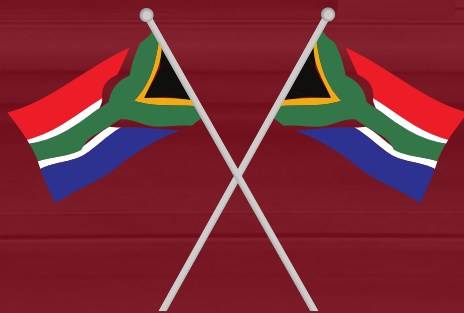


MEDIAMONITORING
AFRICA

SONA 2025

**What Was Said, What Was
Heard, and What Was
Ignored**



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INTRODUCTION

The annual South African State of The Nation Address (SONA) is a nationwide broadcast speech that updates the public on how the country is performing regarding its economy, politics and socio-economic issues. It serves as a key moment where the administration takes accountability while addressing key issues. The SONA serves as a moment where the current presidential administration takes accountability and a moment to give the public something to look forward to.

On the 6th of February 2025, Presidential Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the SONA at the Cape Town City Hall. Although issues like load shedding, mismanaged municipalities and geopolitical matters- such as the loss of South African soldiers in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo- were addressed, this raises important questions about how the public expectations align with government priorities. Were the key issues the South Africans anticipated addressed enough, or did the SONA leave critical concerns unspoken? By analysing social media discussions, the aim is to uncover the themes that resonated the most with the public and those that may have been overlooked in the official speech and to uncover the actual priorities for the public.

METHODOLOGY

Using data from Determ, a social media scraping tool, this report will examine the intersection of public sentiment and the themes highlighted by SONA 2025. This report identifies the topics that resonated most with South Africans by analysing social media mentions, key discussion points, and engagement trends. It also highlights gaps between governmental priorities and public concerns. The data was scraped over a 7-day monitoring period. The keywords that were used were “SONA”, “SONA2025”, “Sona”, “State of the Nation Address”, and “state of the nation address”. Findings from Determ’s data are analysed in this report.

To achieve this, the report includes:

- ▶ The word cloud showcasing the most discussed topics
- ▶ A discussion of the top topics
- ▶ A time series graph tracking mentions over time by source type
- ▶ The different types of sources that were highlighted (social media platforms)
- ▶ An engagement analysis by Author
- ▶ The Top 10 Authors

Themes repeated from the previous SONA

Specific socio-economic issues such as “job creation” and “water sanitation” have persisted across the previous and current SONA. Despite repeated commitments, the public remains divided between hope for change and scepticism due to unfulfilled promises. Words such as “promises” and “plan” reinforce the idea that these issues remain unresolved and continue to dominate the public discourse. Words such as “empty promises” may signal public frustration and suggest that people feel the government has repeatedly promised solutions in the past but has failed to deliver. However, the public is still hopeful for solutions to these unresolved issues, and this is seen in the presence of words like “listen” and “hope”, signalling that while there is still some frustration, the public expects the government to address the issues that they have brought forward.

Public Concerns and Priorities

Public discourse indicates that economic growth and stability are still important issues that the public wants to address. Words such as “*economic growth*”, “*funding*”, “*billion*”, and “*infrastructure*” highlight the continued focus on financial stability and development. However, the word “challenge” frequently suggests that while economic improvement remains a priority, many still see many hurdles ahead. While economic recovery, investment and job creation remain dominant themes in the public conversation, the public is still hesitant to trust the government to deliver on its promises.

Influence of International Affairs

While national affairs were discussed, they did not dominate the conversation as much as local governance issues. Mentions of Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and the gun salute—likely referencing the controversy surrounding Musk’s gesture at Trump’s inauguration, which drew parallels to Nazi symbolism—highlight some engagement with international relations and historical sensitivities. However, the word cloud shows domestic concerns such as the GNU, economic recovery, and political leadership were far more central to public discourse. The prominence of words related to governance, economy, and infrastructure suggests that while global affairs sparked discussion, they did not overshadow local priorities.

Public and Media perceptions

Words like “*blah blah*”, “*nothing*”, and “*empty promises*” indicate a high amount of scepticism among the public. The focus on “*speech*”, “*time*”, and “*listen*” could suggest that people were paying close attention to what was being addressed.

Underrepresented issues

Unlike previously addressed, gender-based violence and climate did not seem to be as prominent. This raises the question of whether these issues received enough attention in the speech or whether political and economic issues were more dominant. Surprisingly, load shedding and the energy crisis were not part of the public discourse, possibly because the government is either making progress in alleviating it or it could indicate public fatigue in discussing it.

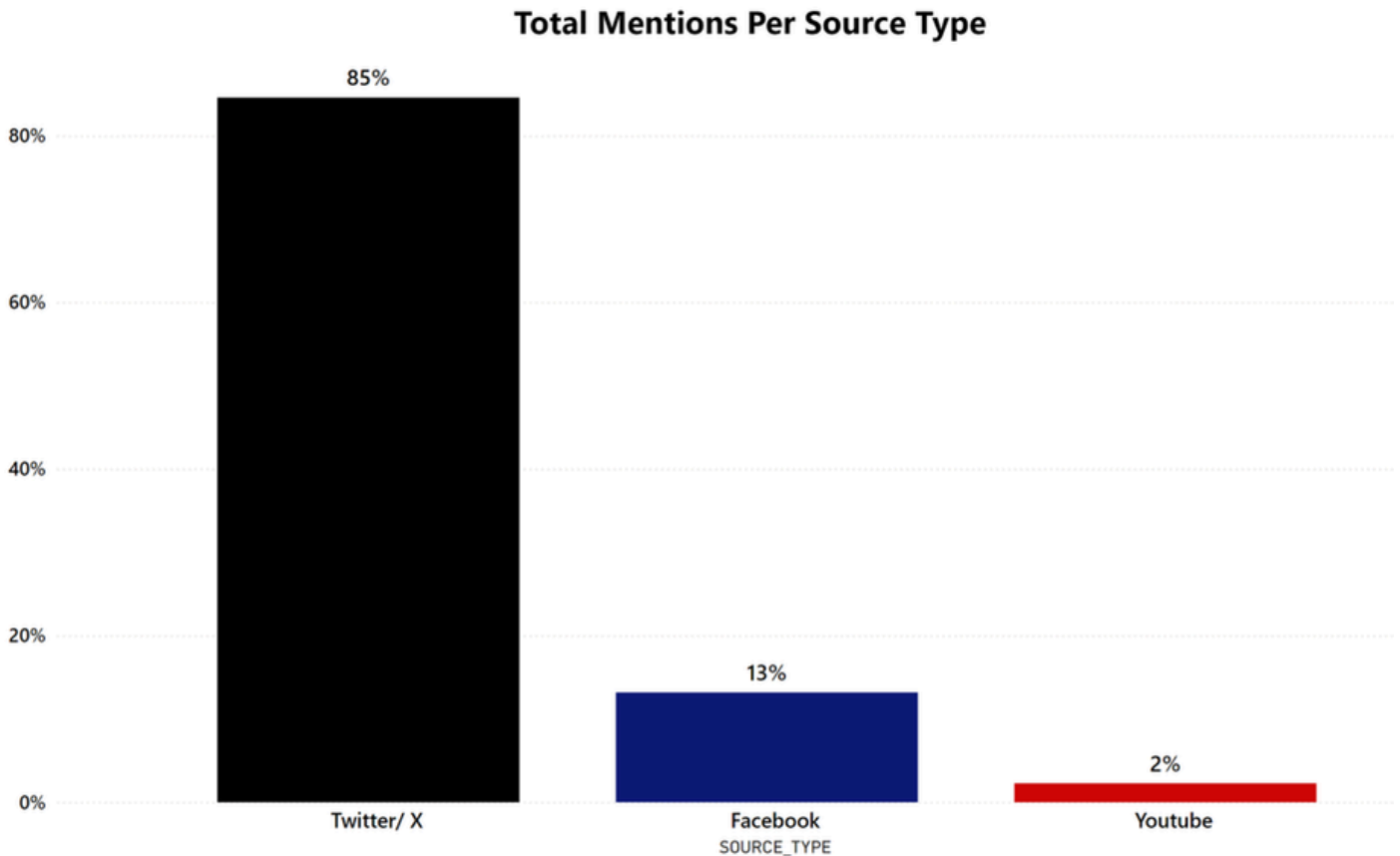


Figure 2: Total Mentions for Source

This bar chart illustrates the distribution of total mentions across three social media platforms: **X (formerly known as Twitter)**, **YouTube** and **Facebook**. Most discussions surrounding the SONA occurred on **X**. This indicates that **X** was the most dominant real-time engagement and discourse platform. With 85% of the discussions being on **X**, it is the leading platform for public discourse, live reactions and commentary. This aligns with **X**'s nature as a fast-paced platform where most South Africans discuss political events and major speeches that affect the public. **Facebook** accounted for 13% of the mentions, indicating that while it was not the most prominent, some discussions probably took place there through longer-form discussions and **Facebook** groups. **YouTube** had the lowest engagement, suggesting it is not a platform for real-time engagement. This is expected since it is primarily a video-based platform where engagement would most likely happen during the live-streaming of the SONA or through the comments on the uploaded video.

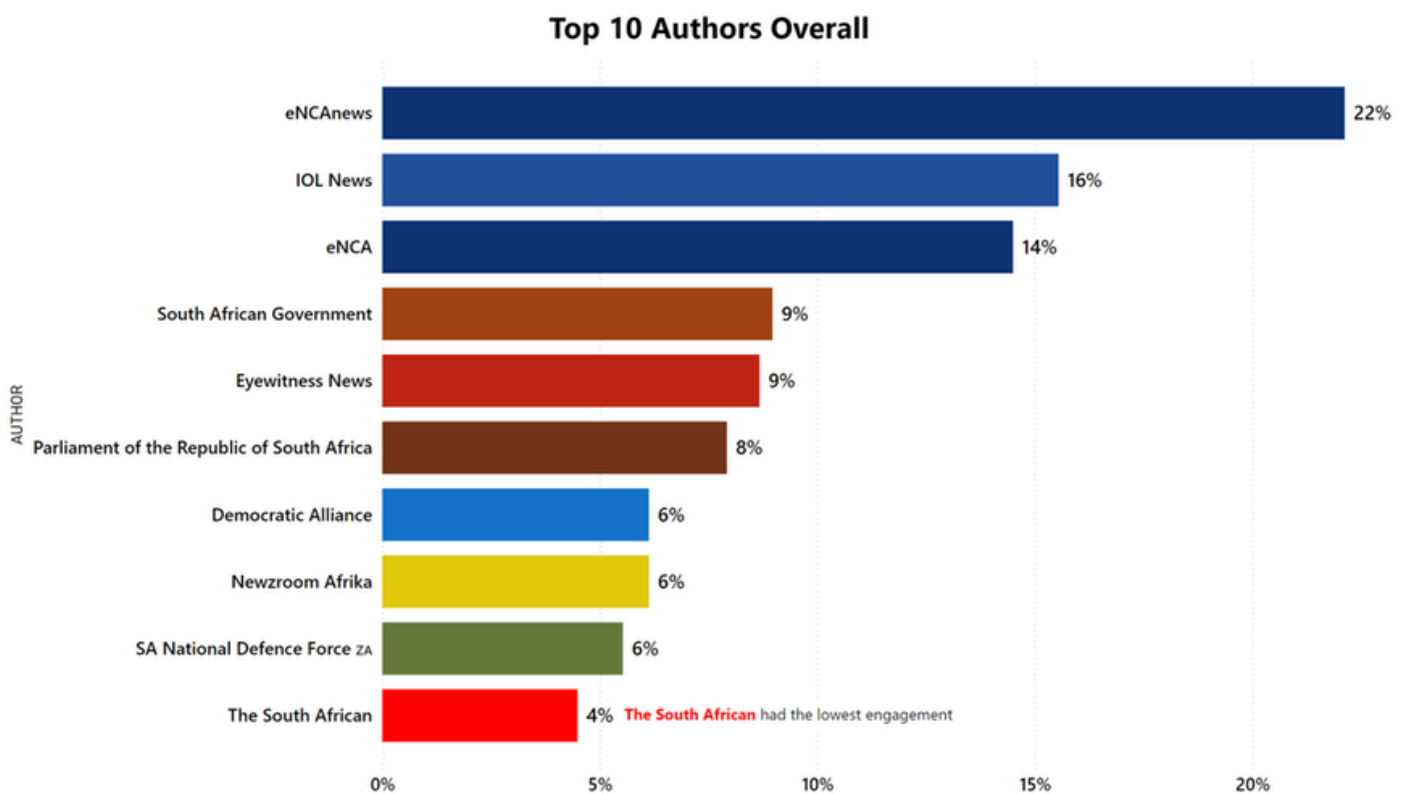


Figure 3: Top 10 Authors

Figure 3 shows the total share of mentions for the Top 10 Authors during the address. Most of the top authors are news publications, with actual users playing little to no role in the people who posted the most. News organisations such as **eNCAnews** (22%), **IOL News** (16%) and **eNCA** (14%) accounted for the largest share of mentions, indicating that they shaped most of the narrative. Official accounts, including **The South African Government** (9%), the **Parliament of SA (8%)** and the South African National Defence Force (5%), played a role in distributing the official SONA messaging. However, their influences are secondary to media organisations, suggesting that media interpretation. Reporting shaped the broader public narrative while official statements were present. The absence of individual voices raises questions on whether the public sentiment was adequately captured or hidden by institutional narratives.

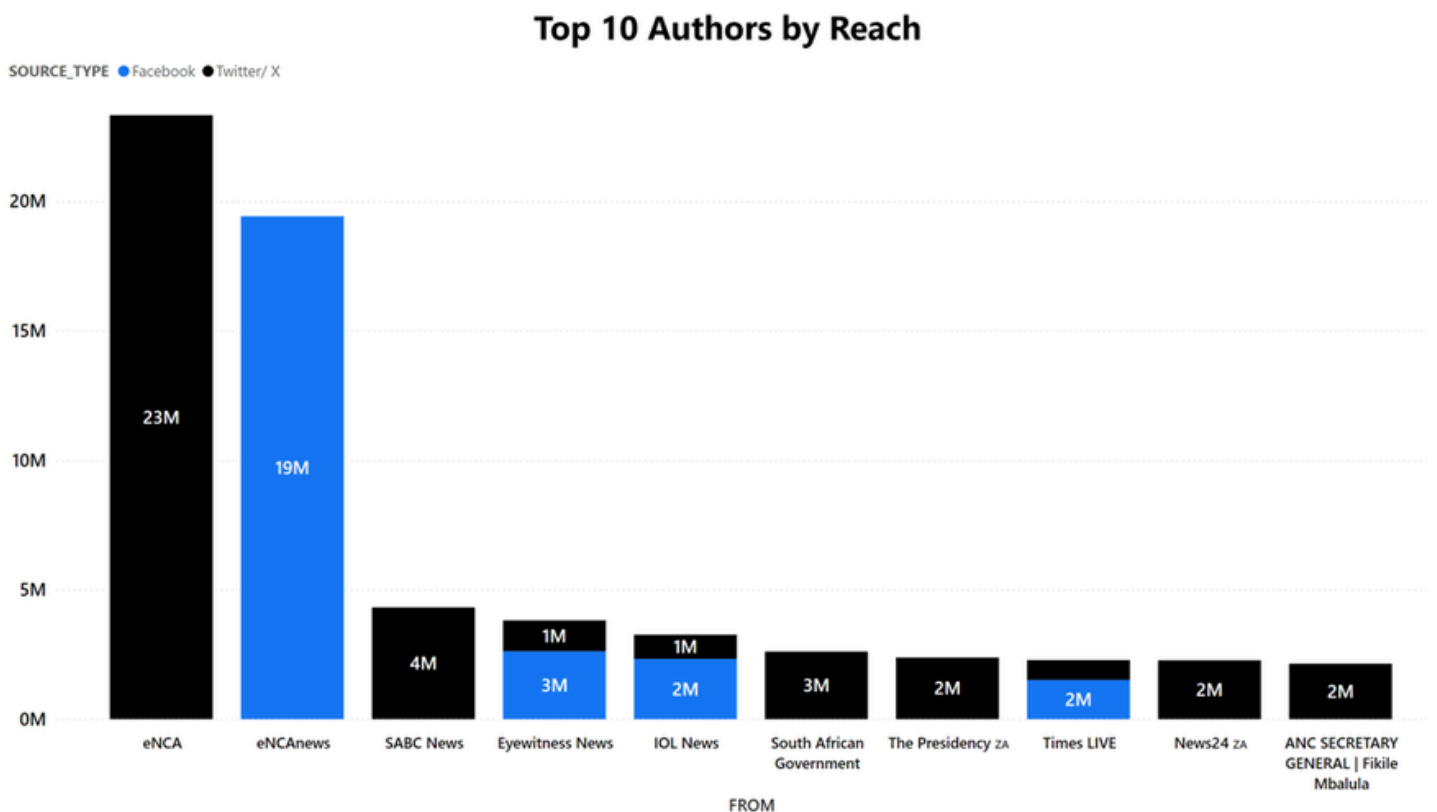


Figure 4: Top 10 Authors

This graph continues the observation that the SONA was shaped primarily by mainstream media outlets, particularly **eNCA**, which had the most expansive reach, collectively reaching 42 million users interacting on their posts. Their dominance may suggest eNCA’s coverage was key in shaping public perceptions of the SONA on X and **Facebook**. Other media outlets, such as **SABC News** (4 million), **Eyewitness News** (4 million combined across both platforms), **IOL News** (3 million) and **Times LIVE** (2 million), further reinforce the central role of traditional journalism in setting the SONA discourse. The distribution suggests that political and news discussions around SONA were more active on X, which is often a platform for real-time engagement. The preference for **X** suggests that more political conversations around SONA were in real-time, fast-paced, and driven by real-time updates than **Facebook**, where conversations may have been in groups/forums or were commentaries and comments in a singular post.

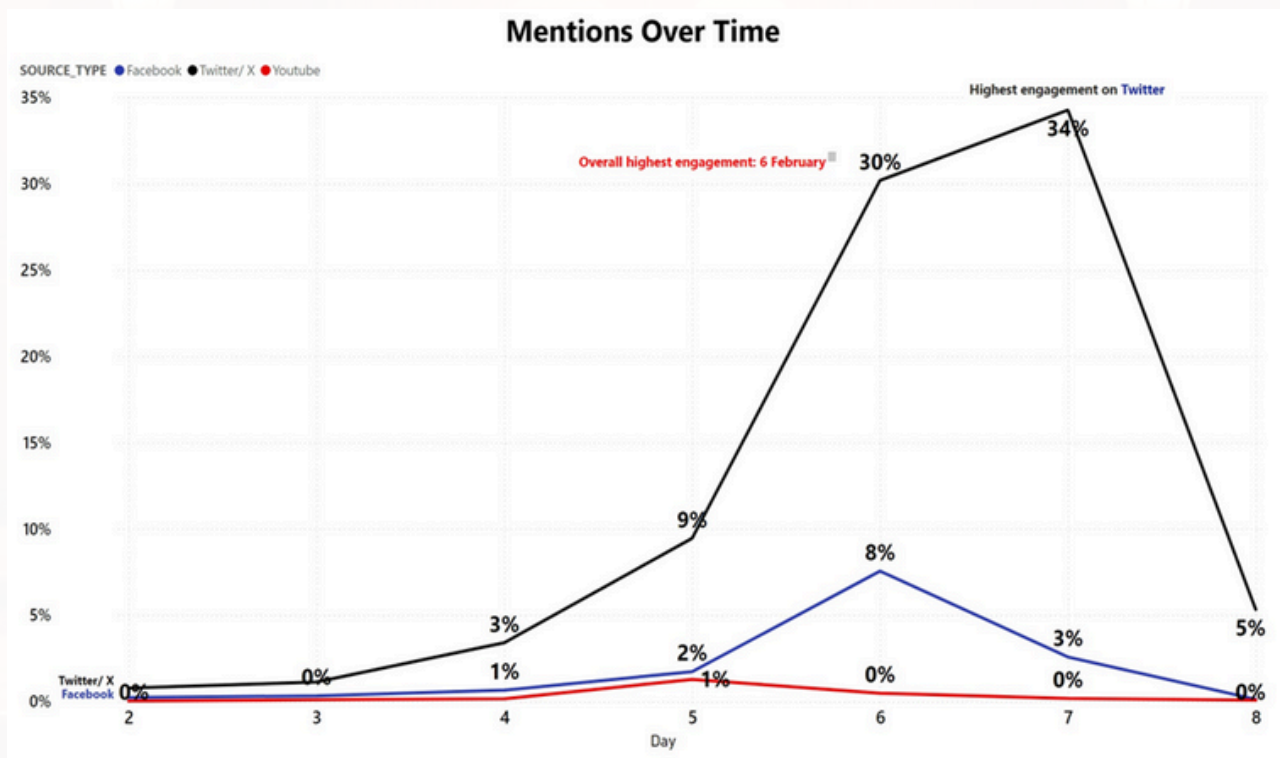


Figure 4: Total Mentions Over Time by Source Type

This graph visualises mentions over time across three platforms previously mentioned: **X** (Black), **Facebook** (Blue) and **YouTube** (Red). The highest engagement was on the 6th of February, the day of the SONA, where **X** accounted for most of the mentions at 30%, showing a steep rise in activity. **X**'s engagement continued to peak on the 7th of February at 34%, marking the highest engagement level on the platform. **Facebook** saw its highest engagement on February 6th at 8%, while **YouTube** remained consistently low, never exceeding 1%. After February 7th, engagement dropped sharply across all platforms, which could indicate the public loss of interest in the speech



CONCLUSION

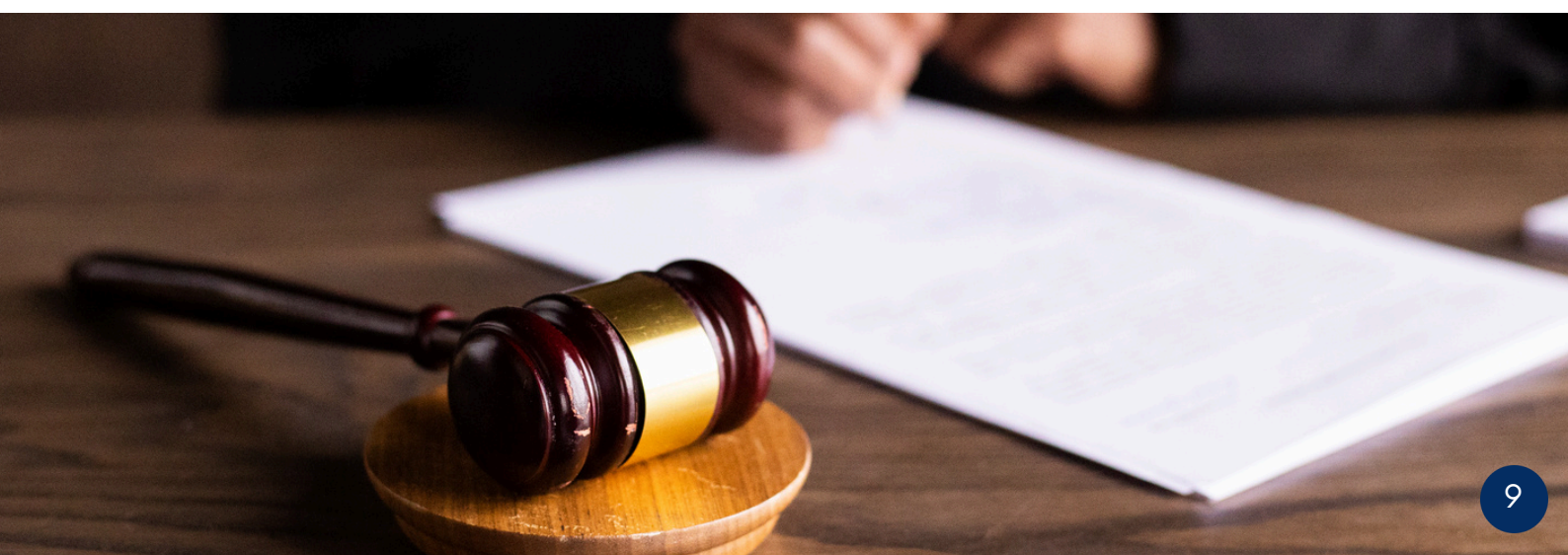
The analysis of the 2025 SONA reveals that while economic concerns (such as “job creation” and “infrastructure”) remained a top priority for the public, the tone of the discourse shifted towards growing scepticism and frustration of unaddressed issues as in the previous years. Phrases like “empty promises” and “challenge” highlighted increasing frustration with the government's perceived inability to deliver tangible results. Despite this, the public also hopes the admin will make changes in the current year.

The introduction of the GNU after the 2024 elections has influenced the SONA 2025 narrative, with the public expressing hope and doubt about the coalition's ability to govern effectively. Political figures like John Steenhuisen and other key leaders significantly shaped the conversation, further driving debates around leadership and governance. Surprisingly, topics such as gender-based violence, climate change and load shedding received less attention than in previous years, raising concerns about whether these critical issues are being sidelined. The mixed public reactions to the government's commitments highlight a gap between promises made and progress. This suggests that the government needs to focus on achieving tangible results, directly addressing citizens' concerns, and ensuring that key issues remain a priority.

Platform engagement revealed that **X** was the main platform for real-time interaction, while **Facebook** and **YouTube** played smaller, more passive roles. This shows that **X** remains central to the fast-paced political conversation, raising questions about how this immediacy influences public debates. Does this shift toward instant discussions mean political narratives are shaped more by quick reactions than in-depth reflection? It highlights **X** as a key platform for public sentiment.

Regarding media influence, the top 10 authors reveal that mainstream media outlets- like eNCAnews, IOL News, and eNCA- dominated the conversation, suggesting that the media, rather than the public, largely framed the SONA narrative. These outlets didn't just provide live updates but also likely shaped public perceptions of the address. The absence of individual voices among the top mentions shows that news outlets and official sources (like the South African Government and Democratic Alliance) were the main drivers of the conversation, limiting the direct influence of ordinary citizens.

This analysis shows that traditional media still shapes public discourse around the SONA. Media outlets generated the highest number of mentions and reached the widest audiences, especially on **X**, the hub for live, real-time discussions. Meanwhile, **Facebook** likely hosted slower, more reflective conversations post-address. However, the lack of public voices in top mentions suggests that public sentiment was filtered through media perspectives, raising concerns about the gap between media narratives and authentic public opinions. Understanding how media, politicians, and the public interact on social media is crucial when analysing how political events like SONA are discussed and perceived.





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