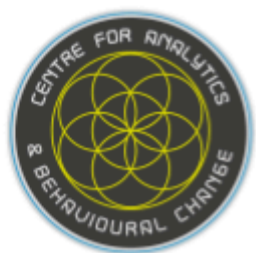


Report name: Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence and the Silencing of South African Women Journalists on Social Media

Date range: 1 January - 31 December 2025

Release date: 03 February 2026

* This research was funded by the Ford Foundation and Global Affairs Canada through the Women's Voice and Leadership South Africa project. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the CABC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ford Foundation nor Global Affairs Canada, the Women's Voice and Leadership Project nor Gender Links as implementing partner.



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Introduction

Policy and regulatory environments have not kept pace with Social Media platforms' evolution. There is broad recognition of content moderation challenges. However, there is far less agreement on concrete ways to address these challenges. Significant policy gaps persist. These enable extreme online harassment with little accountability. Women journalists suffer sustained, often gendered abuse that undermines their safety, credibility and ability to work.

In November 2025, South Africa's Competition Commission published its Media and Digital Platforms Market Inquiry [report](#). The Competition Commission recommended that the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies regulate social media content moderation in two ways. First, extend the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act's limited liability provisions to platforms. This requires platforms to join an industry body and follow its Code of Conduct. Liability protection applies only when platforms comply and act on takedown notices. Second, create a regulatory framework for a Social Media Ombudsman. This body would handle consumer disputes with platforms and refer serious cases for investigation or prosecution.

The research focuses on X (formerly Twitter). It entails two core outputs documenting online harms against South African journalists: (1) a comprehensive library of harmful posts and an analysis of these posts; and (2) a 4-tier harm glossary (physical threats, hate speech, disinformation, incivility) serving as a newsroom-ready lexicon for abuse monitoring. By mapping the spectrum of harms journalists face online, from physical intimidation to strategic disinformation, this study outlines the specific challenges an ombudsman would need to tackle. It also pre-emptively equips newsrooms with a practical tool to identify such harms and to engage meaningfully during public comment periods on forthcoming draft regulations.

The global platform problem and its local impact

Social media platforms operate on a global scale with influence that transcends national borders. This transnational reach creates a profound power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South regarding content moderation and the definition of harmful speech. Platform policies and enforcement mechanisms are primarily shaped in the United States and reflect the legal and cultural priorities of that jurisdiction rather than the local realities of the countries they are based in (Elswah, 2025. Al Jazeera Institute, 2025). As a result, harmful content that is swiftly removed in some countries may remain visible and unchecked in others where local context, language and forms of hate speech are often poorly understood or deprioritised by global moderation systems (Elswah, 2025).

For journalists, this means their professional environment has expanded into a digital sphere governed not by national labour laws or local media ethics but by the opaque and commercially driven rules of foreign tech giants. The same geopolitical imbalances that play out in international relations, such as unequal influence over global norms, selective enforcement and the marginalisation of Global South voices, are mirrored in the way online abuse is handled (or ignored) on these platforms.

In traditional physical workplaces, risks are treated as health and safety issues requiring clear mitigation policies. However, the gendered threats journalists face online are often dismissed as an inevitable part of the job with individuals expected to simply develop a thick skin (Posetti et al., 2020). This treats online violence as an individual burden rather than a structural workplace safety crisis that demands institutional intervention and collective bargaining.

Newsroom leadership is not immune to these risks and often finds itself powerless to act. Editors cannot unilaterally delete abusive posts or suspend accounts. They are entirely dependent on the responsiveness of platforms that frequently treat the South African market as a low priority (Al Jazeera Institute, 2025).

The proposed social media ombudsman scheme in South Africa presents a vital opportunity for change. By organising collectively, newsrooms and the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) can move beyond individual resilience. This unified approach allows the industry to identify systemic abuse and demand platform accountability while turning regulatory momentum into tangible safety protocols that protect the integrity of the profession.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

The United Nations Population Fund defines Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as 'an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender'. According to Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute TFGBV 'includes online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos also referred to as revenge porn, deepfakes, cyberstalking, and other forms of digital harassment and abuse' (Cornell Law School, n.d.). Crucially, this hostility is not confined to the internet. As Masters (2022) observes, these digital threats can spill over into the physical world, resulting in a dangerous combination of online and offline abuse that can lead to psychological and physical harm. Even if the threat never manifests physically, the anticipation of physical harm (threats of rape or murder) causes severe psychological trauma and often leads to self-censorship.

In the 2021 report *The Chilling: global trends in online violence against women journalists*, the authors found that the majority of women interviewed for this study were targeted by disinformation campaigns designed to damage their personal and professional reputations (Posetti et al., 2021). These attacks used ridicule to increase the risk of physical harm while aiming to humiliate the journalists and discourage them from pursuing critical accountability reporting. By casting doubt on their integrity, such tactics also serve to erode public confidence in their work (Posetti et al., 2021). The chilling effect that the report outlines refers to the psychological and professional pressure that causes journalists to self-censor or withdraw from public discourse to avoid further harassment. This phenomenon undermines democracy because it effectively silences critical reporting and discourages women from investigating sensitive topics that might trigger coordinated attacks.

For journalists, especially women and queer journalists, TFGBV is not only a personal safety and mental-health issue. It reshapes beats, silences critical voices, narrows what can be reported and ultimately undermines pluralistic, democratic journalism.

Methodology

This study analyses online harms against South African journalists on X. The research began with manual collection of harmful tweets targeting journalists of all genders. This broad approach enabled subsequent identification of the gendered nature of the abuse. This initial corpus was expanded by scraping toxic comments on their posts using a web scraper (Apify). The collected data underwent systematic content analysis to identify harmful comments. A library of harmful posts and comments was then compiled. Refer to Annexure B for the library of harmful X posts. Each post was categorised according to the nature of harm (form of abuse) and potential community standards violated. For each, the targeted journalist(s) and/or newsroom

was identified. In total the library encompasses 274 tweets targeting 39 journalists and 14 newsrooms in South Africa.

Analysis of this structured library revealed common themes in how harmful content manifests. From this corpus, linguistic mapping identified keywords, hashtags and phrases associated with online attacks. Brandwatch social listening searches expanded this set across broader conversations targeting journalists. These terms were compiled into a glossary of harmful terms. Refer to Annexure A for the glossary, which is structured across four tiers:

- Tier 1: Physical Threat – Direct/indirect threats of violence (rape, assault, murder)
- Tier 2: Hate Speech & Identity Harm – Abuse targeting gender, race, sexuality, religion
- Tier 3: Disinformation – The use of fabricated narratives to discredit/silence journalists
- Tier 4: General Incivility – Trolling, insults creating hostile environments

This glossary serves as a practical newsroom resource for systematic monitoring, categorisation and response to online attacks.

The finalised glossary was used to develop Brandwatch queries combining harmful terms with X handles of three prominent South African women journalists, selected for their visibility, engagement volume and abuse patterns. Refer to Annexure C for the search query. The queries were used to generate a dataset per journalist. These datasets provided 2025 snapshots of their experiences.

While the analysis is centred on X, the study acknowledges that journalists also face harms on other platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok) and that platform-specific features shape the nature and intensity of abuse.

Statement of AI Integration

This chapter was developed with the support of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including Perplexity, Brandwatch's Iris AI and Gemini. These technologies were applied to specific stages of the research and editorial workflows:

- **Data Mining and Analysis:** Perplexity was used for keyword mining and thematic identification, while Iris AI automated the data analysis and summarized the engagement peaks within the case studies.
- **Synthesis:** Perplexity helped aggregate findings across various research strands to ensure thematic consistency and identify core analytical trends.
- **Editorial Refinement:** Gemini provided support for language polishing, proofreading and the refinement of subheadings.

The author retained full editorial oversight throughout this process, meticulously reviewing and verifying all AI-generated content to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Analysis of Library of Harmful Content

Gendered Slurs and the Sexualisation of Professional Work

The analysis of the dataset of harmful comments on X shows that women journalists in South Africa are subjected to intersecting patterns of gendered, racialised and political abuse that far exceed robust criticism of their work and instead target their personhood, identity and right to participate in public life. This abuse is

persistent, personalised and at times coordinated, creating an environment that actively undermines women's safety, credibility and career progression in journalism.

A central theme is the pervasive use of explicitly sexual and gendered slurs to delegitimise women as journalists. Women are labelled 'whore/whorealist/hoernalis', 'presstitute', 'tea girl', 'bitch', 'witch', 'sfebe' and 'prostitutes', often tied directly to their journalistic role. Sexualised online abuse often targets perceived independence or critical reporting (e.g. suggesting women write for 'whoever pays them the most' or are 'bought propagandists'), framing professional work as akin to sex work and therefore morally illegitimate.

These gendered attacks are frequently accompanied by calls for women journalists to be fired, which translates online harassment into pressure on their employment and editorial freedom.

Intersectional Harassment and Racialised Tropes

Online abuse frequently targets intersecting aspects of identity, including race, ethnicity and religion, which compounds the gendered harm for women of colour. Women journalists are attacked as 'race baiters', 'Black traitors', 'lying Muslimah' or told to 'go back' to another country when they are in fact South African, tying the hostility explicitly to race and religion. Harassment often utilises localised derogatory tropes such as 'Clever Blacks' or 'Stellenbosch Clerks' to target Black journalists – particularly those associated with outlets like Radio 702. In the South African context, these terms function similarly to the 'Uncle Tom' archetype, accusing the journalist of betraying their community or serving the interests of white capital. By framing journalists as subservient to 'white' agendas, harassers seek to strip them of their professional credibility and cultural belonging. Black women who criticise a government are framed as betraying their race, while Muslim and Indian women are subjected to xenophobic and Islamophobic narratives that question their belonging in the national public sphere and even in the country. This kind of identity-based attack not only harms the individual but narrows the range of perspectives that can be safely expressed by women journalists.

Attacks on Professional Credibility and Integrity

Another strong theme is the systematic effort to strip women journalists of their professional credibility. Journalists face a barrage of 'credibility attacks' designed to neutralise their reporting. These range from broad dismissals of the media as 'fake' to specific, high-stakes allegations of corruption and foreign interference. Common tropes include the accusation of being a 'paid agent' – represented by 'brown envelope' or 'Stratcom' labels – implying that the journalist has no editorial independence. By framing professional reporting as a paid service for hidden interests, harassers shift the public discourse away from the facts of the story and toward the perceived compromised character of the journalist.

Many comments assert that named women journalists lack qualifications, denigrate their education or expertise or insist they are 'fake journalists', 'gutter journalists' or 'activists' rather than legitimate professionals. Allegations that women are 'bought', 'paid stooges' or 'mouthpieces' for political parties, corporations or foreign actors are frequent, often linked to conspiracy frames involving the ANC, 'White Monopoly Capital', the CIA, George Soros or the World Economic Forum. In this way, criticism rarely engages with the substance of reporting but instead aims to delegitimise women as independent actors, suggesting that their work is inherently partisan, corrupt or deceptive.

This mirrors the findings of Parvez (2025), whose study of journalists in Bangladesh revealed that digital platforms are increasingly leveraged for gendered disinformation. These attacks utilise harassment and

reputational damage to systematically suppress the influence of women journalists and strip them of their public voice (Parvez, 2025).

Weaponised Allegations of Factional Bias and Whataboutism

A recurring theme in the online harassment of journalists involves the weaponisation of 'bias' allegations. Users made frequent accusations of professional bias linked to how journalists cover high-profile political figures. These attacks often manifested as claims of positive bias toward President Cyril Ramaphosa, contrasted with targeted allegations of a coordinated negative agenda against Jacob Zuma, former Public Protector Advocate Mkhwebane and recently, General Mkhwanazi.

A recurring theme in the harassment data is the accusation of factional favouritism. Journalists frequently face claims that they provide disproportionately favourable coverage of the Ramaphosa administration while maintaining a biased or 'obsessed' focus on the legal and political challenges of former President Jacob Zuma. These narratives are designed to undermine the perceived independence of the media by suggesting that reporters are active participants in intra-party political conflicts.

Journalists often face 'whataboutism' as a form of online harassment intended to discredit their reporting. For instance, reporting on state-level corruption frequently triggers bad-faith questioning such as demands to know why the journalist has not focused on private sector scandals like Steinhoff. These critiques often carry a racialised subtext, alleging that the journalist's choice of subject matter is ideologically driven or designed to protect 'White Monopoly Capital' (WMC) by distracting from corporate malfeasance.

Image-Based Harassment and Fabricated Content

Beyond verbal abuse, image-based harassment often takes a misogynistic turn for women in media. Users frequently repurpose a journalist's own photos to facilitate targeted mockery. By zooming in on specific physical traits – such as hands or teeth – harassers engage in a form of visual 'micro-scrutiny' designed to humiliate the journalist and distract from her reporting. Image-based harassment also encompasses the creation of 'cheap fakes', a form of non-consensual manipulation where a journalist's face is digitally superimposed onto another person's body. Unlike high-tech deepfakes, these low-barrier manipulations are frequently used to create suggestive or compromising contexts intended to damage the journalist's professional reputation and personal dignity.

A significant form of online harm identified in this report is the use of impersonation-based disinformation. For example, in the analysed database, were X posts in which Qanita Hunter and Pauli van Wyk highlighted instances where bad-faith actors created fraudulent screenshots of posts falsely attributed to them. City Press was similarly affected by such disinformation. By circulating fabricated 'screengrabs', harassers aim to damage journalists' and newsrooms' reputations or to trick audiences into believing fake news. This tactic involves the creation of synthetic screenshots or 'fake tweets' designed to mimic the journalists' authentic accounts and spread disinformation. These deceptive posts are engineered to undermine their professional credibility by attributing inflammatory or false statements to them, misleading the public into believing the journalists authored the content. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the sophistication of these fabricated tweets.



Figure 1: Fabricated screengrab



Figure 2: Fake poster

Intimidation and Incitement

Several comments in the dataset escalated from hostile criticism to intimidation and incitement, with particular implications for women's safety. Journalists and outlets are labelled 'enemy of the people', compared to Nazi propagandists or described as part of 'crime cartels' and 'regime propaganda', casting them as enemies rather than participants in democratic discourse. There are veiled or explicit references to doxxing, suggestions that journalists might face physical harm if they 'put a foot wrong'. Invasive personal comments, such as interrogating women's marital status in public threads, further blur the boundary between professional critique and personal targeting, increasing the risk of offline harassment and surveillance.

The abuse is often embedded in what appear to be coordinated or at least highly networked campaigns. Recurrent slogans and hashtags, especially variants of 'Voetsek SA media', are used to cluster attacks on journalists and newsrooms and to normalise the portrayal of the media as 'captured', 'cartel media' or 'propaganda arms'. The following post (see Figure 3 below) features the hashtag #VoetsekSAMedia, a recurring trope used to incite hostility against the press. The accompanying image was identified across the dataset as a frequent artifact of coordinated harassment; its repetitive use by accounts sharing similar xenophobic/Afrophobic content suggests a templated or organised campaign aimed at, among other things, delegitimising South African media institutions.



Figure 3: Example of #VoetsekSAMedia post

Harmful Discourse and the Impact on Sensitive Beats

Another trend is that when journalists post or repost their stories, users sometimes direct harmful and extreme comments at the subjects of those reports rather than engaging with the journalism itself. This dynamic contributes to a toxic discourse and may, in turn, discourage journalists from posting or amplifying important information, particularly on sensitive beats such as crime and gender-based violence.

For instance, crime reports about rape and murder frequently trigger calls for the death penalty and explicit incitement to violence against suspects, rather than measured discussion of justice or due process. Example comments on one female journalist's story include: 'This animal needs to be put down, there is no rehabilitation for such savages', 'Can't someone just sh00t him?? ♀' and 'What is this thing even!??? K"ll it! Euw 🤢', all of which use dehumanising language and advocate extra-judicial violence.

Platform Limitations and the Backlash when using Safety Tools

Platform safety tools on X, such as restricted replies and blocking, offer journalists a primary line of defence against abuse. However, these interventions can be double-edged; blocking an account often encourages the user to 'double down' on their attacks. By sharing screenshots of the block, abusive users signal their exclusion to their own followers, sparking further ridicule. This often leads to organised efforts where third parties are recruited to badger the journalist to be unblocked, effectively bypassing the initial safety measure.

Key implications

This study reveals the pervasive, gendered nature of online violence against South African women journalists on X, transforming platforms meant for public discourse into spaces of systematic silencing.

X's user sharing and algorithmic amplification propel mis- and disinformation into mainstream discourse, as evidenced by the case studies. This normalises abuse against journalists, entrenching echo chambers where harmful narratives gain legitimacy through relentless volume and repetition.

Such scaled harassment intimidates the press, undermining democratic oversight. In South Africa, it risks suppressing coverage of critical issues like politics, crime and corruption, whilst eroding public trust in media amid surging mis- and disinformation. The gendered nature of these attacks disproportionately discourages women journalists from tackling 'hard beats' with mass exposure to 'liar' or 'fake news' labels eroding their professional authority, deterring sources, audiences and peers.

High-visibility abuse flourishes on X due to lax moderation and inadequate safeguards. Platform owners have rolled back safety measures, prioritising engagement over protection and resisting further improvements. Cross-border moderation inequities such as US-centric policies deprioritise African harms like intersectional gendered slurs. These dynamics reveal the inadequacies of existing policies and regulatory responses to online safety.

Looking ahead, the Competition Commission's proposal to bridge the regulatory gap by amending the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act is a sophisticated strategic move. By making limited liability protection conditional on a platform's active compliance with an industry Code of Conduct and its responsiveness to takedown notices, the Commission has created a powerful, self-correcting incentive.

This 'carrot and stick' approach effectively transforms liability from a static legal shield into a dynamic reward for responsible governance. It ensures that platforms cannot simply remain passive observers of harmful content; instead, they are financially and legally incentivised to maintain high standards of moderation to retain their protection. Coupled with the proposed Social Media Ombudsman, this framework shifts the burden of accountability back onto the digital giants, ensuring they act decisively against misinformation and abuse or face the full weight of legal consequences.

Industry adoption of harm-tracking tools such as those used in this analysis will equip editors to engage effectively with the Social Media Ombudsman.

Recommendations

- **Legislative and Platform Accountability:** The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) must prioritise the implementation of the Competition Commission's recommendations by amending the Electronic Communications and Transactions (ECT) Act and establishing an independent Social Media Ombudsman to enforce platform accountability and ensure content moderation remains sensitive to Global South contexts.
- **Adopt the 4-Tier Harm Glossary:** Newsrooms should integrate the research's harm glossary into their daily social media management. By categorising abuse (from 'General Incivility' to 'Physical Threats'), editors can move beyond telling staff to 'develop a thick skin' and instead trigger formal security or legal protocols when "Tier 1" or "Tier 2" thresholds are met.
- **Shift from Individual to Institutional Defence:** Newsrooms must treat online harassment as a health and safety violation. This includes providing legal support for journalists facing doxxing or 'cheap fake' manipulation and offering specialised mental health care that acknowledges the specific trauma of intersectional and sexualised abuse.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated a disturbing reality. For journalists in South Africa, the digital public square has become a site of persistent, gendered harm. Online harassment is not merely a collection of isolated incidents, but a structural barrier designed to police women's voices and silence critical reporting on the country's most sensitive beats, from politics and corruption to crime and human rights.

The analysis of the 274 targeted posts in the library of harmful content reveals a clear taxonomy of harm. These attacks aim to strip women of their professional personhood through the use of sexualised slurs and the weaponisation of racialised tropes such as 'Stratcom' or 'Clever Blacks'. The findings also highlight the deployment of fabricated cheap fakes.

As newsrooms navigate a global platform environment that often deprioritises Global South contexts, it is clear that individual safety tools are an insufficient defence against TFGBV. The current culture that expects individual resilience in newsrooms is no longer tenable. Online violence must be reclassified as a critical workplace health and safety issue that requires institutional legal and mental health support.

The timing of this research coincides with a pivotal regulatory moment in South Africa. The Competition Commission's recommendations to establish a Social Media Ombudsman and a mandatory Code of Conduct provide a legal hook for systemic change. This study equips the media with a practical tool to move beyond individual resilience. Specifically, the four-tier harm glossary allows the industry to demand genuine accountability from global platforms.

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Annexure A: Glossary of harmful terms

Term	Tier	Gendered? (Y/N)	Race-based (Y/N)	Category / Type
702s	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult; Media-criticism / smear
702 black	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult; Media-criticism / smear
activist hack	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
agent	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
ANC arselickers	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
ANC24	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
*24 (BSNews24, FakeNews24, Kak24, Lies24, Poes24, Propaganda24, Rag24, Rubbish24, Shit24, Sletwerk24, Vomit24)	4	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
ANC mouthpieces	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
anti-white	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
anus	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Apartheid clerk	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
arsehole	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
askari	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
ass	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
asshole	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
aunty	4	Y	N	Gender-based abuse; Insult / vulgarity
baboon	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
baffoon	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
bastard	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
beat	1	N	N	Physical threat
behead	1	N	N	Physical threat
Bell Pottinger	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
bitch	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity

b1tch	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
black	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
block	2	N	N	Physical threat
bloody	2	N	N	Physical threat
bloody agent	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
bought and paid for	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
bought journalist	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
brain dead	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
bribe	3	N	N	Corruption
brown envelope	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
bruin koevertjies	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
BS	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
buffoon	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
bulalani lento	1	N	N	Physical threat
bullet	1	N	N	Physical threat
bullshit	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
burn her	1	N	N	Physical threat
burn him	1	N	N	Physical threat
burn them	1	N	N	Physical threat
bustard	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
butt	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
cabal	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Insult / vulgarity
capture	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
captured media	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption
#capturedmedia	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption
cartel media	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption
charlatan	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
cheating	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
chest pains	1	N	N	Physical threat
chicken	4	Y	N	Insult / vulgarity

CIA	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
#citypressfakenews	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
clever black	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
clickbait	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
clowns	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
👹	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
cock	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
cock sucker	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
coconut	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
coloured	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
condom collector	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
confess	1	N	N	Physical threat
coon	2	N	Y	Insult / vulgarity
corrupt	3	N	N	Corruption
coward	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
CR17	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language
crap	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
credibility	3	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
credible	3	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
criminal	4	N	N	Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
crook	4	N	N	Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
cunt	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
cut her throat	1	Y	N	Physical threat
cut his throat	1	Y	N	Physical threat
Dailykak	4	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
Daily*	4	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
deal with	1	N	N	Physical threat
death sentence	1	N	N	Physical threat
Demagogue	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Demise	1	N	N	Physical threat
Demon	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
deserve to	1	N	N	Physical threat
devil	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity

dick	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
die	1	N	N	Physical threat
dildo	2	N	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
dirty	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
disappear	1	N	N	Physical threat
disgrace	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
disgust	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
disinformation	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
dof	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
dom	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
domkop	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
dom kop	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
doos	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
douche	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
dox	1	N	N	Physical threat
doxing	1	N	N	Physical threat
drunk	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
enemy	1	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
evil	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fake	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
fake news	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
#fakenews	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
fat	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fat cats	3	N	N	Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
fire	2	N	N	Signifier of harm
firing	2	N	N	Signifier of harm
fok	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fokken	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fokkof	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fokof	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fool	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity

foreign agent	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Insult / vulgarity
fraud	3	N	N	Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
fuck	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
fuck off	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
funded by	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
futsek	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
garbage	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Goebbles	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
go away	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
go to hell	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
government lackey	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
gun	1	N	N	Physical threat
gutter journalism	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
hack-job	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
handler	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
hang	1	N	N	Physical threat
hate	2	N	N	Signifier of harm
hit	1	N	N	Physical threat
hit piece	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
hoernalis	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption
home	1	N	N	Physical threat
hore	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
house	1	N	N	Physical threat
hypocrite	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
idiot	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
id1ot	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
idi0t	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Ignorant	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Imbecile	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Indian	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
is finished	1	N	N	Physical threat

jerk	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Jew-hating	2	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
jigga	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
jellof	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
jollof	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
jou ma se	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
k*ffir	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
kak	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
Kak24	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
kill	1	N	N	Physical threat
kleva	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
kont	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
lackey	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
lamestream media	4	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
lefty	4	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Insult / vulgarity
legacy media	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
#legacymedia	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
libtard	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
liar	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
lie	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
Liewe Heksie	4	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
Lies24	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
live	1	N	N	Physical threat
loser	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
loony	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
lying	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
lynch	1	N	N	Physical threat
mafia	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
mafia media	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
magogo	4	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
mainstream media	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
mampara	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
#MediaDistortion	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language

media is lying	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
mentally disturbed	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
mgodoyi	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
MI6	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
misinformation	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
mislead	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
misunu	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
moerskont	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
moloi	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
mond suig 24	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
moron	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
moronic	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
mouthpiece	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Insult / vulgarity
mouth of ANC propaganda	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language
MSM	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
msunery	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
msunu	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
must die	1	N	N	Physical threat
mxm	4	N	N	Signifier of harm
narrative	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
Naspers	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
Nazi	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
necklace	1	N	N	Physical threat
needs help	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
negro	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
n*gga	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
n*gger	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
Nonsense24	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
not a true journalist	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
nutter	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
obsessed	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
oksalayo	4	N	N	Signifier of harm

operative	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
paid	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
#paidmedia	4	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
pathetic	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
pay	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
peddler	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
perish	1	N	N	Physical threat
piece of shit	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
piel	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
piel suig	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
Pielsuig24	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
pig	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
pimp	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
piss off	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
plot	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
poes	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
👁️	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity; Signifier of harm
presstitute	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Corruption
propaganda	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
propaganda arm	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
Propaganda24	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
propagandanist	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
propagandist	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
prostitute	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
puke	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
punch	1	N	N	Physical threat
puppet	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language

puppet masters	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
pussy	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
racist	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
rape	1	Y	N	Physical threat; Sexual violence
regime propaganda	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
reputation	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
retard	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
retarded	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
road kill	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
roadkill	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
rogue unit	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
rubbish	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
rubbish reporting	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
SA media	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
#SAmedia	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
satan	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
sathane	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
scavenger	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
scum	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
scumbag	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
#scummedia	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
scum media	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
send them to the deep sea	1	N	N	Physical threat
se poes	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
sfebe	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
sham	3	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
sheep	4	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
shem	4	N	N	Signifier of harm
shill	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
shit	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
sh1t	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
shithead	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
shithole	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
shoot	1	N	N	Physical threat
shoot her	1	Y	N	Physical threat
shoot him	1	Y	N	Physical threat
shoot this one	1	Y	N	Physical threat
shut up	1	N	N	Physical threat

silence	1	N	N	Physical threat
silent	4	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
skelm	4	N	N	Corruption
slaughter	1	N	N	Physical threat
sleazebag	4	Y	N	Insult / vulgarity; Gendered abuse
sleazy	4	Y	N	Insult / vulgarity; Gendered abuse
sleeper	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Insult / vulgarity
slet	2	Y	N	Insult / vulgarity; Gendered abuse
slush fund	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption
slush fund journalist	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption
slut	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse
smear	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
smear campaign	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
snake	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
socialist	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
South African media	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
Soros	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
spies	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
sponsored narrative	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
spy	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language
SSA	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
stab	1	N	N	Physical threat
State Security Agency	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Corruption
stealing	4	N	N	Corruption

stomach journalist	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
stooge	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
stratcom	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
#stratcom	3	N	N	Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear; Insult / vulgarity
stupid	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
tea girl	2	Y	Y	Gendered abuse; Racism / racialised insult
terror	3	N	N	Signifier of harm
terrorist	3	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
thief	4	N	N	Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
thieving	4	N	N	Corruption; Insult / vulgarity
this one	4	N	N	Signifier of harm
this one is finished	1	N	N	Physical threat
thuma mina	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language
thumamina	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language
#thumamedia	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
#thumaminamedia group	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language; Media-criticism / smear
thumaminion	3	N	N	Party/political identifier; Conspiracy / 'capture' language
torture	1	N	N	Physical threat
trailer trash	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
traitor	3	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
trash	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity; Signifier of harm

Trash Maverick	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
treason	3	N	N	Signifier of harm
trough	4	N	N	Corruption
truth	4	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
tsek	2	N	N	Signifier of harm
turd	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
twat	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
twot	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
twerp	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
ugly	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
unalive	1	N	N	Physical threat
useless	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
vermin	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
violate	2	N	N	Sexual violence / gendered abuse
voetsek	2	N	N	Insult / vulgarity; Signifier of harm
#VoetsekSAMedia	2	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
vomit	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
wanker	4	Y	N	Insult / vulgarity
We are the media now	3	N	N	Media-criticism / smear
West	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
white	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
white establishment	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
white monopoly	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
white monopoly media	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult; Media-criticism / smear
White Monopoly Capital	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
whore	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
whore-house	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
whore-journalist	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
whorenalist	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
whore-news	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
whore-operated media	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
worst journalist	4	N	N	Insult / vulgarity
will find	1	N	N	Physical threat

witch	2	Y	N	Gendered abuse; Insult / vulgarity
WMC	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
WMC media	3	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult
xenomorph	2	N	Y	Racism / racialised insult

Askari = sell out/informant. Bulalani lento = kill this thing. Bruin koevertjies = brown envelopes. Hoernalis = whorealist. Mgodoyi = the man is a mongrel/stray dog. Jollof = an insulting term to refer to a South African woman who marries a Nigerian. Derived from Jollof rice. Jellob = variation on Jollof. MSM = mainstream media. Msunu = insult: anus, male or female genitalia or cunt. Mxm = South African slang - a mouth click indicating annoyance. Oksalayo = the fact of the matter is. Magogo = Grandmother. Piel = cock. Piel suig = cock sucking. Voetsek = go away!. WMC = White Monopoly Capital.

Key to tiers

Tier	Description
Tier 1	Physical Threat – Direct or indirect threats of violence, including threats of rape, assault and murder.
Tier 2	Hate Speech & Identity Harm – Abusive language based on gender, race, sexuality, religion or other identity markers.
Tier 3	Disinformation – Spreading false or misleading information to discredit or silence the journalist. The use of these terms may form part of coordinated disinformation campaigns.
Tier 4	General Incivility – Insults, trolling and low-level abuse that contribute to a hostile environment but do not rise to the level of direct threat or hate speech.

Annexure C: Query

(((@QaanitahHunter NEAR/5f ("702s" OR "702 black" OR "activist" OR "agent" OR "ANC arselickers" OR "ANC24" OR "*24" OR "ANC mouthpieces" OR "anti-white" OR "anus" OR "Apartheid clerk" OR "arse*" OR "askari" OR "ass*" OR "aunty" OR "baboon" OR "baffoon" OR "bastard" OR "beat" OR "behead" OR "Bell Pottinger" OR "b*tch" OR "black" OR "block" OR "bloody" OR "bought and paid for" OR "bought" OR "brain dead" OR "bribe" OR "brown envelope" OR "bruin koevertjies" OR "BS" OR "buffoon" OR "bulalani lento" OR "bullet" OR "bullshit" OR "burn her" OR "burn him" OR "burn them" OR "bustard" OR "butt" OR "cabal" OR "capture*" OR "#capturedmedia" OR "cartel" OR "charlatan" OR "cheat*" OR "chest pains" OR "chicken" OR "CIA" OR "#citypressfakenews" OR "clever black" OR "clickbait" OR "clowns" OR "🤡" OR "cock" OR "coconut" OR "coloured" OR "condom collector" OR "confess" OR "coon" OR "corrupt" OR "coward" OR "CR17" OR "crap" OR "credib*" OR "criminal" OR "crook" OR "cunt" OR "cut her throat" OR "cut his throat" OR "throat" OR "Daily*" OR "deal with" OR "death sentence" OR "demagogue" OR "demise" OR "demon" OR "deserve to" OR "devil" OR "dick*" OR "die" OR "dildo" OR "dirty" OR "disappear" OR "disgrace" OR "disgust" OR "*isinformation" OR "dof" OR "dom" OR "domkop" OR "doos" OR "douche" OR "dox*" OR "drunk" OR "enemy" OR "evil" OR "fake" OR "#fakenews" OR "fat" OR "fat cat*" OR "fire" OR "firing" OR "fok*" OR "fool" OR "foreign agent" OR "foreign*" OR "fraud" OR "fuck" OR "funded by" OR "futsek" OR "garbage" OR "Goebbles" OR "go away" OR "go to hell" OR "hell" OR "lackey" OR "gun" OR "gutter" OR "hack" OR "handler" OR "hang" OR "hate" OR "hit" OR "hit piece" OR "hoernalis" OR "home" OR "hore" OR "house" OR "hypocrite" OR "idiot" OR "id1ot" OR "idi0t" OR "ignorant" OR "imbecile" OR "Indian" OR "is finished" OR "jerk" OR "Jew-hating" OR "jigga" OR "jellof" OR "jollof" OR "jou ma se" OR "k*ffir" OR "kak" OR "kill" OR "kleva" OR "kont" OR "lackey" OR "lamestream media" OR "lefty" OR "legacy media" OR "#legacymedia" OR "libtard" OR "liar" OR "lie" OR "Liewe Heksie" OR "live" OR "loser" OR "loony" OR "looney" OR "lying" OR "lynch*" OR "mafia" OR "magogo" OR "mainstream media" OR "mampara" OR "#MediaDistortion" OR "media is lying" OR "mentally disturbed" OR "mgodoyi" OR "MI6" OR "mislead" OR "misunu" OR "moerskont" OR "moloji" OR "moron*" OR "mouthpiece" OR "mouth of" OR "MSM" OR "msun*" OR "must die" OR "mxm" OR "narrative" OR "Naspers" OR "Nazi" OR "necklace" OR "needs help" OR "negro" OR "n*ggga" OR "n*gger" OR "not a true journalist" OR "nutter" OR "obsessed" OR "oksalayo" OR "operative" OR "paid" OR "#paidmedia" OR "pathetic" OR "pay" OR "peddler" OR "perish" OR "piece of shit" OR "piel*" OR "pig" OR "pimp" OR "piss off" OR "plot" OR "poes" OR "👅" OR "presstitute" OR "propaganda" OR "propagandist" OR "prostitute" OR "puke" OR "punch" OR "puppet" OR "puppet masters" OR "pussy" OR "racist" OR "rape" OR "regime" OR "reputation" OR "retard*" OR "road kill" OR "roadkill" OR "rogue unit" OR "rubbish" OR "SA media" OR "#SAMedia" OR "satan" OR "sathane" OR "scavenger" OR "scum*" OR "#scummedia" OR "send them to the deep sea" OR "se poes" OR "sfebe" OR "sham" OR "sheep" OR "shem" OR "shill" OR "sh*t" OR "shithead" OR "shithole" OR "shoot" OR "shut up" OR "silen*" OR "skelm" OR "slaughter" OR "sleaz*" OR "sleeper" OR "slet*" OR "slush fund" OR "slut" OR "smear" OR "snake" OR "socialist" OR "South African media" OR "Soros" OR "spies" OR "sponsored narrative" OR "spy" OR "SSA" OR "stab" OR "State Security Agency" OR "steal*" OR "stomach journalist" OR "stooge" OR "stratcom" OR "#stratcom" OR "stupid" OR "tea girl" OR "terror*" OR "thief" OR "thieving" OR "this one" OR "this one is finished" OR "thuma mina" OR "thumamina" OR "#thumamedia" OR "#thumaminamedia" OR "thumaminion" OR "torture" OR "trailer trash" OR "traitor" OR "trash" OR "🗑️" OR "Trash Maverick" OR "treason" OR "trough" OR "truth" OR "tsek" OR "turd" OR "twat" OR "twot" OR "twerp" OR "ugly" OR "unalive" OR "un*I've" OR "useless" OR "vermin" OR "violate" OR "voetsek" OR "#VoetsekSAMedia" OR "vomit" OR "wanker" OR "We are the media now" OR "West" OR "white" OR "white establishment" OR "white monopoly" OR "White Monopoly Capital" OR "whore*" OR "whore-house" OR "whore-journalist" OR "whorenalist" OR "worst journalist" OR "will find" OR "witch" OR "WMC" OR "WMC media" OR "xenomorph")) AND country:ZAF)