# SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT LEADERS ON TWITTER 2022

DECODE COMMUNICATIONS

#GovCommsSocial

**The 3rd annual South African Government Leaders on Twitter Report is a benchmark tool with the purpose of reflecting on the presence and activity of cabinet members and their spokespeople on the microblogging app.**

Although the report is largely quantitative – it highlights some qualitative findings, and serves as a guide for government leaders and their spokespeople to improve citizen engagement.

**The 2022 South African Government Leaders on Twitter Report is compiled by #GovCommsSocial.**

#GovCommsSocial – an initiative of Decode Communications – is a **knowledge sharing** platform aimed at guiding government and public sector communicators, and social media professionals through the complexity and opportunities that come with using social media for citizen engagement.

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# DEDICATED TO LUZUKO SABELO KOTI

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This report is dedicated to the late Luzuko Sabelo Koti – former journalist, government communicator, spokesperson for the Nelson Mandela Foundation and Business Manager of SABC's Channel Africa – who passed away on 21 March 2022 after a brief battle with leukaemia.

**Luzuko was an integral part of the conceptualisation and development of this report. He spent many days and hours critiquing and reviewing the outputs from the research data for the previous reports.**

Luzuko was ever so helpful by refining and shaping the report's content and framing of the insights – thanks to his extensive experience in government communications which always came in handy.

Although his absence was deeply felt during the preparation of the 2022 report – Luzuko's spirit of excellence and thoughtfulness continues to inspire all of us at Decode Communications. We shared a common belief that, "When government communicators win, citizens win."

**Long Live the Spirit of Luzuko Sabelo Koti!**
**Long Live!**



# DATA GATHERING

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## 2022 SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT LEADERS ON TWITTER REPORT

- All the information or data (on the presence or lack thereof of the respective government leaders and their spokespeople) used in this report regarding the use of the social platform Twitter, was mainly gathered through monitoring Twitter itself.
- This quantitative part of the report does not look at any qualitative elements such as engagement, professional look and feel, tone, topics of interest, active campaigns, share of voice etc.
- The Twitter data was collated and analysed over a 1-year period (12 December 2021 to 22 December 2022).

# WHY TWITTER?

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**The biggest question is: do government leaders and their spokespeople see Twitter as a nice to have or as an integral part of their outreach and rapid response mechanism?**

Twitter's influence has been elevated by its ability to provide a platform for real-time outrage, consumer activism, social mobilisation by brands and governments.

Although Facebook has the greatest number of users in South Africa, like in many other countries – Twitter is the most news-friendly social media platform. It is by far the place where journalists are most likely to spend their social media energies.

Twitter remains the most influential platform used as a channel for news and prompt information sharing by politicians, government leaders, public representatives, media and communication professionals, journalists, and newsrooms.




jack
@jack
2022 was a house on fire!
152.7K
127.1K
Copy link to Tweet
#GovCommsSocial
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
SCANIA

# 2022 TOP 10 NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

**If 2020 and 2021 were extraordinary years – then 2022 unfolded one of the most explosive ever, with several events that had a profound impact on South Africans, dominating news cycles for months and got many talking for days on end.**

1. The burning and fires around Parliament in Cape Town.
2. The bold and firm assertions by our South African foreign policy on Russia and Ukraine conflict and non-alignment perspective.
3. The release of the State capture (Zondo commission) reports and arrest thereafter of few political and business elites.
4. Coronation of the Zulu King.
5. #PhalaPhala farmgate scandal with President Cyril Ramaphosa's stash of millions of US dollars under the mattress and in couches at his farm.
6. #Krugersdorp gang rape and the Zama Zamas.
7. #EnyobeniTavernTragedy with 21 teenagers that died at a tavern during Youth Month.
8. #KZNFloods one of South Africa's badly managed natural disasters.
9. #RamaphosaAbroad (King Charles Visit, COP27, SAHWARI visit, Biden Visit).
10. #Eskom (debilitating loadshedding under the leadership of CEO Andre de Ruyter).

# LEADERSHIP MATTERS

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# WHY LEADERS?

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**Leadership buy-in into the strategic and tactical use of social media as part of the communication mix is no longer a nice-to-have because digital is no longer a medium, it is a method – a method to create public value.**

government communications
Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) senior managers and government leaders are responsible for key decisions including:

1. Budget allocation for creative campaigns, human resources, infrastructure and equipment.
2. Elevating and centralising the role of social media in planning and execution of service delivery.
3. Institutionalising social media use by government leaders and Ministerial Liaison Officers, government communicators and spokespeople instead of leaving it to individual preference.
4. Prioritising governance, socialising the social media policies and standardising their application.
5. Ensuring compliance to the legal aspects of social media and how it affects the work of professionals.

# GOVERNMENT LEADERS AT CABINET LEKGOTLA



# 10 KEY FACTS ABOUT THE CABINET OF SOUTH AFRICA



1. It is the most senior level of the executive branch of government.
2. It is led by President Cyril Ramaphosa and Deputy President David Mabuza.
3. It is made up of 30 members* – the president, deputy president and 28 ministers.
4. The national government has 28 departments which are led by 28 ministers.
5. The national ministries are divided into 7 clusters.
6. The provincial Executive Councils have a total of 99 members.
7. Each of the 9 provinces are led by a premier and 10 Members of the Executive Councils (MEC).
8. The president, deputy president, premiers, and all ministers and MECs are supported by spokespeople also known as ministerial liaison officers (MLO), advisors and other personnel.
9. The spokespeople are based in the offices of the cabinet members, premiers and MECs, and although they are not heads of communication in the respective departments – both national and provincial – they also speak on behalf of the departments.
10. The CEO of the GCIS is the spokesperson of Cabinet.

*Since former Minister Ayanda Dlodlo left the department of Public Service Administration to join the World Bank Group, she has not been replaced. Minister Thulas Nxesi has been acting since 01 April 2022.

# KEY FINDINGS – NATIONAL CABINET

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**72%** on twitter in 2022 **vs** **67%** on twitter in 2021

1. Unlike in **2021**, all the top **10** most followed accounts of cabinet members and the top **10** most followed national departments in **2022** are verified.
2. On the contrary, none of the **10** most followed accounts of cabinet members' spokespeople are verified.
3. Water and Sanitation Minister, Senzo Mchunu experienced a triple-digit growth and the highest Y-O-Y at **197%**. Unsurprisingly followed by:
    i) Minister of Justice and Correctional Service, Ronald Lamola with **42%**; then surprisingly by
    ii) Deputy President David Mabuza with **23%**
4. Minister of Public Works, Patricia De Lille continues to experience the least growth at **2%**. In **2021** she saw **3%** growth.
5. Among the spokespeople, Defence Ministry's Cornelius Monama experienced the highest Y-O-Y growth at **81%** followed by the Justice and Correctional Ministry's Chrispin Phiri and Presidency's Nonceba Mhlauli with **45%** and **28%** respectively.

# KEY FINDINGS – NATIONAL CABINET

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6. **Gimmicks, controversy and scandal significantly contribute to follower growth, e.g.:**
   (i) President Cyril Ramaphosa did not receive the highest Y-O-Y growth, however he gained **427K** followers,
   (ii) Transport Minister Fikile Mbalula gained **262K** followers.
7. Two cabinet members joined Twitter in **2022**, namely:
   (i) Defence and Military Veterans Minister, Thandi Modise joined in July; and
   (ii) Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga joined in November.
8. The Department of Small Business Development experienced the highest Y-O-Y growth at **42%**.
9. Although the South African Police Service did not receive the highest Y-O-Y growth, it earned **202K** followers compared to the Department of Small Business Development which only earned **8,3K** followers.
10. The Justice and Correctional Services ministry is the only department that has separate Twitter accounts for the Minister, the Ministry and the Department. **The benefit is** – departmental accounts communicate on administrative issues, and the Ministry on policy issues without depending on the government leader or their spokesperson.

# TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – NATIONAL CABINET



**Fikile Mbalula**
@MbalulaFikile
Transport
Followers: **2,8M** (2,6M) **9,96%**



**Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa**
@CyrilRamaphosa
President
Followers: **2,5M** (2,1M) **20,25%**



**Gwede Mantashe**
@GwedeMantashe1
Mineral Resources and Energy
Followers: **512K** (480K) **7,30%**



**Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**
@DlaminiZuma
Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
Followers: **414K** (396K) **6,08%**



**Lindiwe Sisulu**
@LindiweSisuluSA
Tourism
Followers: **264K** (227K) **21,53%**



**Patricia De Lille**
@PatriciaDeLille
Public Works and Infrastructure
Followers: **224K** (221K) **1,59%**



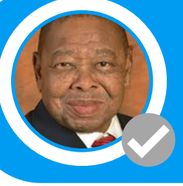
**Ronald Lamola**
@RonaldLamola
Justice and Correctional Services
Followers: **108K** (76,7K) **42,26%**



**Nathi Mthethwa**
@NathiMthethwaSA
Sport, Arts and Culture
Followers: **99,7K** (95K) **5,04%**



**Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams**
@StellaRated
Small Business Development
Followers: **82,1K** (75,1K) **9,96%**



**Dr Blade Nzimande**
@DrBladeNzimande
Higher Education, Science and Innovation
Followers: **59,4K** (53,3K) **11,40%**

*Numbers in brackets represent the followers recorded on 12 December 2021

# TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – NATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

**Presidency**
@PresidencyZA
Followers : **2,3M** (2,05M) **13,26%**

**SAPS**
@SAPoliceService
Followers: **1M** (889K) **22,74%**

**Health**
@HealthZA
Followers: **392K** (346K) **13,33%**

**Basic Education**
@DBE_SA
Followers: **292K** (264K) **10,80%**

**Home Affairs**
@HomeAffairsSA
Followers: **176K** (140K) **26,05%**

**Finance**
@TreasuryRSA
Followers: **150K** (128K) **17,75%**

**Labour & Employment**
@deptoflabour
Followers: **112,7K** (88,8K) **27,02%**

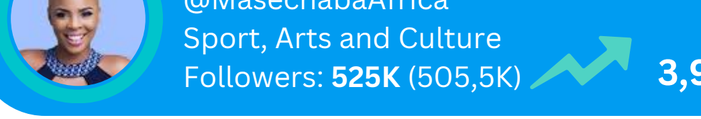
**Trade, Industry and Competition**
@the_dti
Followers: **101K** (93,1) **8,48%**

**DIRCO**
@NationalCoGTA
Followers: **99,1K** (82,5) **20,20%**

**COGTA**
@NationalCoGTA
Followers: **81,5K** (62,5K) **31,09%**

*Numbers in brackets represent the followers recorded on 12 December 2021

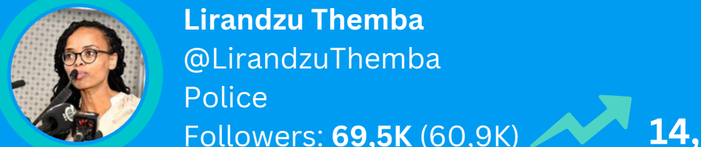
# TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – CABINET MEMBERS' SPOKESPEOPLE



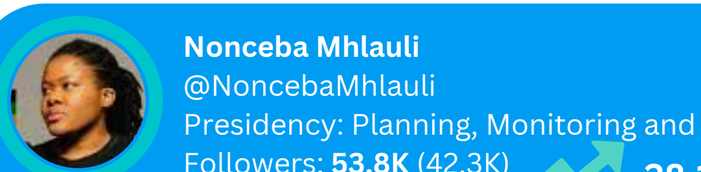
**Masechaba Khumalo**
@MasechabaAfrica
Sport, Arts and Culture
Followers: **525K** (505,5K) **3,94%**



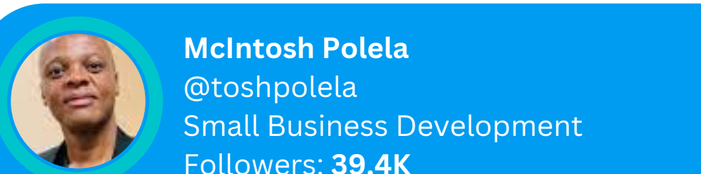
**Lwazilwaphesheya Khoza**
@lwaphesheya_k
Transport
Followers: **138,1K**



**Lirandzu Themba**
@LirandzuThemba
Police
Followers: **69,5K** (60,9K) **14,24%**



**Nonceba Mhlauli**
@NoncebaMhlauli
Presidency: Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
Followers: **53,8K** (42,3K) **28,17%**



**McIntosh Polela**
@toshpolela
Small Business Development
Followers: **39,4K**



**Vincent Magwenya**
@spokespersonRSA
Presidency
Followers: **9,468**



**Steve Motale**
@SteveMotale
Tourism
Followers: **7,910** (7,677) **3,04%**



**Cornelius Tanana Monama**
@cmonama
Defence and Military Veterans
Followers: **7,202** (4,064) **81,14%**



**Chrispin Phiri**
@Chrispin_JPhiri
Justice and Correctional Services
Followers: **6,642** (4,743) **45,03%**



**Hlengiwe Nhlabathi**
@Hlengi
Human Settlements
Followers: **5,235** (5,184) **0,95%**

*Numbers in brackets represent the followers recorded on 12 December 2021

# KEY FINDINGS – PROVINCIAL CABINETS

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**Out of the 9 Premiers and 90 Provincial Members of the Executive Councils (MECs):**

**51%** on twitter in 2022 **vs** **49%** on twitter in 2021

1. Gauteng Premier, Panyaza Lesufi is the most followed provincial leader. He experienced a **22%** Y-O-Y increase gaining **71,5K** followers.
2. Gauteng Health MEC, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko experienced the highest Y-O-Y growth among the provincial leaders at **66%** with an increase of **1,683** followers, followed by:
   (i) Limpopo Health MEC, Dr Phophi Ramathuba at **56%** who gained more than **21K** followers; then by
   (ii) KwaZulu-Natal Cogta MEC, Sihle Zikalala and Gauteng Human Settlements and Infrastructure Development MEC, Lebogang Maile both at **27%** – respectively gained **25,4K** and **13,6K** followers.



# KEY FINDINGS – PROVINCIAL CABINETS

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3. **The premiers of KwaZulu Natal,** Nomusa Dube-Ncube and the **North West Province**, Bushy Maape are the only two heads of provincial cabinets **NOT** on Twitter.
4. Free State Province's Treasury MEC, Gadija Brown experienced the highest Y-O-Y decline of **-66%** – probably due to protected tweets.
5. Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape provinces have the least number of cabinet members on Twitter with only **3** and **2** respectively with active accounts..



# TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – PROVINCIAL CABINET



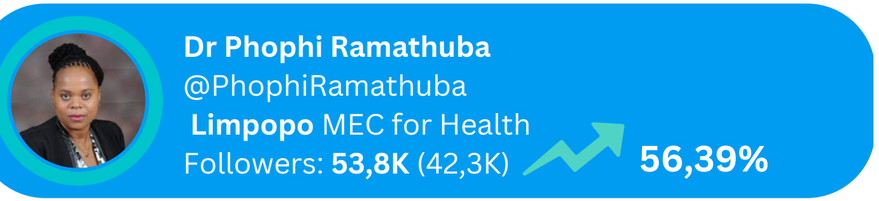
**Panyaza Lesufi**
@Lesufi
**Gauteng** Premier
Followers: **400K** (329,2K) **21,72%**



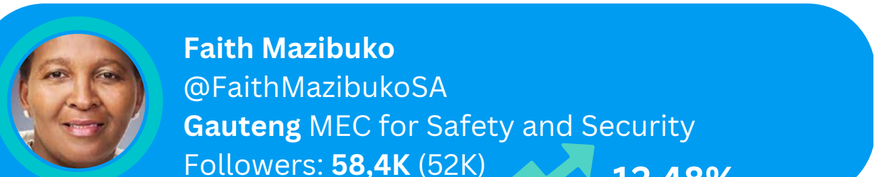
**Sihle Zikalala**
@sziks
**KZN** MEC for Cogta
Followers: **118,8K** (93,7) **27,16%**



**Lebogang Maile**
@LebogangMaile1
**Gauteng** MEC of Human Settlements & Infra Dev
Followers: **65K** (51,5K) **26,50%**



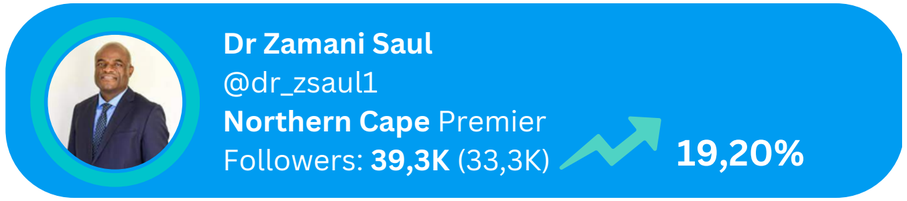
**Dr Phophi Ramathuba**
@PhophiRamathuba
**Limpopo** MEC for Health
Followers: **53,8K** (42,3K) **56,39%**



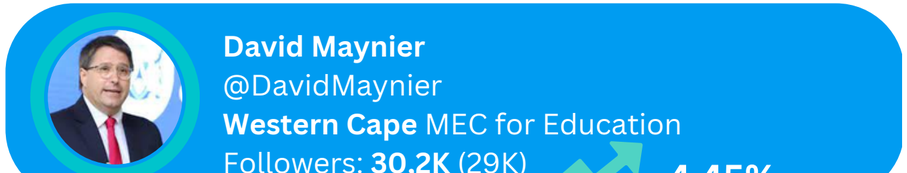
**Faith Mazibuko**
@FaithMazibukoSA
**Gauteng** MEC for Safety and Security
Followers: **58,4K** (52K) **12,48%**



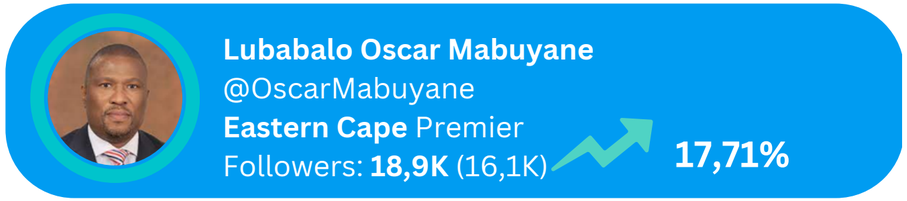
**Alan Winde**
@alanwinde
**Western Cape** Premier
Followers: **52,9K** (47,5K) **26,21%**



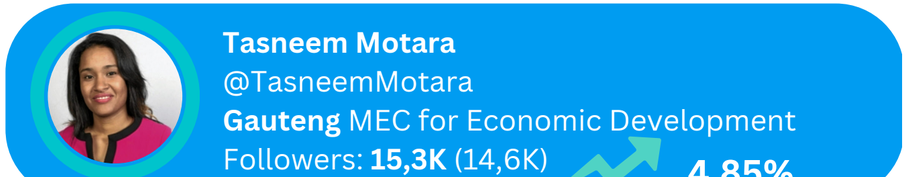
**Dr Zamani Saul**
@dr_zsaul1
**Northern Cape** Premier
Followers: **39,3K** (33,3K) **19,20%**



**David Maynier**
@DavidMaynier
**Western Cape** MEC for Education
Followers: **30,2K** (29K) **4,45%**



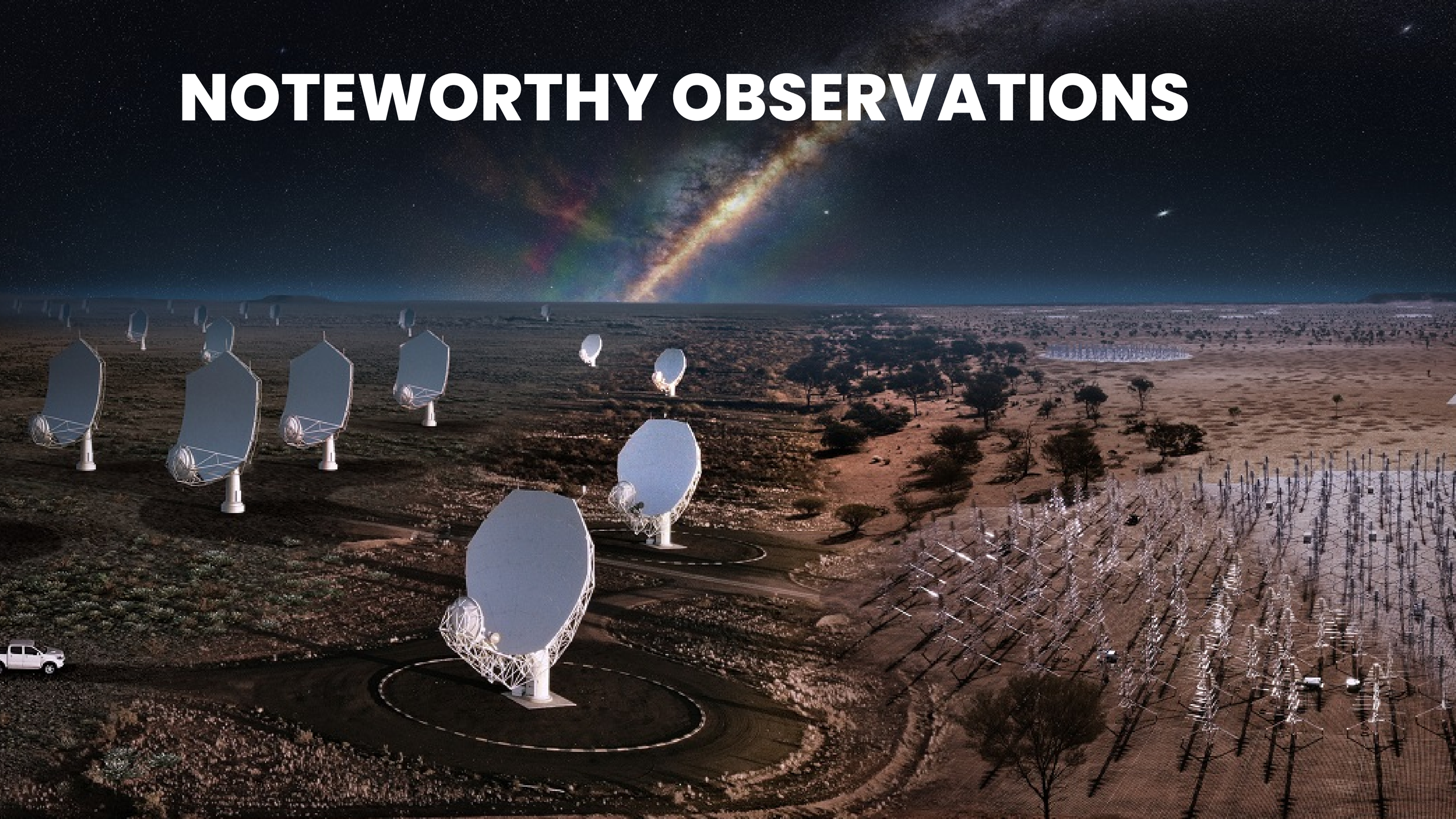
**Lubabalo Oscar Mabuyane**
@OscarMabuyane
**Eastern Cape** Premier
Followers: **18,9K** (16,1K) **17,71%**



**Tasneem Motara**
@TasneemMotara
**Gauteng** MEC for Economic Development
Followers: **15,3K** (14,6K) **4,85%**

*Numbers in brackets represent the followers recorded in on December 2021

# NOTEWORTHY OBSERVATIONS



# KEY TAKE-OUTS

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2022 was a big political year for South Africa's governing party – the African National Congress (ANC). Citizens witnessed many government communication professionals blurring the lines, all in the name of – "*this is my personal account, no one will tell me how to conduct myself.*"

Unfortunately, the lack of tact that comes with this kind of reasoning and conduct is not adequately dealt with by the GCIS's social media policy.

**Conflating the Party and State**

The current spokesperson of the President, Vincent Magwenya, started his job well on the Twitter front by rebranding his handle to reflect his role.

However, it was worrying to observe that even a seasoned communicator like him was emboldened to project the party message in his capacity as a government official at the ANC's National Congress in December 2022.

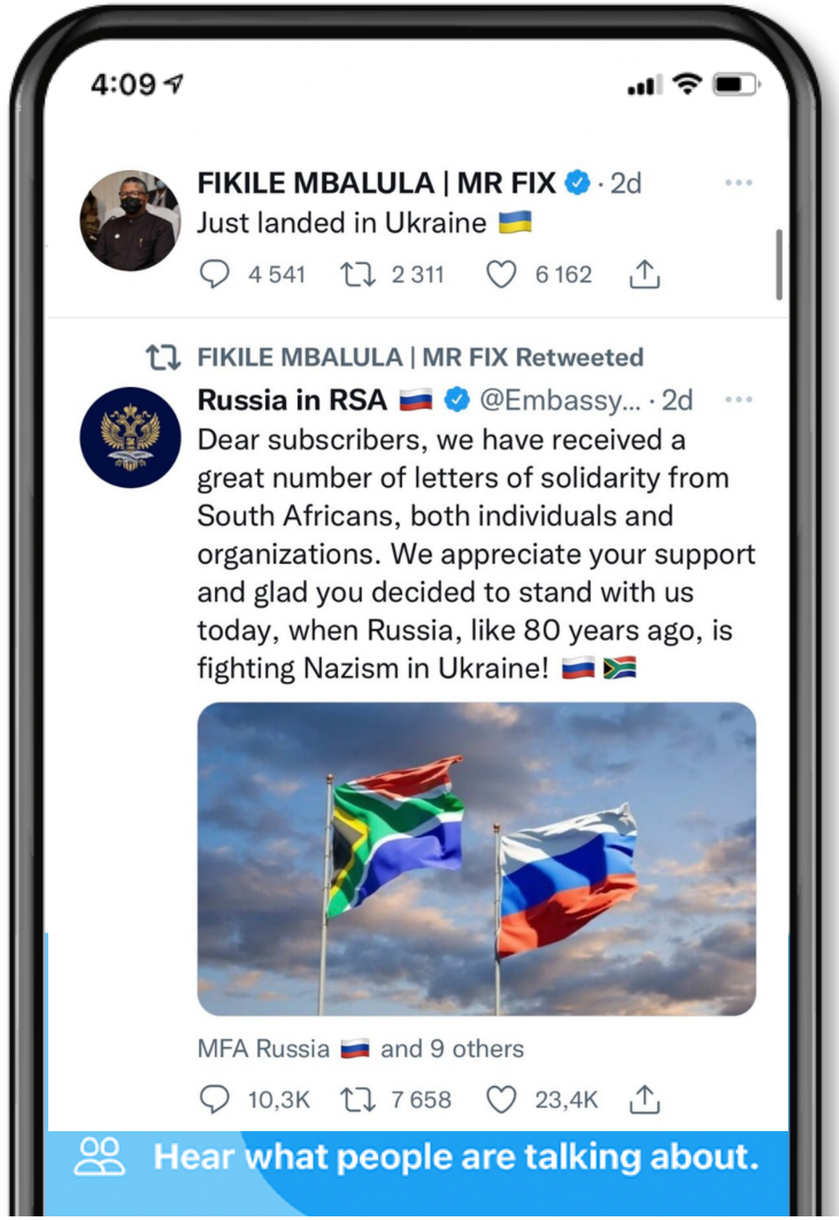
This is one of the many examples of how **government bureaucrats** take advantage of the gap in social media governance and **easily conflate the party and state**.

# KEY TAKE-OUTS

**Leadership fails when politicians become a law unto themselves**

Politicians such as Minister Fikile Mbalula who **often speaks out of turn, making light of serious issues**, continues to present a major challenge for communicators as they constantly have to deal with endless distractions instead of providing public value through engaging citizens on service delivery.

Another **unnecessary distraction** is the grandstanding by political principals like when the Limpopo Health MEC, Dr Phophi Ramathuba failed to show leadership buy using the available platforms to ventilate the issue of immigration. Instead, Dr Ramathuba – a medical professional – chose to record a video that went viral on social media and made news as she was undressing a patient, seemingly, in an effort to make a public and political statement.



# KEY TAKE-OUTS

#GovCommsSocial

## Missed Opportunities

Despite the many available communications opportunities in 2022 such as the 10th anniversary of the National Development Plan (NDP) – **majority of the spokespeople of ministers still do not use their Twitter** presence for policy communication, promotion of messages of their departments and principals.

Unfortunately, the lack of institutionalising social media accounts of government leaders is a missed opportunity with the likes of Dr Joe Phaahla, Minister of Health and Bheki Cele, Minister of Police are not on Twitter. **The missed opportunities include**:

1. **Failure** to use unmediated engagement to educate citizens and the public on a variety of subjects and campaigns.
2. **Failure** to build public trust through open, humanised and responsive communication that encourages two-way conversations.

## On the bright side

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) has been consistently setting a good standard and benchmark of how to optimally utilise social media to demonstrate public value and continuously educate citizens about its mandate.

# KEY TAKE-OUTS

#GovCommsSocial

**Twitter overexposure – a risk for government leaders**

While Facebook has the greatest number of active users in South Africa, **majority of the government leaders tend to prefer Twitter** over other social media platforms. This skew has created dependency on Twitter **instead of a more diversified approach** to connecting and engaging with citizens.

This presents **several risks:** i.e., Presidency, Ministers, Premiers, MECs and Spokespeople with a huge following lend their respective departments the necessary muscle to connect and engage with citizens – however – **when they leave, for one reason or the other, they leave with the audience.**

Also, should the unimaginable happen with Twitter, citizens will be the biggest losers as government leaders who prefer the microblogging app are not learning to prioritise the utility of the other social platforms for citizen engagement.



# HOW TO INSTITUTIONALISE ACCOUNTS OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS – A CASE STUDY

## Did You Know?

- When Twitter suspended Donald Trump permanently from the microblogging app, the @POTUS account which had 33 million followers continued to operate.
- The @POTUS account was first created by former US President Barack Obama back in 2015 and handed over to Trump when he entered the White House.
- Twitter wiped off all the 33 million followers on @POTUS and 26 million on @WhiteHouse when US President-elect Joe Biden was sworn in on 20 January 2021.
- This move by Twitter is not unprecedented. When Obama left office, majority of the top social media platforms wiped off the content from the official accounts, archived and reset the accounts to zero.
- Twitter and Facebook content was archived for access by the public, historians, developers etc. in new accounts with the migrated content – for example: Obama presidency's content can be found on @POTUS44.



# SO, WHAT NOW?

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In 2023, Twitter may be a completely different platform whose purpose and intention may be questioned and questionable due to the many changes the company has experienced since the new owner, Elon Musk took it over in the third quarter of 2022.

However, the market and regulation in various jurisdictions may force Twitter to exist to serve its users and audience instead of it being a fiefdom that fails to offer public value.

Furthermore, if Twitter continues on the current trajectory with reputation and solvency issues – publishers may walk away like the advertisers did and the credibility of the platform will be put to the test.

Therefore, the **digital strategies with a more diversified approach** to connecting and engaging with citizens **should be the focus of the senior management teams in government.** These should include intentional content strategies for Facebook, TikTok, YouTube etc.



# CONCLUSION

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Although the **South African government is always behind the digital curve** – in order to continue building trust and confidence with citizens in a post-Covid-19 world – **and, to achieve the objectives of the Open Government Partnership of which South Africa is a founding member of** – government communication machinery must prioritise digital agility with a focus on the following 5 areas:

1. **Leadership**
2. **Skills and Capacity**
3. **Digital Strategy and Culture**
4. **Collaboration, Experimentation, and Innovation**
5. **Investment required to shift the dial in government Twitter engagement**



# ABOUT GOVCOMMSSOCIAL

#GovCommsSocial

#GovCommsSocial – an initiative of Decode Communications – is a platform that supports public sector social media professionals and government communicators by:

- Facilitating **TRAINING,**
- Hosting **EVENTS** and
- Organising a **COMMUNITY** of digital marketers across Africa.

**Our mission is to connect government communicators, public sector digital marketers and social media professionals with their peers, representatives from the major social networks for education and networking, and the private sector companies that can assist them through case studies and best practices.**

We offer training using established social media and digital marketing best practices from the experts through:

- Face to face and Online workshops
- Keynote addresses
- Coaching internal teams

**We also provide social media crisis management support during disasters.**

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# ABOUT DECODE

Pan-African Reputation Management agency, head-quartered in Johannesburg.

Founded by Lorato Tshenkeng – Mail & Guardian Top 200 recognised communication strategist.

With our proven African experience – we help brands understand patterns of communication to tap into the psyche of their audiences by mapping ebbs and flows in trends.

**Decode – We master every wave**

***"Undoubtedly, technology influences how we live, work and play. This reality demands on public sector communicators to adapt quickly by being on top of trends and best practice of communicating in the digital age."***

**Lorato Tshenkeng,**
CEO of Decode Communications



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AN INITIATIVE OF:

DECODE COMMUNICATIONS

You've read the report. If you need more information or you wish to inquire about the social media training for public sector communicators - contact us on: hello@decode.co.za or lorato@decode.co.za

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