IMPACT ⓘ	REACH ⓘ
		POS	NEG	NEU	AVERAGE	AVERAGE
<input type="checkbox"/>  @masotobe39	1858	41	987	830	28.4	3989
<input type="checkbox"/>  @Hannah_786_sa	1206	320	199	687	0	173
<input type="checkbox"/>  @angelofdeath157	1140	0	0	1140	0.5	24
<input type="checkbox"/>  @sepitlaoptom	1053	21	525	507	5	727
<input type="checkbox"/>  @lolobee052	895	41	339	515	9.2	2397
<input type="checkbox"/>  @vusi74285522	796	20	421	355	0.6	458
<input type="checkbox"/>  @myNSFAS	777	0	0	777	61.3	27867
<input type="checkbox"/>  @sirpeey	745	22	282	441	0.1	7
<input type="checkbox"/>  @MYKAPTENI	725	24	370	331	24.6	3345
<input type="checkbox"/>  @SekaoV	678	15	363	300	6.3	1050
Total for top authors	9 873	504	3 486	5 883		

Table 2: Top 10 Twitter/X posters

Analysis and commentary

This report analyses online discussions about immigrants in South Africa for May 2024. There was a significant increase (33%) in online mentions compared to April 2024. The total mentions was 452.46k mentions from more than 92.73k authors. The high retweet percentage of nearly 93% raises concerns about potential manipulation.

Key issues include political parties clashing over deportation versus immigrant rights which are enshrined in the Constitution; competition between immigrants and locals for jobs, businesses, and resources; and concerns about crime, exploitation, and strain on law enforcement due to illegal immigration. There is an intersection of the discussion about immigration with discussion about policies like National Health Insurance and land ownership.

The National and Provincial Elections held on 29 May was a key event during the reporting period. Politicians exploiting xenophobia for votes underscores the necessity of responsible dialogue and policy action to tackle root issues. The top three hashtags were (1) #putsouthafricansfirst, (2) #abahambe and (3) #operationdudula. The Patriotic Alliance and Operation Dudula feature frequently in relation to these hashtags. Criticism of the EFF party's stance on immigration dominated high-reach content.

Top mentions and twitter posters give a sense of who is driving the conversation. That the top mentions are largely of political leaders or their party's handles is indicative of how the conversation has been politically instrumentalised. Online xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric has been accompanied by the institutionalising of that sentiment in the body politic, as evidenced in the dramatic increase of votes obtained by the PA (albeit that other contributory factors also exist).

Overall, the online conversation surrounding immigrants in South Africa remains tense in May 2024. Political campaigns, tragic incidents, and concerns about jobs and resources contribute to ongoing xenophobic sentiment.

Summary of Recommendations

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

- **Promote factual information:** Counter misinformation and disinformation with accurate data and stories about the positive contributions of immigrants. Report hate speech, incitement to violence and disinformation to Report such instances to [Real411](#). Make use of fact-checking organisation [Africa Check](#) to request fact checks of suspected disinformation.
- **Advocate for inclusive policies:** Lobby policymakers to create policies that address genuine concerns about competition for resources but don't target immigrants unfairly.
- **Initiate and support campaigns:** Make use of campaigns that humanise foreign migrants and their families in particular, raise awareness of their plight(s) and their immigration stories, and which emphasise the contributions they make to South Africa as a country
- **Awareness building:** Raise awareness of immigrant rights as being constitutionally enshrined, and the reasons it is important that those rights are upheld.
- **Support migrant rights organisations:** Collaborate with existing organisations working to protect immigrants from exploitation and empower them to integrate into society.
- **Public dialogues:** Promote deeper public dialogues on issues relating to foreign migrants and immigration, with a particular emphasis on dispelling scapegoating narratives and highlighting the complexity of immigration and its impacts on the country instead.
- **Long-term approach:** Address the underlying causes of xenophobia, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, to create a more just and inclusive society.



**Funded by
the European Union**

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