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Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

A fresh upsurge of intimidation and violence against foreign nationals, and particularly African migrants, has once again sown distrust, generated suspicion, and prompted an entire industry of disinformation, with toxic consequences, as was witnessed in both Durban and Soweto recently. This upsurge took place over 8th and 9th October, and the immediate cause was widely thought to be the DHA directive ordering Refugee Centres to give expression to the 7th July Constitutional Court judgement which, in essence, ordered offices to process asylum seeker applications despite applicants' procedural shortcomings. For some anti-migrant groups this provided the trigger for a new surge in activity.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufD3CRalnHE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6trZJOOrJ2Iin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cT78afV3TO0&t=44s

The violence resulted in the torching of about 24 cars in the two cities, and the destruction of foreign-owned shops and of properties allegedly owned by drug dealers. As in similar incidents in the past, these incidents led to the displacement of hundreds of people, including women and children who sought refuge in police stations and at the Diakonia Centre. Most of those displaced had the requisite documentation. This, in part, made a lie of the claim that those operating these groups were not targeting all foreigners, but only those who were undocumented

https://www.facebook.com/reel/1107138222165950

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZpQ7RU3O-I

March and March, the main mover and the most visible force in this field, also courted considerable controversy when it called for a march against the recent spate of femicide in the Ekurhuleni region. The crowds chanted anti-immigrant slogans and a spokesperson made much of a supposed link between GBV and immigration, thus suggesting that the presence of immigrant men was linked to the phenomenon. This is without evidence. Commentators also pointed out that vulnerable migrant women, especially pregnant and sick women, have routinely been barred from access to public hospitals and even chased out of some hospitals.

https://groundup.org.za/article/march-and-march/

Many leaders of political parties cite the ANC and its inability or unwillingness to provide secure borders as the fundamental reason for the waves of xenophobia, broken trust and violence. This has become a dominant argument in pre-election rhetoric.

https://tinyurl.com/2wdvx47e

A further point of interest, given the proximity of the November local elections, was the presence of a number of political parties present on the march. This occasioned discussions around political expediency, courting voters, and giving March and March political credibility.

https://tinyurl.com/2ptrnv47

https://mg.co.za/politics/2026-06-04-mk-party-backs-march-and-march/

The leader of March and March, Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma, has stepped further into the political domain, as she has given her followers certain criteria to look for in choosing a party to vote for in the upcoming elections, and has even suggested which parties meet those standards.

https://tinyurl.com/2bx4e7rb

Also in the run up to the elections, the Democratic Alliance's mayoral candidate for Tshwane joined in an armed raid by a private security firm seeking to root out illegal immigrants. Mr Cilliers Brink has not had any former involvement in this area and thus many conclude that it is an attempt to garner votes, knowing than anti-migrant sentiment is a strong draw for voters. The fact that the group was armed is a red flag and a dangerous precedent for political campaigning in controversial areas.

https://forgood.org.za/da-abandons-liberal-pretence-and-signs-up-with-xenophobia-brigade/

The MK Party's mayoral candidate for Johannesburg was also canvassing on a promise to send all illegal immigrants home. This proves the point that the issue of migrants and refugees is a key issue in this election and is sadly shaping the election environment.

https://www.news24.com/politics/former-da-mayor-turned-mkp-mayoral-candidate-vows-to-send-illegal-immigrants-home-20261008-0516

On a different note, the EFF's mayoral candidate for Johannesburg spoke up for those discriminated against, including foreign nationals, and condemned the way migratory status was weaponised to discriminate against them. She said that it was reminiscent of apartheid and that no person was illegal, and thus all had to be treated humanely.

https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2026-08-14-backlash-after-effs-joburg-mayoral-candidates-migrant-remarks/

No strangers to controversy, the organisation AfriForum entered into a collaborative working relationship with March and March. The working group focuses on shared community concerns including crime-fighting, stronger border security, illegal migration, education (such as mother-tongue and accessible education), legal advocacy, and the rule of law. Some would raise questions around March and March's commitment to the rule of law, given their behaviour at hospitals, schools and in public spaces. Both organisations have an undertone of exclusivity.

https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-08-25-a-not-so-odd-couple-afriforum-and-march-and-march-s-dangerous-alliance/

The political environment, from the activist on the street to the formal election trails and the rhetoric of candidates, seems to be coalescing to provide a most unfortunate culture of exclusion and discrimination that in so many ways comes across as a flash back of our past.

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