

From Cairo to Cape Town: How African Twitter Shapes the Global Palestine-Israel Narrative

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Abstract

African Twitter users are active shapers of the Palestine-Israel conversation but their contribution remains relatively understudied. Using 132.5K geo-located tweets from 2020 to 2023 and 451-term list of keywords in 33 languages, we identify three patterns in this context: (1) broad participation (Egypt supplies 43% of posts, yet Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana contribute more than a third); (2) multilingual predominantly pro-Palestine amplification across Arabic, English, French, Swahili and other tongues, with 8% of tweets left “undetermined” by Twitter’s language detector; and (3) a humanitarian framing that centers civilian harm through hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #PalestineLivesMatter. We outline design implications for language-agnostic interfaces, low-friction source verification and cross-movement recommendation tools that foreground African epistemologies in global civic-tech systems.

Keywords: Information Retrieval, Twitter, International Affairs, Transnational Solidarity, Africa, Palestine, Israel

1. Introduction

Despite the vibrancy of African digital activism, prior work on it focuses on movements such as #EndSARS or climate justice and seldom analyses its engagement with the long-lasting volatile case of Palestine (Shawar et al., 2025). We pursue two guiding questions to address this gap: (1) To what extent do Africans interact with the Palestine-Israel conflict on Twitter (now X)? (2) What are the main patterns characterizing those interactions?

We show that Africans display a predominantly pro-Palestinian stance, propelled by a major spike in May 2021 during the Sheikh Jarrah controversy (Elmimouni et al., 2025). More interestingly, interactions are **not** confined to Arabic-speaking nations or those with Muslim majority; instead, users in Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana contribute significant volumes. Our findings highlight an understudied form of intersectional activism by mapping how Africans mobilize around a conflict outside the continent.

2. Related Work

African solidarity with Palestine typically exceeds official governmental stances and it highlights the widespread condemnation of Israeli actions in Gaza (Diallo, 2024). However, there is limited scholarly consideration of the specific ways African digital communities engage with these global issues. Transnational digital activism significantly influences global discourse, especially concerning the Palestine-Israel conflict, through platforms like Twitter that facilitate rapid information dissemination and international solidarity (Daniele and Kelsch,

2025; Shatara and Saleh, 2024).

Previous studies of digital activism often focus on Euro-American contexts, often overlooking the distinctive patterns emerging from Africa. African activists uniquely connect global movements like #BlackLivesMatter with local contexts of systemic racism, colonial legacies and social injustices. Notably, African organizations such as the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) have leveraged digital platforms to integrate environmental and human rights activism effectively (Mwenda and Bond, 2020; Beer and Mwenda, 2016). Movements such as #ClimateStrike and #GreenNewDeal have seen participation from African youth and organizations, highlighting the intersection of environmental issues with social and economic justice.

Recent work specifically on Palestine-related activism on social media has highlighted claims of censorship (Magdy et al., 2025; Abokhodair et al., 2024; Elmimouni et al., 2024; Bany Mohammed et al., 2025). They critically analyze how content moderation influences Palestinian activism online, revealing biases and the complexities of digital resistance. This case study extends existing scholarship on intersectional hashtag activism (Jackson et al., 2020) by centering African actors and identifying distinctive African narratives and digital engagement patterns. We aim to offer practical insights into the unique modalities of African transnational activism.

Palestine	Palestinian/s	Gaza	West bank	Quds	Aqsa
Hamas	Fatah	Sinwar	Ismail Haniyeh	Yasser Arafat	
Israel	Israeli/s	Tel Aviv	Jerusalem	Likud	
Israel Defense Forces	IDF	Netanyahu	Ariel Sharon	Naftali Bennett	

Table 1: Keywords used for retrieving tweets from the Twitter archive on Palestine–Israel. Only English version is shown in Table; however, we included the translation of those keywords in all languages supported by Twitter (now \mathbb{X}).

3. Methods

3.1. Data Collection

In this study, we present a quantitative analysis of the presence of posts discussing the Palestine/Israel conflict on \mathbb{X} (formerly Twitter) over three years between January 2020 and January 2023. We queried the Twitter Stream Grab¹, which is a rich resource that has been used in multiple earlier works (Wilson et al., 2020; Fawzi et al., 2025). To capture discourse from both sides of the conflict while minimizing lexical bias, we compiled a symmetric keyword list covering (i) core place names (e.g., *Israel, Palestine, Gaza, Tel-Aviv*), (ii) leading institutions (*IDF, Hamas*), and (iii) prominent political figures (*Netanyahu, Sinwar*) (See Table 1 for the full list). Each term was translated into 33 languages, yielding 451 unique query tokens. The translations were manually validated. Following a pilot run, we observed a volume of irrelevant tweets that were retrieved due to keywords having a different meaning like *Jerusalema* (a famous song) and *@victor_israel* (an influencer) so, we removed them and reformed the translations that might have a double meaning (e.g. Translating *Fatah* to *حركة فتح* instead of just *فتح*).

To focus our study exclusively on African countries, we examined the user-provided location field for each tweet that matched our search keywords. Although the majority of users on \mathbb{X} leave the location field blank/invalid (Fawzi, 2022; Fawzi and Magdy, 2024; Fawzi et al., 2026), we matched the valid entries against a comprehensive list of African countries and capitals, accounting for all languages supported by Twitter (\mathbb{X}). Only tweets from users whose locations matched an African country were included in our analysis. We acknowledge that this approach may exclude tweets originating from Africa if the user did not explicitly mention an African location in their profile. However, due to the lack of a reliable alternative, this method was the most practical option for geographic filtering.

¹The Twitter Stream Grab <https://archive.org/details/twitterstream>

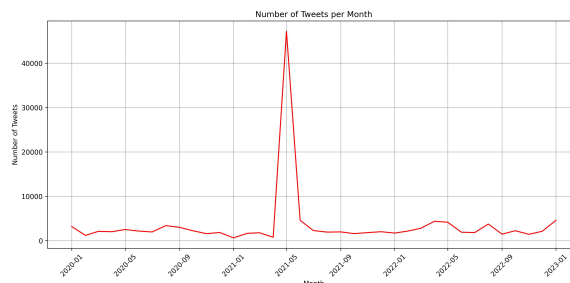


Figure 1: The distribution of tweets over the timeline under study.

3.2. Data Analysis

For the collected tweets from Africa, we first visualize their time distribution, language distribution, and geographical distribution. Then we identify the overall top hashtags and accounts involved either as sources for retweets or as targets for arguments and discussions. Finally, we dive into the top hashtags and accounts per country to mitigate any potential bias originating from the most active countries.

Limitations: Our data source ends in January 2023 due to the restriction of Twitter API; Hence, we do not capture the massive 2023 Gaza War spike. Secondly, geo-location via profile strings likely misses some rural and pseudonymous users. In addition, sentiment inference from hashtags may miss sarcasm or code-switching nuances. These limitations call for mixed-method follow-ups (e.g., interviews with community translators or ethnographies) to triangulate platform-level metrics with live experiences.

4. Findings

4.1. Time, Language, and Location

Out of the 7.5M tweets that matched our keywords during this period of time, 132.5K tweets were located in Africa. Figure 1 shows the number of tweets collected by month over the studied period where there is a large spike in the tweets in May 2021. This coincides with the clashes in East Jerusalem after the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Israeli settlers had the right to evict Palestinian families from their homes in the neighborhoods of

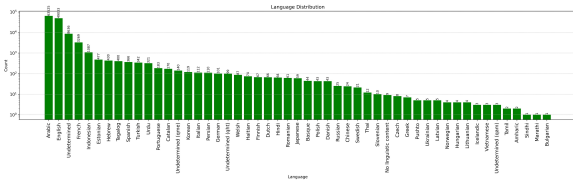


Figure 2: The distribution of languages within the tweets under study.

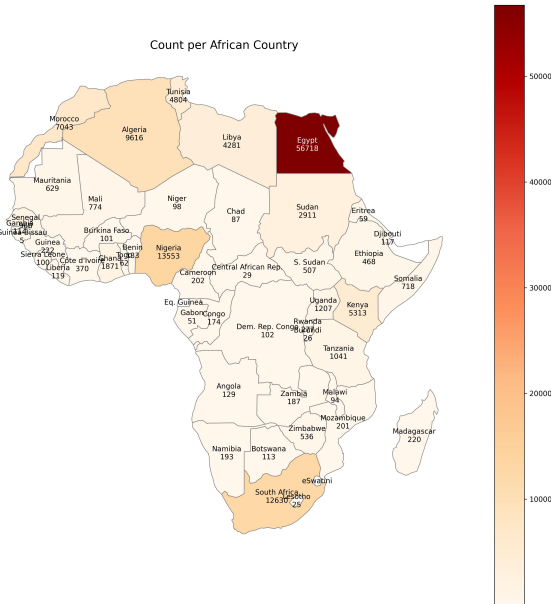


Figure 3: The distribution of tweets on Africa's map.

Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. The conflict triggered a war after Hamas, the Palestinian governing body in Gaza, fired rockets into Israel. This led to the massacre of hundreds of civilians and a digital outrage (Magdy et al., 2025).

Figure 2 shows the language distribution of the tweets collected where Arabic was the top language used in the tweets followed by English and French. Large portion of the tweets were written in a language that was undetermined by Twitter, which might highlight the low support of Twitter (X) to some of the African languages. Having Arabic as the top language is not surprising given the presence of the north African Arab countries who are known for their large support to the Palestinian cause (AlMasri, 2021).

To better understand the location of the tweets, the map in Figure 3 shows the number of tweets per country. It was interesting to see the tweets from Egypt account for around 43% of the total number of tweets located in Africa on the topic, with a total of 56.7K tweets. This is followed by Nigeria (13.6K), South Africa (12.6K), Algeria (9.6K), Morocco (7K). It was interesting to see that the three most active countries who tweeted on the topic have two non-Arab countries.



Figure 4: The most frequent hashtags inside African tweets on the topic.



Figure 5: The top accounts for which Africans retweet on the topic.



Figure 6: The most frequently mentioned accounts inside African tweets on the topic.

4.2. Top hashtags

Next, we try to analyze the general stance of the African tweets using the hashtags used. Figure 4 shows the tag-cloud of the top hashtags found in the tweets. We find that almost all the hashtags show a supportive stance towards the Palestinians, with almost no presence of any hashtags showing clear support to Israel.

The most trending sets of hashtags include #GazaUnderAttack, which is used to show the destruction and the casualties that occur in Gaza as a result of the conflict, as well as #FreePalestine, which is a call to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories. The hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah is specifically related to what happened in May 2021 in the West Bank as explained earlier. Most of those hashtags have their corresponding Arabic ones trending as well. In addition, we also spot #القدس and #المسجدالأقصى in Arabic, which refer to the city of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque. These locations have a very unique religious value for Muslims and usually used by Arabs in their tweets supporting Palestine. Interestingly, we also spot #PalestinianLivesMatter which is inspired by #BlackLivesMatter, which shows an broader African vision that extends beyond local borders.

4.3. Top retweeted accounts

Figure 5 shows the word cloud for the most retweeted accounts in our data collection which can be perceived as the main source of information about the topic used by Africans. We categorize the accounts into the following categories:

- **Non-official news sources:** The most retweeted accounts include alternative news sources, such as Palestinian accounts (*MyPalestine0*, *OnlinePalEng*, *Time-sofgaza*, *ShehabAgency*) and Egyptian accounts (*RassdNewsN*, *ScreenMix*).
- **Journalists and activists:** This group includes the most retweeted account, *MuhammadSmiry*, an independent journalist in Gaza. Other notable figures are *TurkiShalhoub*, British activist Sarah Wilkinson (*swilkinsonbc*), African pro-Palestine accounts like *Africa4Pal*, and broader ones such as *Saudis for Aqsa* (*Saudis2018*).
- **Official news sources:** Few official outlets appear among the top retweeted. Notable exceptions include Al Jazeera (Arabic and English), consistent with (Darwish, 2022), and *ArabyTV*.

4.4. Most mentioned accounts

Similarly, Figure 6 shows the cloud for the most mentioned accounts either for tagging or replying and demonstrate the entities with which Africans argue and interact when addressing the topic. We identify the following unique categories among them:

- **Israeli Accounts:** These include official governmental accounts like *IDF* (Israel Defense Forces), *AvichayAdraee* (The head of the IDF's Arab media division), *netenyahu*, *IsraelArabic* (The official account for the state of Israel posting in Arabic), and *EdyCohen* (A famous Israeli journalist of Lebanese origin).
- **News sources:** Many of the accounts in this category are similar to the retweets network introduced earlier in addition to *YouTube*, which is mentioned automatically when a YouTube video is shared on X.
- **International politicians & Public Figures:** Multiple politicians are involved in the mentions/replies like *JoeBiden*, *realDonaldTrump*, *BorisJohnson*, *Ras Cyril Ramaphosa* (The current president of South Africa), and *MBuhari* (The former president of Nigeria). There are also mentions for famous footballers and sports commentators such as *Mahrez22*, *MoSalah*, and *derradjihafid*.

4.5. Analysis by country

Since the above statistics reflect trends across the entire continent, they may be skewed toward the

most active countries, particularly Egypt, which accounts for the highest tweet volume. To provide a more balanced view, Table 2 presents the top hashtags and most retweeted/mentioned accounts for each of the 12 most active African countries (the ones having more than 1K tweets), offering a clearer picture of the trending discourse within each country.

Notably, across all these countries, the trending hashtags overwhelmingly express support for Palestine, with *#FreePalestine* and/or *#GazaUnderAttack* appearing prominently in nearly every case. Greater variation is observed, however, in the most retweeted and mentioned accounts across countries. For the most retweeted, *AJEnglish* appears in many of the non-Arab African countries. Still many alternative news accounts appear in the top retweeted accounts for each country. *Muhammad Smiry*, the independent Gazan journalist and the British activists Sarah Wilkinson are among the top three accounts retweeted in South Africa. For the most mentioned accounts, it is notable that *EdyCohen* appears as the most mentioned account in nearly all Arab countries. This can be attributed to the fact that this pro-Israeli account tweets exclusively in Arabic.

5. Discussion

Our findings show African Twitter users are rebroadcasting the Gaza narrative through an African lens, translating it into at least 15 languages, and tying it to region-specific moral vocabularies. While earlier work often frames African digital activism around *#EndSARS* or climate justice, we reveal a centripetal form of activism in which Africans mobilize for a cause beyond the continent's borders without abandoning local idioms of resistance.

5.1. Linguistic Implications

Spikes in *und* (undetermined) language codes signal that platform language detection pipelines ignore many African tongues. Social media users need supporting language-agnostic hashtag discovery and search as well as community-driven lexicon updates.

African users rely on a handful of transnational news outlets for legitimacy. Civic-tech tools should lower the friction of attaching credible sources. (e.g. by recommending regional fact-checking sources or embedding citation widgets) so that solidarity threads remain trustworthy even when global outlets are throttled.

Tweets	Country	Top Hashtags	Top Retweeted	Most Mentioned
56,718	Egypt	#GazaUnderAttack, غزّة#, فلسطين#	MyPalestine0, Rassd-NewsN, ScreenMix	EdyCohen, MyPalestine0, RassdNewsN
13,553	Nigeria	#Palestine, #FreePalestine, #Israel	AJEnglish, Timesofgaza, IDF	MBuhari, stylebender, wizkidayo
12,630	South Africa	#FreePalestine, #Palestine, #Gaza	MuhammadSmiry, OnlinePalEng, swilkinsonbc	palinfoen, AJEnglish, CyrilRamaphosa
9,616	Algeria	فلسطين#, #GazaUnderAttack, غزّة#	MyPalestine0, AJArabic, Saudis2018	EdyCohen, derradjihafid, YouTube
7,043	Morocco	فلسطين#, غزّة#, القدس#	PalinfoAr, AIMayadeen-News, salehelnaami	EdyCohen, jamalrayyan, AJArabic
5,313	Kenya	#FreePalestine, #Israel, #NowPlaying	AJEnglish, swilkinsonbc, OnlinePalEng	Israel, RailaOdinga, Arsenal
4,804	Tunisia	#GazaUnderAttack, #FreePalestine, #SaveSheikhJarrah	AlarabyTV, MyPalestine0, AJArabic,	AlarabyTV, medza-kraoui80, AJArabic
4,281	Libya	#GazaUnderAttack, فلسطين#, غزّة#	Hala_almajbry, MyPalestine0, TurkiShalhoub	EdyCohen, ScreenMix, IsraelArabic
2,911	Sudan	السودان#, فلسطين#, #GazaUnderAttack	MyPalestine0, ScreenMix, AJArabic	EdyCohen, mag-zoubali2345, skynewsarabia
1,871	Ghana	#Israel, #Palestine, #Gaza	FabrizioRomano, AJEnglish, spectatorindex	garyalsmith, HarryFiscianGH](Lyric, ELgh_
1,207	Uganda	#Israel, #Palestine, #FreePalestine	AJEnglish, mkainerugaba, OnlinePalEng	AJEnglish, mkainerugaba, Israel
1,041	Tanzania	#Palestine, #Gaza, #Israeli	OnlinePalEng, Timesofgaza, Kuffiyateam	TWennesland, antonioguterres, SimbaSC-Tanzania

Table 2: Top hashtags, retweeted and mentioned accounts for the top 12 countries (with over 1000 tweets) who discussed the Palestine/Israel conflict

6. Future work & Conclusion

This work can be extended by scraping emergent alternative platforms that are popular in Africa (e.g., Threads, Nairaland forums, WhatsApp channels) and testing algorithms that surface underrepresented languages in real time. Other continents can also be analyzed and compared through the same source. Topic modeling, stance detection, and sentiment analysis shall provide more insights about the content.

Our analysis shows how Africans engage with the Palestine-Israel conflict through multilingual solidarity-driven practices and highlights some take-aways that can enable more equitable participation in global social debates.

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