

62% increase in volume of mentions in online anti-immigrant conversations on X in SA

The volume of mentions in online anti-immigrant conversations on X (formerly Twitter) in South Africa has increased by 62% between 1 January and 5 November 2023, compared to the previous period of the same duration.



Source: © 123rf [123rf](#) The volume of mentions in online anti-immigrant conversation on X (formerly Twitter) in South Africa has increased

Between 1 January and 5 November 2023, the online conversation about immigrants in South Africa garnered about 2.93 million mentions, compared to the previous period with 1.81 million mentions.

This is according to a new report by the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC), which analysed troubling narratives and divisive content relating to xenophobia on South African social media, specifically X.

Mention volume measures the number of times that online content containing selected keywords was posted to or from a social media channel. Examples of a mention include a tweet, a phrase in a news article, or a YouTube video comment.



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20 Nov 2023



Top hashtags

Top hashtags within the conversation include #khositwala, #operationdudula, #putsouthaficansfirst (spelt without an 'r'), #zimbabwe and #putsouthafricansfirst.

Researchers found that the conversation about #KhosiTwala did not “drive xenophobic narratives”, however, some accounts would occasionally use the hashtag to spread hateful micro-narratives, leapfrogging off a trend to allow their content to be seen. Khosi Twala is the winner of the TV show, Big Brother Titans. The presence of that hashtag is due to the keywords that are used.

This practice referred to as hashjacking involves using a hashtag for purposes other than the original intention to divert attention towards another conversation.



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Biggest peak in March

The biggest peak was recorded between 20 and 26 March.

This peak was mostly driven by the following conversations:

- the EFF's National Shutdown, which called for an end to the electricity crisis and for President Cyril Ramaphosa to step down.
- Al Jazeera's gold mafia documentary that exposed criminal gangs involved in a billion-dollar black money operation in Zimbabwe with ties to SA.

Former Operation Dudula leader Nhlanhla Lux who alleged that his house in Soweto had been bombed is the reason this content was assessed. Operation Dudula is a formation that is known for driving messages on social media with a xenophobic slant.

Mentions of gold mafia and the National Shutdown were found in a previous CABC Xenophobia [report](#) - the former due to the inclusion of Zimbabwe-related keywords in the query.

Some proponents of the online anti-immigrant narrative used the national shutdown conversation to call on the public to desist from joining the EFF's shutdown earlier this year. The party is often criticised for its pan-Africanist stance.



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Second peak

The second peak, recorded between 21 August and 3 September, focused on the conversation around the Zimbabwe elections.

The data was divided into various categories including 'police', 'home affairs', 'media', and 'civil society'. The conversation

within the media and civil society mostly consisted of original posts, while categories of Home Affairs and the police were mainly made up of retweets.

Micro themes within these categories revealed:

- The conversation about Home Affairs focused on fraudulent IDs allegedly issued to immigrants and calls for them to be deported. Some users advocated for documents issued to migrants to be audited, while others shared that the EFF's pan-Africanist stance was fuelled by the party's desire for immigrants who have South African IDs to vote for them. Researchers also detected the use of the whataboutery technique, used in the anti-immigrant conversation, to compare South Africa's visa policy positions with those of other countries.
- Allegations that police were not enforcing the law and were instead soliciting bribes from immigrants.
- Allegations that the media was biased and drove political messaging in their reporting - this is a common tactic in mis- and disinformation campaigns that seek to erode trust amongst the citizenry.
- That civil society organisations were driven by foreign funders and acted in those funders' interests. Others called on the government to clamp down on NGOs because they were undermining the sovereignty of the country.

Find the full report [here](#).

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