Report name: Online conversation about the Expropriation Act

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Introduction

The recent signing of the Expropriation Bill has triggered various reactions online. While some view this as a positive step towards reform, others see it as a threat to farmers, likening it to Zimbabwe's reform policies. Driving this conversation are two types of authors, those who amplify content in large volumes, and those who post less content but receive greater engagement. The former usually reposts or "buzzes" certain narratives. With misinformation being used to fan the flames of division, the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change unpacks the X (formerly Twitter) conversation about expropriation and the 'justifications' for the predominantly negative online sentiment towards the bill, and the prominent authors behind them.

What the Expropriation Bill says

The first port of call, in this regard, is section 25 of the Constitution which deals squarely with property. The relevant section provides for the expropriation of property for a public purpose or in the public interest **and** subject to compensation. Public interest, as defined in the Constitution, includes the nation's commitment to land reform, and reforms to bring about equitable access to all South Africa's natural resources. An example of the latter, is the expropriation by the Department of Public Transport, Roads and Works in Gauteng in order to build the necessary infrastructure for the Gautrain Public Transport system.[1] Legislation governing the expropriation of land is found across the world with countries such as Canada, Brazil as well as Germany possessing laws or regulations guiding the process of expropriation in terms of public interest or, in the case of Brazil, agricultural reform.[2] The Constitution, being a guiding document, does not define expropriation nor with any certainty, set out what constitutes expropriation in the public interest. For this purpose, legislation is required to establish the procedure through which expropriation may take place.

The Expropriation Bill B23-2020 defines expropriation as the compulsory acquisition of property by organs of state or those empowered by legislation. Expropriation anticipates something more than just limitation rights over property, it is the act of acquiring the legal rights to use, dispose of and exploit property such that the original owner no longer has any rights in said property. However, the Bill makes it clear that property may only be expropriated for a public purpose or in the public interest.

Public Interest

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[1] https://www.gov.za/news/gauteng-commencing-gautrain-expropriation-04-may-2006

[2] B Hoops '*Expropriation Procedures in Germany and the Netherlands*' 2016 European Property Law Journal. Available at https://pure.rug.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/239820794/10.1515_eplj_2016_0014.pdf. See also https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC024675/ & https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-21/fulltext.html.

The Bill largely reiterates the Constitutional provision by stating that the public interest includes the nation's commitment to land reform, and reform to bring about equitable access to all South Africa's natural resources in order to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws or practices. The addition of the latter section is significant, in that, addressing the result of past discriminatory laws or practices is not specifically included in the Constitution. In 2017, an audit was conducted by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. Their investigation found that the black majority (about 80% of the population) own approximately 4% of private farms and agricultural land. Around 72% of this form of land is owned by white people, who make up 8% of the population[3].

This is not South Africa's first attempt at legislated expropriation. The Expropriation Act 63 of 1975 provides for the expropriation of land and other property for public and certain other purposes. In this legislation, the public interest is confined to the administration of the provisions of any law by an organ of the State. In terms of the above legislation, organs of state had the power to expropriate property in line with their functions.

However, this must be taken in context with legislation like the Land Act or the Group Areas Act that allowed the forcible removal of individuals from their homes with no reason proffered by the then government. The Bill can be critiqued for being vague in certain respects such as the definition of public interest as well as what constitutes land reform.[4] The Bill vests the rights of the expropriated land in a State Organ or authorised person.

Compensation

In terms of the Expropriation Act of 1975, compensation was payable for any expropriation undertaken by the State. However, note the caveat above in regard to forced removals. In terms of the new Expropriation Bill, section 7(4) provides that if a notice to expropriate has been issued, the owner of the property must deliver a written statement including the amount claimed by them as just and equitable compensation. The determination of compensation is set out in section 12(1) of the Bill.

The Bill does, however, make provision for expropriation without compensation. In terms of section 12(3), if the land is:
  a. Not being used and there is no intention to develop the land or use it to generate an income, but to benefit from the appreciation of its market value;
  b. Where an organ of the state holds land that it is not using for its core functions and is not reasonably likely to require the land for future activities;

[3] Land Audit Report (2018) - Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
[4] BV Slade "*Public Purpose or Public Interest" And Third Party Interests* (17) PER 1 2014. Available at: https://www.saflii.org/za/journals/PER/2014/6.pdf.

c. Abandoned and the owner failed to exercise control over it;

d. Market value of the land is equivalent to, or less than, the present value of direct state investment or subsidy in the acquisition and beneficial capital improvement of the land; and

e. When the nature or condition of property poses a health, safety or physical risk to persons or other property.

This list is not exhaustive, and there may be further circumstances that dictate that no compensation be paid. However, there are adequate safeguards in place for an owner to claim compensation from an authority seeking to expropriate their property.

Online conversation

People who spread mis- and disinformation have exploited confusion around the Expropriation Bill to create and amplify messaging that heightens racial tensions and stokes fear around current land ownership in South Africa.

Politically, the bill has also shed light on the Government of National Unity (GNU), comprised of the different parties with varying standpoints on the expropriation of land. Parties that are not members of the GNU, such as the EFF, which has been calling for the expropriation of land, have criticised the bill in its current form for failing to adequately address "the challenges of land faced by the landless African Masses," according to a report by [Newzroom Afrika](). In response to US President Donald Trump's threat to cut funding to South Africa, Julius Malema, leader of the EFF said that "threats would not stop land [expropriation]()." Addressing the public in his SONA address, President Cyril Ramaphosa also stated that "we will not be bullied".

The conversation about the Expropriation Bill as tracked in the CABC's dataset received more than 300,000 mentions on X, between 23 January and 5 February 2025. Two peaks were recorded during the period, the first on 24 January, a day after Ramaphosa signed the Bill, and one on 3 February, when reports that the US President Donald Trump would cut off funding to South Africa until investigations were conducted, started circulating (see Figure 1 below). An analysis of the most retweeted posts in the conversation reveals a general negative sentiment towards the signing of the Expropriation Bill.
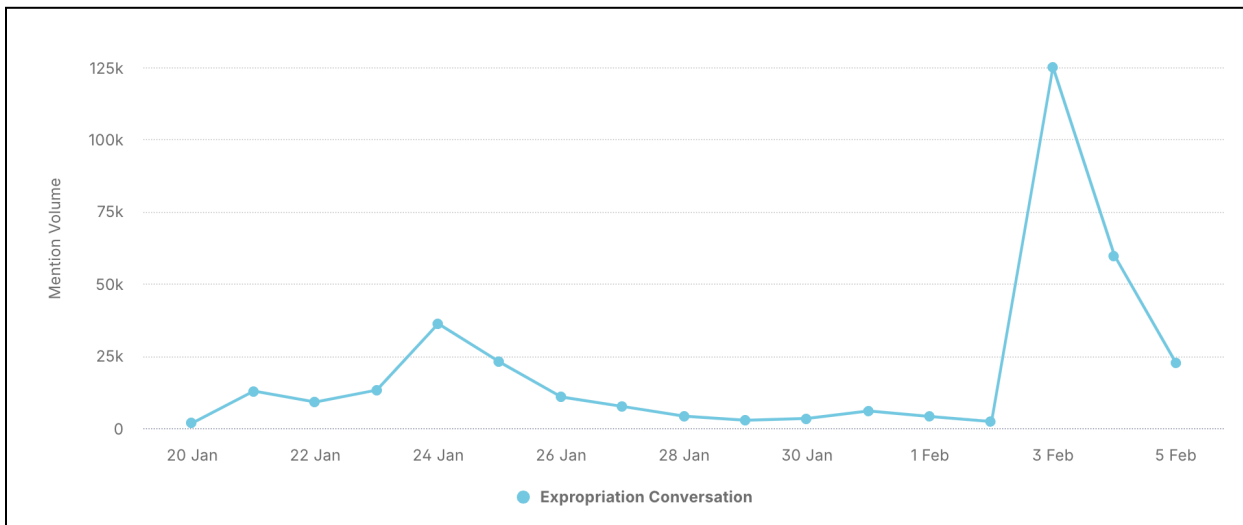
Figure 1: Volume of expropriation conversation between 23 January and 3 February 2025

Popular themes within this conversation revolved around topics such as race, reparation, and equity. Accounts in opposition to the signing of the bill have likened it to Zimbabwe's land reform policies under late former president Robert Mugabe, while others accused Ramaphosa and the government of targeting white farmers (*see Figure 2 below*).
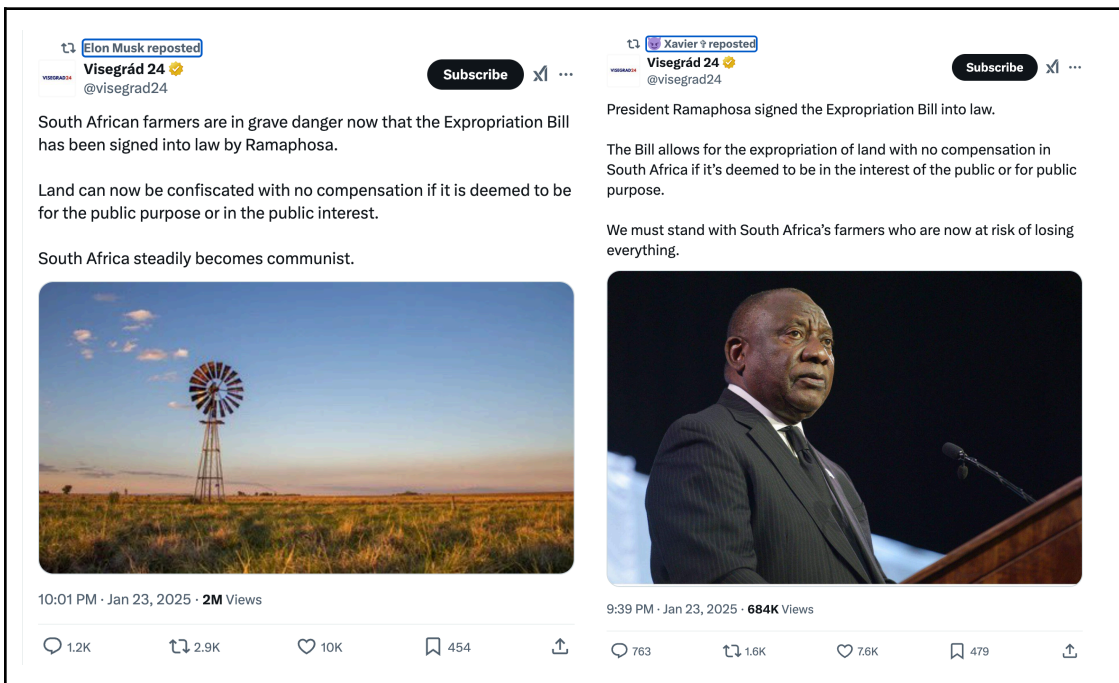
Figure 2.1: Reactions to the signing of the Expropriation Bill

Not all responses to news of the Expropriation Bill, or to Trump's statement that terrible things were happening in South Africa were negative. Although our analysis was predominantly focused on X, we found a number of videos from South Africans, some on TikTok dispelling this information, some using satire to achieve this (see Figure 2.2).
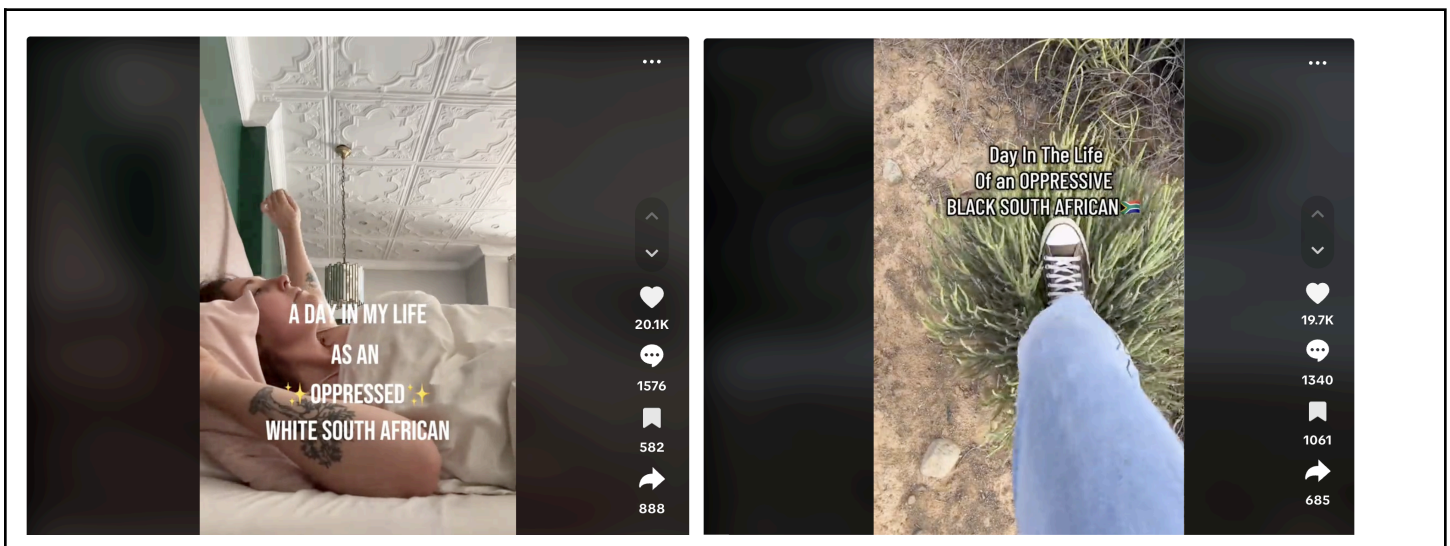

Figure 2.2: Examples of TikTok videos using humour and satire to dispel misinformation about the realities of South Africans

Researchers noted the variation in the top 10 most retweeted posts in the conversation. Among those is President Cyril Ramaphosa's post dispelling misinformation about land "confiscation" which was retweeted more than 13,000 times. Examples of other most retweeted posts can be found in Figure 3 below.
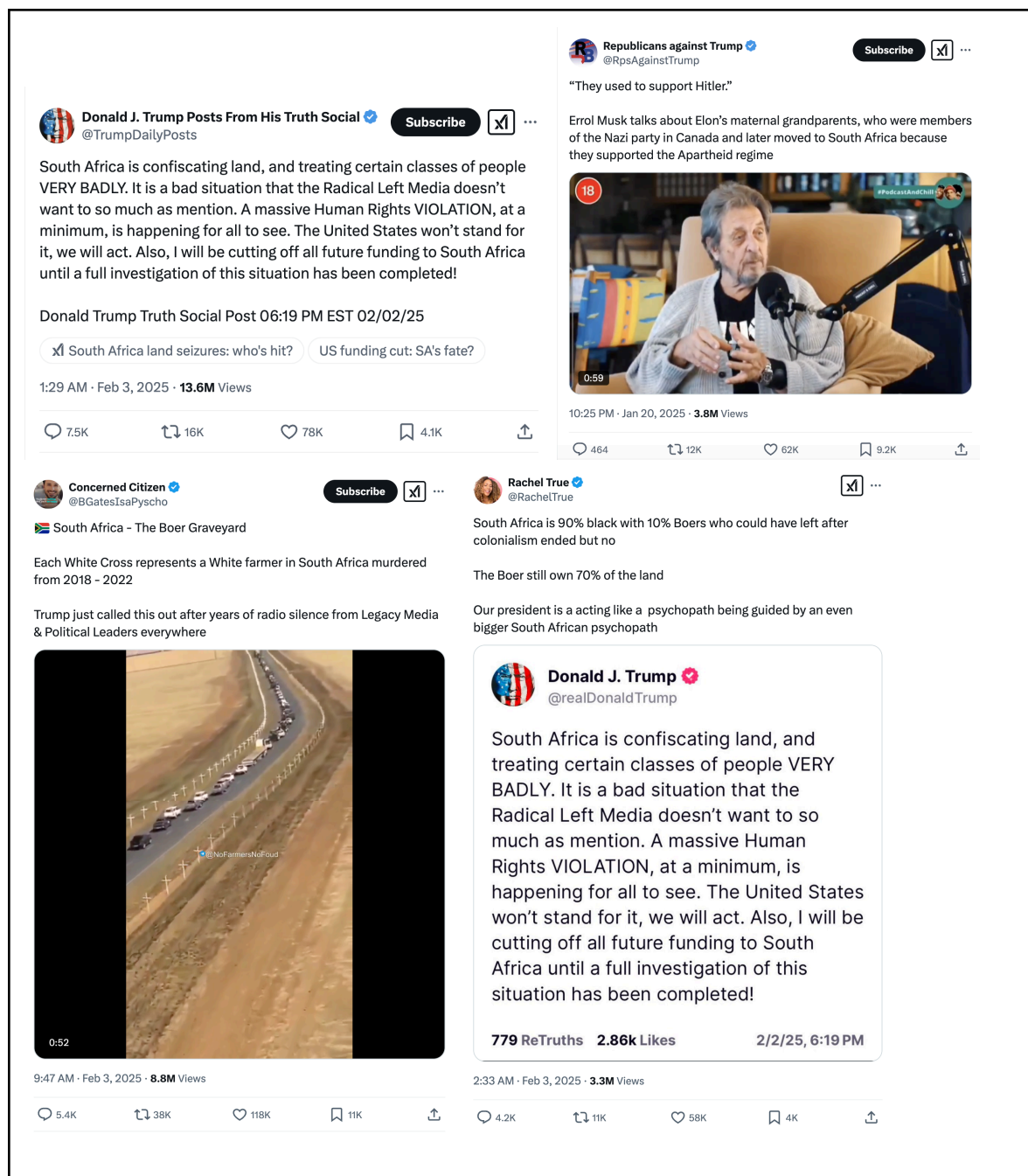

Figure 3: Examples of the most retweeted posts in the conversation

Authors

Researchers divided authors in the expropriation conversation, the first being those who contributed the mentions to the conversation (see Figure 4 below), and the second being those whose posts received the highest engagement.

According to the data, authors who contributed the highest volume of mentions predominantly amplified and reposted content that expressed either confusion about how expropriation will be implemented; or an anti-expropriation stance. This is except the @Elonluvsme account, which replied to a number of accounts with the same post reading: "Elon's grandparents were also secretly Nazis. They moved to South Africa because they supported the apartheid regime". On a deeper exploration of these accounts, it seems apparent that they are most likely hardline ideologues and 'buzzers' of content related to expropriation.
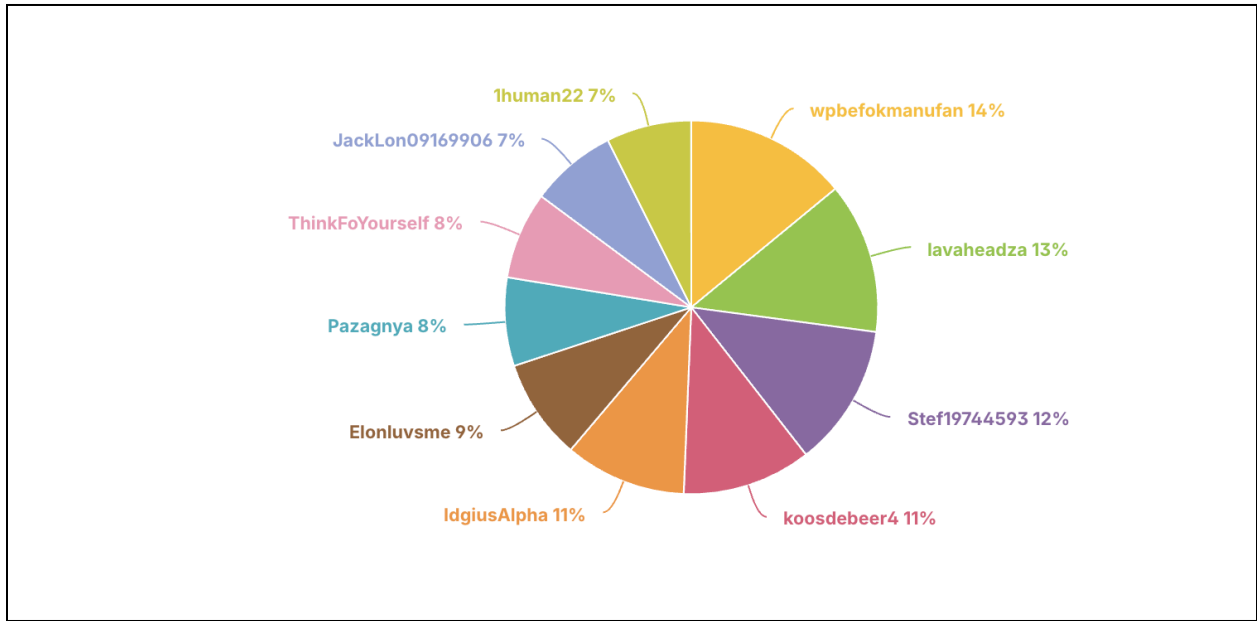

Figure 4: Authors with the highest volume of mentions in the online expropriation conversation between 22 January and 05 February

The second set of authors are those whose posts received the highest engagement online during the research period. These authors include accounts such as @visegrad24. On X, @visegrad24 positions itself as a media and news company that is "aggregating and curating news, politics and current affairs". @visegrad24 was founded by @StefanTompson, a South-African Polish individual who motivated his establishment of the account as a bulwark against the culture war, Russian and Chinese disinformation - and as a media source

based on centre-right, conservative and western values[5]. A recent article on Visegrad24 calling for international action in response to the Expropriation bill was written by Martin Van Staden, a self-described libertarian with prior experience at the Free Market Foundation and The Institute for Race Relations.

Further, an anonymous right-wing influencer in the SA context, @RiebvJanbeeck (seemingly a play on the name Jan van Riebeeck) - self-described as a 'Teutonic' South African in Europe, has authored an article on EWC and the 'marginalisation' of white South Africans for visegrad24 - further calling on the need for international pressure against the South African state (see Figure 5 below). Notably, making use of their alias, and what seems to be an AI-generated image in their author bio.
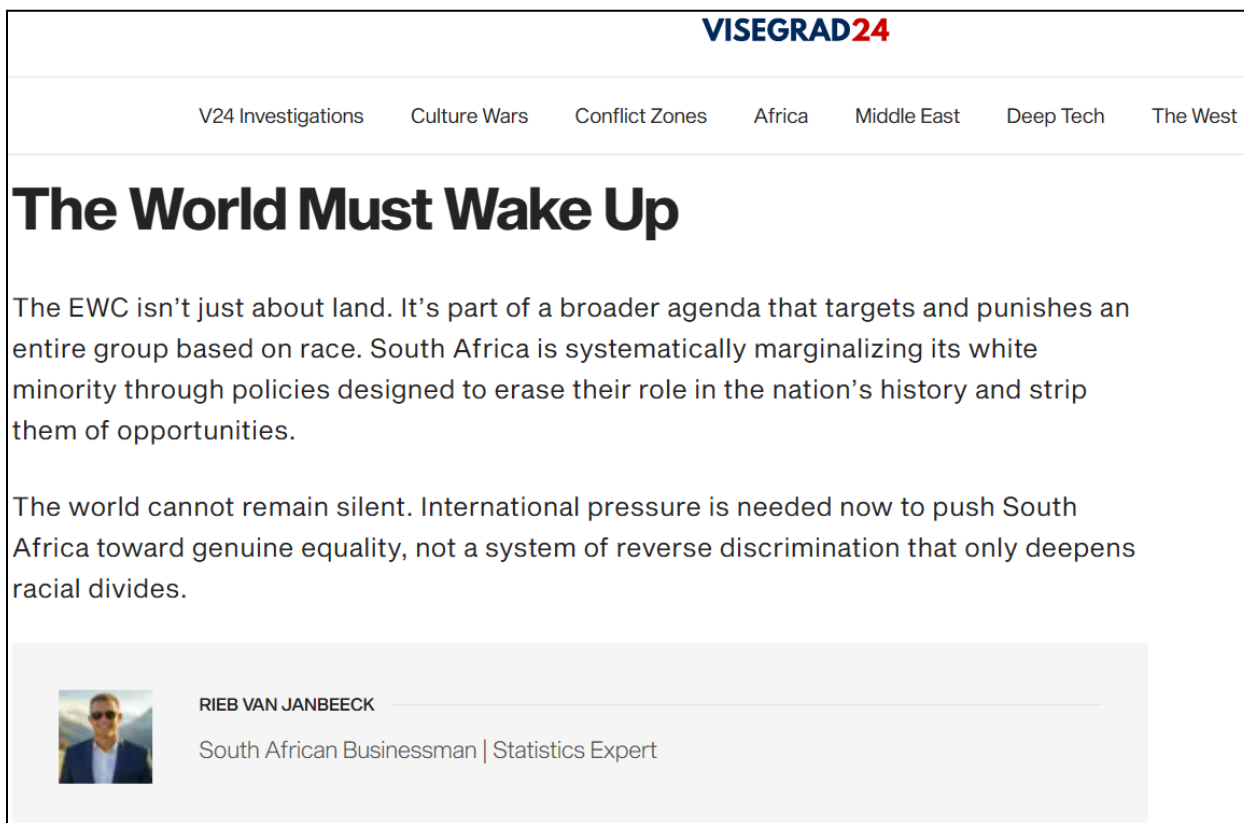

Figure 5: @RiebvJanbeeck article on Visegrad24

Other authors whose posts received high engagement include the @EndWokeness account, whose bio reads, "Fighting, exposing, and mocking wokeness" also shared posts pro-Trump messaging rooted in mis and disinformation about South Africa (see Figure 6 for example posts). At the time of this report, the account which joined X in 2022, had more than 3.5 million followers. The account has been engaging in the online "farm murder" and white genocide conversation since 2023 (and potentially earlier) and frequently interacts with the @elonmusk account.

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[5] Stefan Tompson on Founding Visegrad24, Fake News, Fighting for Israel and the West (YouTube) - Aleph

Figure 6: Examples of posts from the @endwokeness account

Outside of the accounts that frequently posted about the expropriation bill, verified X accounts with large followerships have emerged as key players in the maintenance of varying narratives. Most notably, that the bill would result in the outbreak of violence or destruction within the country (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Other accounts contributing to the expropriation conversation

Global interest

The South African expropriation bill has garnered global attention. Most notably being referenced by United States President Donald Trump, as the discriminatory actioning of land seizure being levied against minority groups. Importantly, local and international reporting, such as that from the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture have indicated prior to the signing of the bill, that such fears are unfounded.

The stream of disinformation and fearmongering regarding expropriation has a storied history. Most recently, members of the civil rights group Afriforum having toured countries in the Global North drumming up concern around land seizure and farm attacks through their #TheWorldMustKnow Campaign. Which has seen

representatives speak at conservative conferences and organisations in the United States, Hungary and the Netherlands.

In an intriguing twist of events, Kallie Kriel, Afriforum CEO, issued a statement on X in response to Donald Trump. Seeking to lobby action solely against senior members of the African National Congress, amid fears of a heavy-handed response which would affect the country as a whole - which contrasts calls from individuals opposed to the expropriation bill, who advocate for international pressure on South Africa in response.

As explored earlier, international influencers and organisations on the X platform have focused on reporting narratives based on racist disinformation within the South African context. Of these, accounts such as 'iamyesyouareno' have supported perspectives that South Africa was 'better' under the apartheid regime. 'tatethetalisman', brother of manosphere influencer Andrew Tate, has further stoked the flames of the myth of white genocide and ethnic persecution within the country. Noted Malaysian far-right influencer Ian Miles Cheong, has further commented on the state of the country, alleging mass famine and ethnic cleansing as a consequence of repressive policies taken by the national government. Misinformation about 'white genocide' and a descent into violent chaos in South Africa is not new. Last year, the CABC released a report dispelling the white genocide misinformation, then supported by Elon Musk.

Considering the geographical distribution of mentions about expropriation from 20 January to 5 February, our analytics tool indicates that a sizeable portion of the conversation comes from accounts in the Global North (see Figure 8).
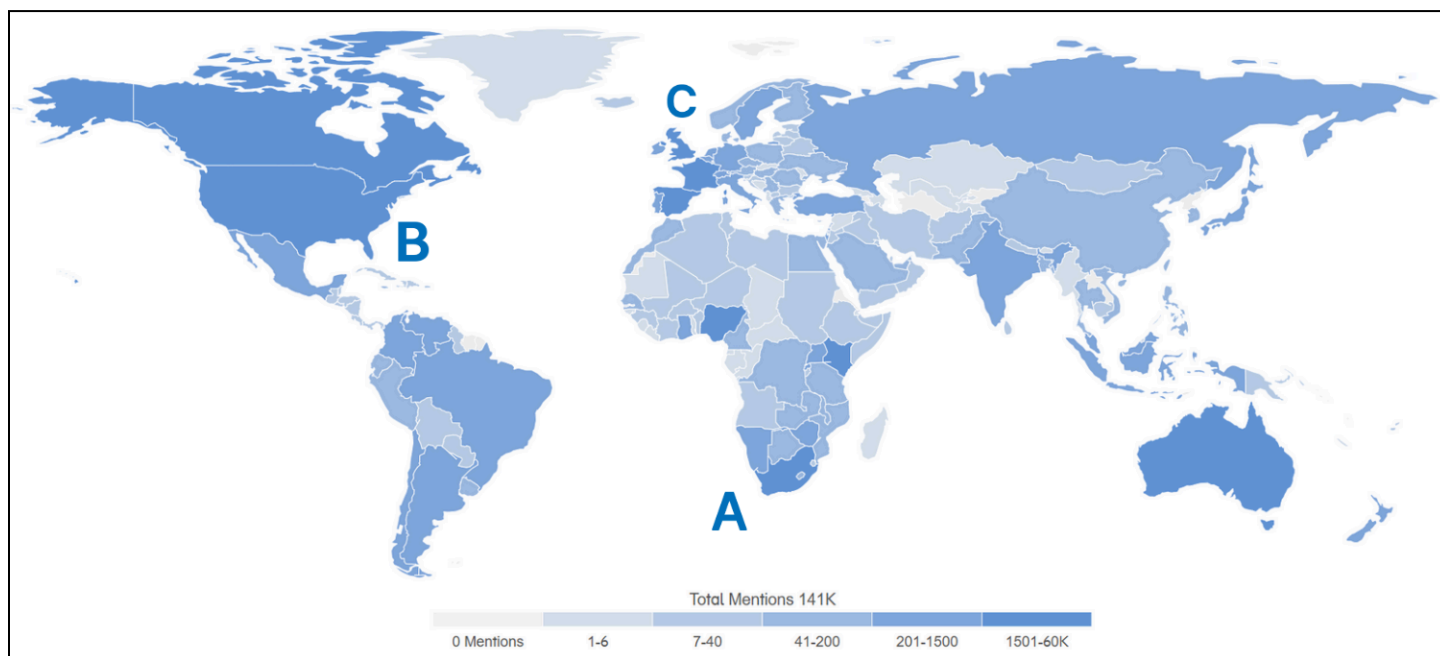

Figure 8: A chart showcasing the national origin of messaging related to the bill from

Of the 141,000 mentions which could be geolocated - 60,339 came from South Africa (A), 40,226 from the USA (B), and 8,255 from the UK (C). In conjunction, mentions from countries abroad were larger than South African contributions to the conversation.

Contributions from TikTok

Making use of the same keywords, researchers detected a well-defined conversation around Expropriation on TikTok. From 20 January to 7 February, 3,786 TikTok mentions (inclusive of posts and comments) were found. With a spike in conversation visible from 3 to 7 February closely aligned to the peak of conversation observed on the social media platform, X (see Figure 9).
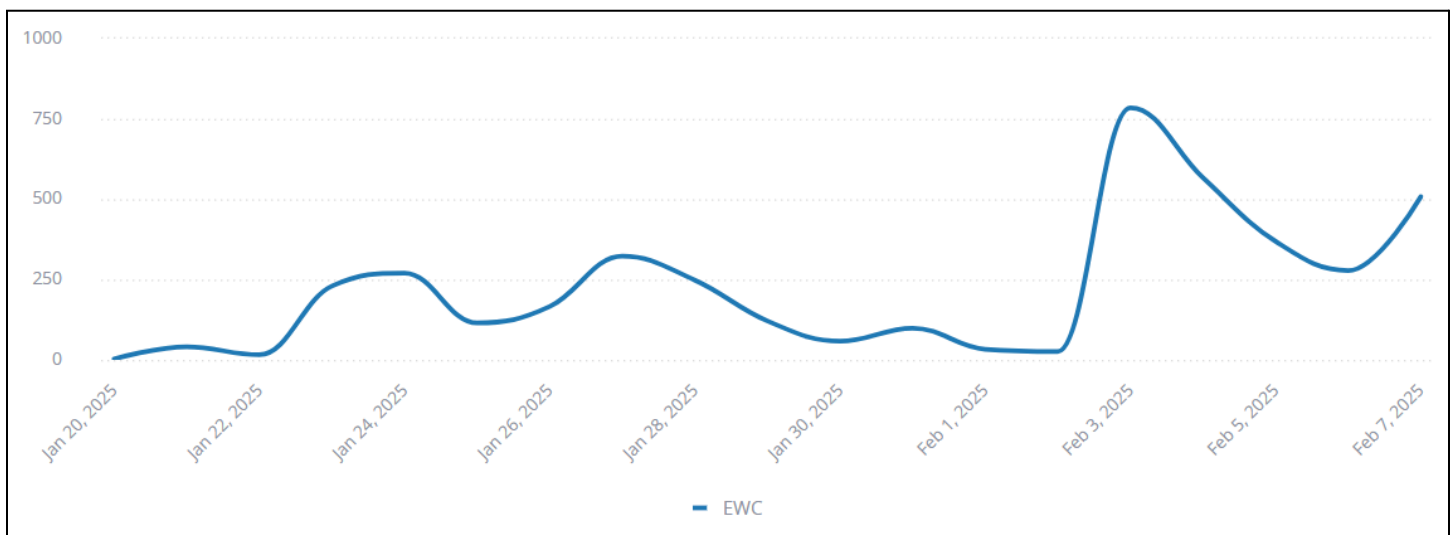

Figure 9: Volume over time for Expropriation Conversation on TikTok

A word cloud showcasing the most commonly used terms across video captions and comments can be seen in Figure 10. Of these, Orania, Minerals, ANC, Trump and Ramaphosa dominated the conversation.
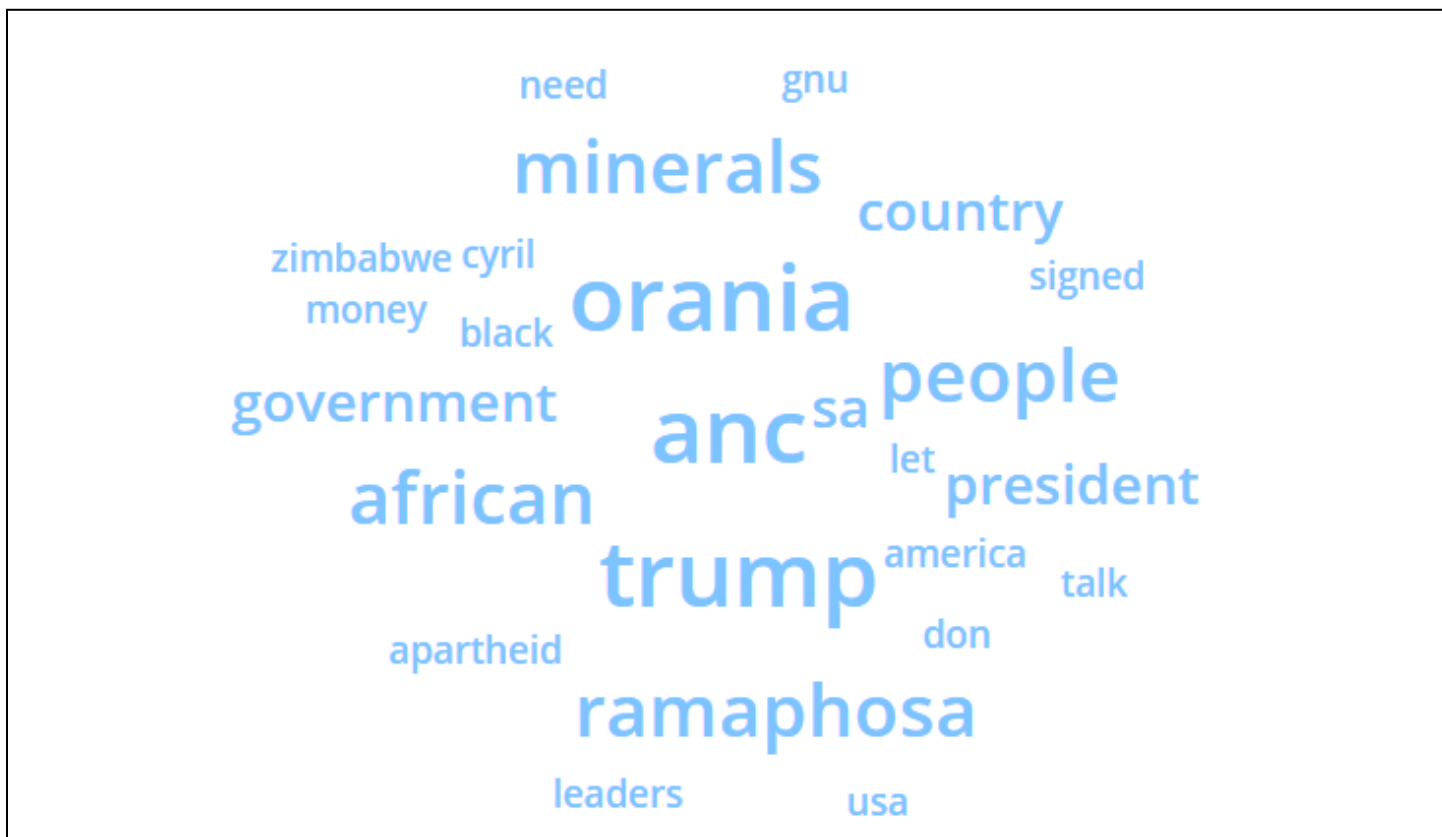
Figure 10: Word Cloud of Expropriation Conversation on TikTok

Breakdown of conversation by dominant keywords:

Trump: Posts on TikTok similarly reflected the comments made by U.S President Trump who announced that future funding will be cut to South Africa as well as launching an investigation into 'land confiscation' by the South African government. Commentary questioned the appropriateness of US intervention in South African affairs.

Orania: Representatives of Orania, a separatist South African town founded by Afrikaners, responded that the Afrikaner community is once again under fire from a communist regime and will remain resolute in defence of the land. Responses to the statements made by the relevant representatives were received negatively, with individuals questioning why Orania still exists in a post-apartheid South Africa and the right of the representatives to question the Bill.

Minerals: In response to the US indicating that they shall halt funding to South Africa, the Minister of Minerals and Petroleum Resources, Gwede Mantashe indicated that South Africa shall respond in kind by ceasing export of key resources to the US. Responses were split in this regard, noting that minerals are bought while funding is discretionary and that income from the export of minerals constitute a significant income that will need to be replaced.

President Ramaphosa & ANC: Discourse surrounding the African National Congress and the Expropriation Bill tended towards negativity both from those opposing the Bill as well as those in favour of land reform. Those in support of land reform noted that the Bill is insufficient and not progressive enough to address inequality and those disadvantaged by Apartheid and who were dispossessed of their land. In contrast, many noted that the

Bill will affect investment in the country and that their position is leading the country to civil war or the destruction of the country. The GNU partners were also brought into the mix, with individuals noting that they had done nothing to prevent the Bill from being passed.

Noting the most highly engaged with TikToks - creators such as Gareth Cliff, interviewing billionaire Rob Hersov, and the Orania Movement provided opinion-based commentary, while Al Jazeera and Chinese media house CGTN reported on speeches and responses made by members of the South African government (see Figure 11).
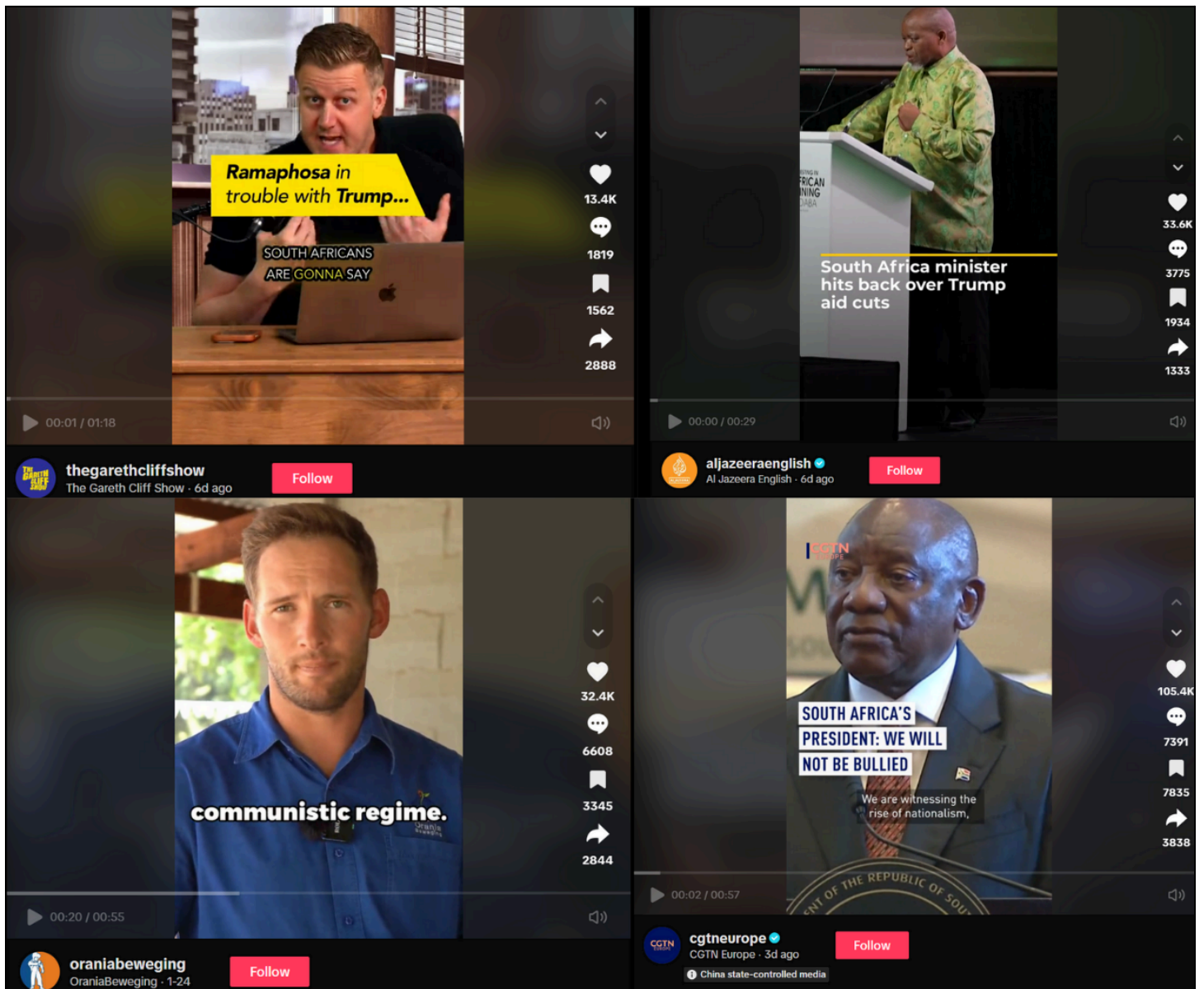

Figure 11: Mentions/Videos about Expropriation with the Highest Engagement

Alongside this, prominent videos included those created by a citizen journalist, @missmedia_1, Eyewitness News reporter, @thabiso.goba1 and commentator @voiceofrsa.

Considering a sample of the most prominent replies across a variety of videos (see Figure 12), the communal perception of the expropriation bill veers toward polarisation. With individuals commenting about Khoekhoe

and San land rights, the distortion of the bill in the broader conversation, the perceived negative effects of nil compensation as an option, and making use of humour in response to a volatile conversation overall.

> This then means the bonds should be cheaper because we don't have to pay for land. we just have to take the bond for the house which is about 40% value of what's advertised on property 24 🤣 🫢 🫢 🫢 🫢
>
> Land restitution act is long overdue, it was the right thing to do and well done Mr.President
>
> This land belongs to the khoisan the aboriginal need to stand up and fight for what is right and what is theirs
>
> No point Farmers working land and being profitable they will just come and take it . sell up and leave SA now before they decide to unalive you 🥺 .
>
> Why to intentionally distort the Act. Do you want to polarise the country to violence.
>
> I tell u what give the residents of Orania soweto and they will turn it into something that the government will want back 😂
>
> Leave everything in God's hand, God doesn't sleep.

Figure 12: Sampled Top Mentions from Videos about Expropriation

Conclusion

What is common among antagonistic perspectives toward the bill is that criticism is not levied at the hallmarks of the policy, nor is effort spent toward understanding the mechanisms and history of expropriation within the country. The central unifying factor is a racist perspective, rooted in white supremacy and unfounded fears of a 'great replacement'. These posts, targeted toward large audiences, serve to stoke and maintain fear of the other. Ostensibly as a ploy for the harnessing of fear as a political tool - as a mobilising agent for isolationist, nativist and nationalist politics.

When considered as a system of information, what is further clear is that an ecosystem consisting of unknown 'new media', peddlers of hate speech on social media, billionaire oligarchs such as Elon Musk, and right-wing

politicians across the global north, predominantly when posting on the X platform - play a large role in propagating untruths for western audiences.

This is further compounded by conversations among the citizens of South Africa and the differing perspectives on equality and land reform. Afrikaners, largely considered a farming community, deem the Bill as a direct attack on their economic interests in the country as well as their heritage and culture. On the flip side, predominantly, black South Africans consider land reform as crucial in facilitating equality in the country. The true nature of the Bill is, therefore, distorted internally with both groups reverting to the extreme ends of the conversation surrounding land reform and expropriation.