



South Africa country briefing

South Africa's May 2024 Elections: Context and key facts

On 29 May 2024, some 28 million voters will cast their ballots in what many describe as South Africa's most contested general election since the end of the apartheid regime in 1994.¹ South Africans will be electing their representatives in local and national parliaments,² and, for the first time since taking power three decades ago, the governing African National Congress (ANC) is expected to get less than 50% of the vote.³ Overall, 70 political parties and 14,903 candidates are fighting for 887 seats in the national and provincial legislatures.⁴

The ANC has been under increased pressure due to high unemployment, which hit 32% last year, economic inequalities, corruption allegations, high levels of violence and frequent power cuts.⁵ The main opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) party says the country is in crisis, while the third largest party in parliament, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is seeking to attract voters with plans to redistribute land to the less well-off.⁶

But there is another horse in this race, namely the newly formed uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party, led by ex-president Jacob Zuma, who was ousted by current ANC leader Cyril Ramaphosa amid allegations of corruption.⁷ Zuma also spent time in jail after ignoring a court order.⁸ Named after the ANC's former armed wing, the MK party is promising to create 5 million jobs and has rendered the race even more unpredictable.⁹

On 20 May 2024, South Africa's top court disqualified Jacob Zuma from running in the upcoming elections.¹⁰¹¹ The court ruled that he wasn't eligible to be a member of nor qualified to stand for election to the National Assembly. (The case stems from the decision of South Africa's

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/27/south-africa-30-years-after-apartheid-what-has-changed>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

⁴ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/security-plan-place-upcoming-elections>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68590538>

¹⁰ <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/772635/social-unrest-warning-for-south-africa-police-on-high-alert/>

¹¹ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-05-21-sas-elections-stand-out-globally-for-very-real-threat-of-violence-assassination-report/>

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/20/south-african-court-rules-zuma-not-eligible-to-run-for-parliament>

Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), which disqualified Zuma in March 2024, saying the Constitution bars anyone with a prison sentence from running for office.¹³ Zuma challenged that decision.) Experts say the Constitutional Court’s ruling will affect the results of the ballot and may lead to security issues.¹⁴ (More information on threats of political violence below.)

Social media landscape

In January 2024, South Africa had 26 million active social media users – accounting for 42% of the total population¹⁵ – and rapidly advancing artificial intelligence (AI) tools.¹⁶ Meta’s WhatsApp is the most popular social media platform, utilised by almost 94% of active social media users,¹⁷ followed by Facebook (88%), TikTok (74%) and Instagram (67%).

Social media trends and threads ahead of the 2024 ballot

Electoral mis and disinformation

Civil society organisations and the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) have been sounding the alarm about election-related disinformation in the leadup to the 29 May 2024 ballot.¹⁸ Falsehoods that may harm or deter voters from casting their ballot have become a fixture over the years and have been proliferating on WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, among others.¹⁹

Some of the most common falsehoods around elections on social media include claims that if one is registered to vote but doesn’t, their vote automatically goes to the governing party.²⁰ But falsehoods also target the independence of the IEC. In February 2024, several political parties accused the IEC of frequently hiring members of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) as voting station staff, alleging that, as SADTU is an alliance partner of the ANC, these staff would rig the election.^{21,22}

In February 2024, Bantu Holomisa, the President of the United Democratic Movement (UDM), tweeted: “The IEC uses this Union to run this country’s elections, an affiliate of Cosatu which is in

¹³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zuma-court-seeking-right-run-south-africas-pivotal-election-2024-05-10/>

¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zuma-court-seeking-right-run-south-africas-pivotal-election-2024-05-10/>

¹⁵ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-south-africa#:~:text=South%20Africa%20was%20home%20to,percent%20of%20the%20total%20population.>

¹⁶ <https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-south-africa>

¹⁷ <https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-south-africa>

¹⁸ <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/analysis/debunked-dont-be-fooled-by-these-common-election-myths-20240503>

¹⁹ <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/analysis/debunked-dont-be-fooled-by-these-common-election-myths-20240503>

²⁰ <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/analysis/debunked-dont-be-fooled-by-these-common-election-myths-20240503>

²¹ <https://twitter.com/BantuHolomisa/status/1757850193897164818>

²² <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/analysis/debunked-dont-be-fooled-by-these-common-election-myths-20240503>

alliance with the ANC. This time in our meeting of the opposition parties on 26/2/24, we must take a resolution on this rigging of SA elections”.²³

Like elsewhere in the world, AI-generated disinformation, including deepfakes, has been on the rise in South Africa – including in the context of the upcoming election – and South Africans reportedly struggle to spot them.²⁴ AI-generated misinformation on Meta’s WhatsApp messaging app, which has become the main means of communication across the country, has been of particular concern to experts.²⁵ In rural areas, WhatsApp provides access to information on a range of issues, including reproductive health. But it has also become a major conduit for disseminating and consuming misinformation.^{26,27}

Calls for election violence

South Africa has a history of political violence.²⁸ While law enforcement today is better equipped to handle instances of electoral and post-election violence than in previous years, authorities and experts have raised concerns about some politicians’ threatening rhetoric.^{29,30}

“As the government, we want to issue a stern warning to anyone with intentions to disrupt the elections that the law enforcement officers will deal with them decisively and will put them behind bars,” Minister of Defence and Military Veterans Thandi Modise reportedly said in April 2024.³¹

In the leadup to the ballot, members of Jacob Zuma’s MK party have ramped up threats of violence should they not get their way at the polls, or should the court decide to disqualify Zuma from the race.³² “If these courts, which are sometimes captured, if they stop MK, there will be anarchy in this country. There will be riots like you’ve never seen in this country. There will be no elections,”³³ MK’s leader Visvin Reddy said in March 2024 in a video, which was widely circulated on social media.³⁴

²³ <https://twitter.com/BantuHolomisa/status/1757850193897164818>

²⁴ <https://theconversation.com/deepfakes-in-south-africa-protecting-your-image-online-is-the-key-to-fighting-them-223383>

²⁵ <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/37375267/Misinformation%20and%20Digital%20Literacy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

²⁶ <https://futures.issafrica.org/blog/2024/Disinformation-governance-and-the-South-African-election>

²⁷ <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/37375267/Misinformation%20and%20Digital%20Literacy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

²⁸ <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/771274/the-biggest-social-unrest-risks-in-south-africa-right-now/>

²⁹ <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/771274/the-biggest-social-unrest-risks-in-south-africa-right-now/>

³⁰ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/security-plan-place-upcoming-elections>

³¹ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/security-plan-place-upcoming-elections>

³² <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

³³ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

³⁴ <https://witness.co.za/news/kzn/2024/04/04/visvin-reddy-in-the-dock-for-allegedly-inciting-public-violence/>

Reddy's statement, for which he's facing charges of inciting public violence³⁵, is one of many made by MK party members in public and shared on social media platforms, including X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok.³⁶ One TikTok video, since removed, reportedly showed a man wearing an MK shirt firing a pistol into the hills, followed by a camera pan to a table with a shotgun and assault rifles.³⁷ MK's purported ties to violent individuals became very real in January 2024, when a group of over 60 men and women charged with instigating deadly riots in 2021 in KwaZulu-Natal, turned up to court sporting MK regalia.³⁸

The violence of 2021, in which over 300 people lost their lives, was sparked by the decision of a local court to imprison former president Jacob Zuma for contempt of court. In January 2024, South Africa's Human Rights Commission confirmed that social media platforms played a key role in fuelling the violence through amplification of inciting posts.³⁹

The investigation found that through "*dissemination of inflammatory content, social media amplified grievances, stoked fear and anger, and mobilised individuals towards disruptive actions.*"⁴⁰ "*It was clear from the evidence obtained that mechanisms to gather information to counter the weaponization of these platforms are available. However, the responsible entities [authorities] did not take steps to improve their skills, neither did they have the capacity to do so at the time,*" the Commission said in the report.^{41,42}

Concerns over political violence were raised again on 20 May 2024, after South Africa's top court disqualified the face of the MK party, ex-president Jacob Zuma from running in the upcoming elections.^{43,44,45} The court ruled that Zuma wasn't eligible to be a member of nor qualified to stand for election to the National Assembly. During the proceedings Zuma challenged the independence of some of the court justices.⁴⁶

"These narratives attacking the independence of the Constitutional Court are reminiscent of the narratives that played out both online and offline challenging the legitimacy of his contempt of court conviction which led to violent riots in July 2021 to stop his arrest," said Sherylle Dass, Regional Director of the public law firms Legal Resources Centre (LRC), adding that *"there is a*

³⁵ <https://witness.co.za/news/kzn/2024/04/04/visvin-reddy-in-the-dock-for-allegedly-inciting-public-violence/>

³⁶ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

³⁷ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

³⁸ <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2024-01-30-july-riots-instigators-ditch-anc-regalia-for-umkhonto-wesizwe-party-gear-in-court-appearance2/>

³⁹ <https://www.itweb.co.za/article/new-report-reveals-how-social-media-fuelled-2021-unrest/DZQ58vV82PxMzXy2>

⁴⁰ https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/JULY%20UNREST%20REPORT%20FINAL_29%20JAN%202024.pdf

⁴¹ <https://www.itweb.co.za/article/new-report-reveals-how-social-media-fuelled-2021-unrest/DZQ58vV82PxMzXy2>

⁴² https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/JULY%20UNREST%20REPORT%20FINAL_29%20JAN%202024.pdf

⁴³ <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/772635/social-unrest-warning-for-south-africa-police-on-high-alert/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-05-21-sas-elections-stand-out-globally-for-very-real-threat-of-violence-assassination-report/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/20/south-african-court-rules-zuma-not-eligible-to-run-for-parliament>

⁴⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/south-africa-elections-vote-zuma-anc-e2d50ff4dffc0a5e82c0322ff09991be>

real risk that similar calls through concerted online campaigns may result in unrest, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal.”

The MK party has also been accused of stoking tribal divisions. In February, Jacob Zuma reportedly referred contemptuously to KwaZulu-Natal residents, raising concerns that the newly formed party could be hijacked to promote Zulu nationalism.⁴⁷ Zuma’s comments were followed by social media posts allegedly shared by MK party supporters emphasising that the party represents the Zulu nation.⁴⁸ At least two political parties have filed complaints – one criminal and one with the IEC – alleging intimidation by MK members. Though the antagonism runs both ways, social media videos appear to show MK supporters being assaulted by ANC members.⁴⁹ Allegations of intimidation have also been made against other political parties.⁵⁰

Xenophobic statements and incitement to violence

Months before the 29 May ballot, rights groups and experts have been sounding the alarm about narratives conflating xenophobia with patriotism spreading across social media,⁵¹ and warning about the exploitation of anti-immigration rhetoric by political parties and possible violence.⁵²

Migration, and especially irregular migration, has emerged as one of the central campaign themes, with politicians of all denominations resorting to incitement to violence. Candidates have been blaming South Africa’s social ills on migration and making xenophobic statements.⁵³ In December 2023, for example, Leader of ActionSa, Herman Mashaba, alleged in a tweet that foreign nationals who run tuckshops use them as illicit drug channels, destroying small businesses and disrupting entire communities.⁵⁴

Government officials have also joined the xenophobic chorus. After an August 2023 fire in a building in Johannesburg’s central business district that killed more than 70 people, Kenny Kunene – the deputy president of the Patriotic Alliance and member of the Mayoral Committee – called for the “mass deportation of illegal immigrants who are staying in abandoned buildings that are taking rent.”⁵⁵ In April, the ANC Minister for Home Affairs approved a White Paper

⁴⁷ <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-02-06-fears-mk-party-could-stoke-ethnic-violence/>

⁴⁸ <https://mg.co.za/politics/2024-02-06-fears-mk-party-could-stoke-ethnic-violence/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

⁵¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/06/south-africa-toxic-rhetoric-endangers-migrants>

⁵² <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-05-04-report-warns-of-xenophobic-rhetoric-for-political-gain/>

⁵³ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-07-07-no-actionsa-no-evidence-that-15-million-undocumented-immigrants-live-in-south-africa/>

⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/HermanMashaba/status/1736607055513845833>

⁵⁵ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-08-31-city-of-johannesburg-points-finger-at-ngos-and-foreign-nationals-after-deadly-fire/>

recommending that South Africa withdraw from the 1951 Refugee Convention, only to ratify it again with reservations.⁵⁶

“Politicians are using immigrants as pawns, without regard for their safety in an attempt to score votes ahead of the general elections,” Nomathamsanqa Masiko-Mpaka, South African researcher at Human Rights Watch said in a May statement.⁵⁷

“We are noticing that the anti-migrant rhetoric is coming from political parties – particularly smaller ones – and some like the Patriotic Alliance have been particularly hateful, like the leader saying he will remove oxygen tanks from sick foreigners in hospitals,” said Yasmin Rajah head of Refugee Social Services in KwaZulu-Natal, a coastal South African province. ***“I don’t think social media platforms do much to stamp out hate speech. It seems like anything goes in South Africa.”***

The rhetoric has already translated into real-world action in KwaZulu-Natal, with pamphlets warning foreign shop owners to close their businesses and a truck driver’s forum mobilising to protest against foreign truck drivers, according to Rajah.

Social media platforms approving hateful ads

In June and August 2023, South Africa’s Legal Resources Centre (LRC) and international non-governmental organisation Global Witness – both members of the Global Coalition for Tech Justice – tested social media platforms’ safety efforts, by submitting extreme and hate-filled advertisements for approval. The June 2023 investigation tested Facebook, TikTok and YouTube ability to detect hate speech and incitement to violence targeting non-nationals in South Africa. The groups prepared ten adverts – which were withdrawn post-approval and never published – based on real-life content in English and translated into Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu. The ads called on the South African police to kill foreigners and encouraged violence through “force” against migrants. The ads were approved by all three social media platforms, with the exception of only one ad in English and Afrikaans rejected by Facebook.

The platforms’ approval of hateful ads has been of particular concern, bearing in mind the violent and sometimes deadly attacks on migrant workers living in South Africa. Xenowatch reported 170 incidents in 2022 and 2023⁵⁸ and 18 between January and April 2024.⁵⁹

South Africa has been a home for millions of African migrants, mainly from Lesotho, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe for decades. While xenophobic sentiments have been

⁵⁶ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/cabinet-approves-final-white-paper-citizenship-immigration-and-refugee-protection#:~:text=Cabinet%20has%20approved%20the%20Final,the%20oral%20and%20written%20submissions.>

⁵⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/06/south-africa-toxic-rhetoric-endangers-migrants>

⁵⁸ <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.xenowatch.ac.za/statistics-dashboard/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1715592480936990&usq=AOvVaw1AZBy-BBARixrGG1DVZ-oo>

⁵⁹ <https://www.xenowatch.ac.za/statistics-dashboard/>

simmering in the country for years, they came to a boiling point in 2022 with the launch of Operation Dudula.⁶⁰⁶¹ Meaning to “force out” in the Zulu language, this social media hate campaign spilled over into the streets of Johannesburg and elsewhere, unleashing violent protests, arson of migrant-owned businesses and leading to the murder of a Zimbabwean national.⁶²⁶³

Hate speech targeting female journalists

The August 2023 investigation, in addition to those platforms tested previously, included X (formerly Twitter). The ads submitted for approval were based on real-world examples of abuse received by women journalists. These were violent, sexualised and dehumanising, referring to women as vermin, prostitutes, or psychopaths and calling for them to be beaten and killed. They included statements such as “they’re just all sheep and should be slaughtered” and “they all need to die”. Despite the extreme content of the adverts that clearly breached the social media platforms’ own policies on hate speech, all four platforms approved the vast majority of the adverts. The findings indicate significant gaps in the platforms’ ability to effectively moderate harmful content, particularly when it involves nuanced, culturally specific language.

Big Tech policies and plans for keeping South Africa’s ballot safe

Ahead of the vote on May 29th, Meta, TikTok and Google appear to have rolled out more or less the same measures they have resorted to in previous years, with some updates. All three companies have signed a voluntary agreement with the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) and civil society group Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), undertaking to work together to combat disinformation and other digital harms ahead of the elections.⁶⁴

Though X (formerly Twitter) is mentioned in the agreement, the tech platform hasn’t signed on – a move which seems to align with changes implemented by free speech absolutist and billionaire Elon Musk who bought the company in 2022.

The framework, which isn’t legally binding, sets out to combat the dissemination of disinformation and relies on the good faith of the participants to work together to ensure free and fair elections.⁶⁵ The agreement also encourages the platforms to implement their own policies

⁶⁰ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1122612>

⁶¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/4/8/what-is-operation-dudula-s-africas-anti-immigration-vigilante>

⁶² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1122612>

⁶³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/4/8/what-is-operation-dudula-s-africas-anti-immigration-vigilante>

⁶⁴ <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/News-And-Media/News-List/News/News-Article/Electoral-Commission-partners-with-social-media-giants-to-combat-disinformation-in-2024-National-and-Provincial-Elections?a=AlSDGvpz75ps1usOfX7oimHCQG6/AToNAzCQK374oSg=>

⁶⁵ Voluntary Framework of Cooperation to Address Disinformation in the 2024 National and Provincial Elections in South Africa.

regarding removal of problematic content, publishing advisory warnings on harmful content and to delist content. It ends on the date election results are announced.⁶⁶

As part of the framework, the tech companies have undertaken to assist IEC with media literacy programmes and to work with the IEC and MMA on misinformation complaints through platforms such as [Real411.org](https://www.real411.org) and [PADRE.org.za](https://www.padre.org.za).

Real411 is an official website for reporting mis and disinformation in the lead up to the elections, which shares complaints directly with the IEC. The IEC then assesses each complaint and is supposed to take appropriate action.⁶⁷ This includes notifying social media platforms, which are expected to ensure “a diligent response,” according to MMA director William Bird.⁶⁸

However, despite IEC’s official commitment and efforts, some observers have raised concerns about the Commission's lack of action around threats of election violence.⁶⁹ The IEC hasn’t officially acknowledged the possibility of violence.⁷⁰ Some allege that the offline and online statements made by MK politicians have violated the Electoral Code of Conduct by using language that provokes violence or intimidates candidates or voters.⁷²

The IEC is also seen as not doing enough regarding inciting anti-immigration rhetoric propagated by political parties and candidates. “The Electoral Commission of South Africa, as an independent constitutional body which manages free and fair elections, should explicitly condemn the harmful rhetoric directed towards foreign nationals,”⁷³ Nomathamsanqa Masiko-Mpaka, South Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch in a statement.

Past failures and current concerns

It has to be noted that in 2021, social media companies agreed to a similar framework for the purposes of safeguarding local elections, but they fell short of their obligations, a report penned by former MP-turned disinformation expert Phumzile van Damme has found.⁷⁴

Civil society groups have been trying to engage with the platforms for months leading up to the 29 May 2024 ballot, but the companies refused to do so, raising serious concerns about their commitment to safeguarding the election.

⁶⁶Voluntary Framework of Cooperation to Address Disinformation in the 2024 National and Provincial Elections in South Africa.

⁶⁷ <https://www.eisa.org/disinformation-and-elections/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/government/meta-tiktok-google-agree-to-help-iec-combat-election-disinformation-20230705>

⁶⁹ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

⁷¹ <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/News-And-Media/News-List/IECNews>

⁷² <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-05-iec-must-act-urgently-against-threats-of-electoral-violence-in-sa/>

⁷³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/06/south-africa-toxic-rhetoric-endangers-migrants>

⁷⁴ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:ffc07022-f3f9-458c-b479-833e53b6b962>

The South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) has expressed “anger at being ‘ghosted’ by big tech companies and our Parliament’s Portfolio Committee on Communications”, after the group’s requests to discuss how to combat disinformation and hate speech during the upcoming ballot were met with silence.⁷⁵ ***“Despite two reminders, by April no acknowledgement had been received from TikTok or X (formerly Twitter). Meta provided a vague response to revert in due course, but six weeks later had not done so,”*** the group wrote in an April 2024 press release.⁷⁶

Concerned by the lack of transparency and concrete information explaining how big tech companies plan to safeguard the ballot, public interest law firm LRC submitted two access to information requests to Meta, Google and TikTok on their election action plans. In its request, LRC asked for substantive information on content moderation and emergency tools available in respect of the South African elections. But all three platforms refused to divulge any details, indicating that South African access to information laws do not apply to them.

“The Legal Resources Centre (LRC) is concerned by the lack of transparency and unwillingness to engage with civil society organisations seeking substantive information around their election plans. Despite TikTok’s formal response, they did subsequently provide the LRC with some of the information requested albeit in very general terms,” said Sherylle Dass, LRC’s Regional Director.

“The refusal by social media companies to provide information on their management of the South African information ecosystem, on the basis that the companies are registered in another jurisdiction is incredibly problematic and undermines democratic processes. It appears impossible to properly hold the companies to account for their acts and omissions relating to the management of the online space during South Africa’s elections,” said Bulanda Nkhowani Campaigns and Partnerships Manager for Africa at Digital Action, convenor of the Global Coalition for Tech Justice.

Social media companies’ failures to prioritise platform guardrails in global majority countries have led to the amplification of content inciting violence and spreading disinformation, often with catastrophic consequences for the most vulnerable members of society. In Brazil, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Tunisia and South Africa, among others, platforms’ failures to stamp out harmful content have translated to real-world violence – including attempts to undermine democracy – and even deaths. Companies like Meta, TikTok, Google and X (formerly Twitter) have known about the grave impacts of their failures to act for years and can’t claim ignorance – they have a responsibility to keep people and elections safe.

“This includes averting any amplification of violent inciting content pre, during and post-ballot, alongside increased public transparency in South Africa, including responding to

⁷⁵<https://sanef.org.za/sanef-is-disappointed-at-being-ghosted-by-some-big-tech-companies-and-parliament/>

⁷⁶<https://sanef.org.za/sanef-is-disappointed-at-being-ghosted-by-some-big-tech-companies-and-parliament/>

institutional and civil society requests for information regarding the management of the country's information ecosystem," Digital Action's Nkhowani added.