

# UNDERSTANDING XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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**Abstract:** South Africa is seen as an intolerant country when it comes to black immigrants of African origin. The existing literature agrees with this narrative on the hostility and resentment faced by immigrants, but there is limited empirical data on the effectiveness of government interventions. This study, therefore, systematically reviews the literature on the common themes that define xenophobia in South Africa. It examines the literature on the impact of xenophobic attacks on victims and the effectiveness of government response strategies. The study's findings demonstrate that peer pressure, failure to provide the promised basic needs to the citizens, and denialism by the government all contribute to the xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The government's ineffective interventions and scapegoating are seen as exacerbating the impact of attacks against immigrants.

**Keywords:** *government response strategies, immigrants, socio-economic inequality, xenophobic attacks*

## Introduction

Immigrants, the international community and civil society groups see xenophobia and xenophobic attacks against immigrants as a deep-seated social evil (Dauda, Sakariyau and Ameen 2018) while host citizens see such attacks as necessary for their socio-political and economic freedom and emancipation (Hewitt, Masikane and Toendepi 2020). Mantzaris and Ngcamu (2019) state that xenophobia is also caused by competition among immigrants who use local gangs to fight their competitors in South Africa. Xenophobia is associated with criminality that arises when perpetrators are fighting to increase their power within communities. The

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narrative of hatred against immigrants has been perpetuated by the popular media and politicians close to election periods, scapegoating them for the government's failure to deal with rampant social ills and the economic hardships faced by locals (Ngcamu and Mantzaris 2023). Huge inequality, weak economy and unethical/corrupt politicians in South Africa have influenced locals, leading them to believe that immigrants are involved in illegal businesses and criminal activities, are job stealers and are putting strain on government services (Samanga 2019). Regrettably, the country's security agencies, including the police force and Home Affairs officials, show little or no compassion for the victims of xenophobic attacks that have resulted from such unverified perceptions (Moses 2018). Rabotata et al. (2021) claim that the unprecedented violent attacks of 2008 and 2015 in South Africa were fuelled by an imbalance in the structural and social conditions in the country. Akinnaso (2019) claims that many Nigerians in South Africa are involved in formal and informal businesses and skilled and unskilled jobs, while others are involved in drug trafficking. Jealousy is believed to be behind the widely held view that Nigerians have amassed wealth in South Africa through their business activities (Odebode et al. 2019). Some authors (Ngcuka 2019; Obaji 2019) have observed xenophobic demonstrations in the country's major economic hubs, with rioters destroying a host of businesses owned by immigrants. As a result, Akionla (2014) considers xenophobia in South Africa to be an old order and states that it is an extension of other forms of violence and intolerance. Nwobi, Nwokoma and Uzozie (2020) argue that xenophobia manifests as different kinds of indigene resentment. This includes viewing foreigners as "threats"; feelings of jealousy, hostility and intolerance; and organised rhetoric and negative sentiments about immigrants. Reviewing the findings of previous studies will shed light on government weaknesses and strengths and give rise to recommendations to future researchers and practitioners on pragmatic ways of addressing the scourge of xenophobic attacks.

There have been numerous attempts by various authors to investigate and highlight the South African government's failures to prevent and respond effectively to xenophobic violence (Dube 2015; Durokifa and Ijeoma 2017; Madue 2015; Misago 2016). However, most of these studies focus on reflections and untested secondary data blending them as empirical, which has led to a serious void in the existing literature. Irrelevant government interventions (including IziMbizo) to tackle xenophobic attacks (Misago 2016); leadership response influenced by public opinion on the discourse (Hewitt, Masikane and Toendepi 2020); the creation of a harmonious

business environment between locals and immigrants (Mamabolo 2015); and ineffective immigration policies and initiatives are some of the themes that have emerged from research into governance response to xenophobic attacks. The present article is not contrary to the analogies mentioned above and realities of how xenophobia is understood; however, it systematically dissects recently published journal articles and their understanding of and insights into xenophobia after two decades of major attacks against immigrants. The major themes in the current literature are unearthed and the gaps are identified, which also necessitates other articles to test empirically and reveal new realities and insights into the phenomenon. The serious gap in the existing literature has necessitated this investigation and systematic review of existing and recent literature to unravel common themes that define xenophobia, the implications of xenophobic attacks on victims, and questions about the effectiveness of government response strategies to curb such attacks. The next sections cover the methods and findings of the study, a discussion of data, and a conclusion accompanied by recommendations.

## **Methods**

The study questions whether recent scholars commonly share the widely accepted narrative on xenophobia and xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Furthermore, the extent and impact of xenophobia among victims are systematically investigated to determine whether it is correct to call the attacks xenophobic. Lastly, the effectiveness of the government's response to xenophobia and xenophobic attacks is questioned. The protocols for writing a systematic literature review have been followed, and the rational research questions that the review has sought to answer are stated, the search strategy and selection criteria (inclusion and exclusion) are explained, the role of assessors is discussed, and a quality assessment checklist is included (Sauer and Seuring 2023; Schröer, Kruse and Gómez 2021). Guided by the latter authors, possible researcher bias has been reduced using a predetermined review protocol to detail the research methods.

## **Search Strategy**

The researcher was assisted during the study by a librarian in developing a search and classification strategy; the well-planned research was conducted between January and February 2021. A review of the literature commenced after the research questions were drafted. The focus was on the causes of

xenophobia and xenophobic attacks against immigrants of African origin; the impacts of xenophobia on victims; and government response strategies and their effectiveness. Quality high-impact factor journal articles were searched and retrieved from credible electronic databases such as the Web of Sciences, Scopus and Google Scholar, and these articles were analysed. Different keywords such as *xenophobia*, *xenophobic attacks*, and *causes and impacts in South Africa* were used. The peer-reviewed articles that were retrieved focused on xenophobia in South Africa; these were recorded and codified using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The majority of the selected journal articles were published between 2015 and 2021 when South Africa had a surge of xenophobic attacks in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019, which was an upsurge throughout the country as compared to the previous years which occurred in selected provinces.

A thematic analysis was used in this research study: the selected journal articles were systematically identified, searched, retrieved, organised and analysed; and themes and patterns of meaning were generated across the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2020). By using a thematic analysis, the researcher made sense of the shared meanings and experiences of the recently published literature examining xenophobia in South Africa. A thematic analysis was used because it is accessible, flexible, and more aligned to qualitative research methods.

### **Characteristics of the Study**

The criteria followed to select databases were the exclusion of publications that had been published before 2015; the exclusion of articles not written in English; and the exclusion of articles in disciplines other than public administration, sociology, business management and economics. A total of 19 research articles relevant to the study's research questions were selected out of 8,240 articles. The sampled articles focused on the African continent, particularly South Africa, where xenophobic attacks against immigrants often occur. The sampled journal articles focused mostly on South Africa, although some focused on Nigeria. Out of 19 journal articles, 13 researchers followed qualitative research approaches, with almost all of them using in-depth interviews as a method and applying purposive sampling. Two senior researchers in sociology and public administration who had published articles on xenophobia were approached to check the relevance and quality of the analysed data against the research questions and study objectives.

Most of the sampled articles focused on the understanding and perceptions of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, and strategies used to respond to these attacks (Dlamini et al. 2020; Mhlanga 2021; Moagi et al. 2020; Peterside et al. 2020). There were a limited number of research studies that focused on effectiveness, efficiencies and proactiveness in response to xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Some researchers dissected the impact of xenophobic attacks on the livelihoods of immigrants (Chibuzor et al. 2017; Nwobi et al. 2020; Rabotata et al. 2021; Sotonye and Tamunopubo 2020). In addition, the journal articles cited at the beginning of this article support the journal articles that are listed in Table 1 as they analyse the understanding of xenophobia, the response strategies and the impacts on the livelihoods of migrants.

## **Findings**

### ***History of the Immigrants and the Locals***

Immediately after the end of apartheid in 1994, as South Africa was celebrating its first constitutional democracy, the country saw an influx of immigrants from poor neighbouring countries; many people were attracted by the economic opportunities and human rights protections (Adjai and Lazaridis 2013; Ogunnubi and Amusan 2018). South Africa's robust economy, high standard of living, and political and social stability are mainly considered to have been the factors that attracted immigrants to the country (Dauda, Sakariyau and Ameen 2018). Isike and Isike (2012) state that indigenes were concerned about the influx of legal and illegal immigrants of African descent into South Africa. Citizens harboured many resentments about the presence of immigrants – South Africans perceived them to be involved in prostitution, criminal activities, and drug and human trafficking, which could destroy the social fabric of the country (Crush and Williams 2013).

Some researchers have traced resentment against immigrants to poor service delivery; violence between the African National Congress (ANC), the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the apartheid government; the influence of micro-politics in urban townships; the involvement of local authorities in economic and political opportunities; and a lack of early detection strategies (Ojedokun 2015; Tirivangasi and Mugambiwa 2016). However, xenophobia differs from province to province in South Africa, as revealed by a survey done by Gordoan, Roberts and Struwig (2013) showing that KwaZulu-Natal is less receptive to immigrants than other provinces. Several

researchers (Choane, Shulika and Mthombeni 2011; Crush, Ramachandran and Pendleton 2013) have observed attacks against immigrants in the industrialised provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and the Western Cape. Hickel (2014) states that the deadliest attack was in 2008. It started in Alexandra and spread to cities such as Durban and Cape Town. Anti-immigrant sentiments mainly stemmed from the socio-economic and cultural misconceptions held by local people. Some immigrants died and thousands were affected during the 2015 attacks (Lynsey 2019).

### ***Conceptual Frame***

Different authors conceptualize the term xenophobia differently based on their socio-economic/political and geographical positions. For instance, a host of researchers (Buthelezi 2009; Mhlanga 2021; Oni and Okunade 2018; Saleh 2015) have defined xenophobia as unreasonable fear, hostility, deep-rooted dislike or hatred of foreigners, coupled with aggressive violence. This violence has led to fatalities and the looting of belongings of foreigners on a lower economic stratum. This view is supported by Field (2017), who claims that xenophobia refers to the fear and hatred of refugees and is associated with violent acts. Pillay (2017), meanwhile, regards xenophobia as another form of racism that can be attributed to the lack of trust between South African citizens and immigrants. Some researchers (Adam and Moodley 2015; Field 2017) attribute xenophobia to ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural differences in certain countries. Xenophobic attacks have been observed in several countries in the Global South after these states obtained independence from their colonisers and called on their oppressors to leave their countries; this subsequently destroyed the daily livelihood of local people (Bhattacharyya 2024; Dutta 2024; De and Tripathi 2024; Fanon 1990).

Ullah and Huque (2014) and the United Nations (2013) consider xenophobia to be a form of discrimination that is triggered by identified differences in gender, sexual orientation, religion and ethnic background. Such abhorrent discrimination is not prevalent only in South Africa, however. In Nigeria, for instance, inter-ethnic strife is widespread, and it is triggered mostly by competition for resources, dominance, territory, autonomy and power (Albert 1999; John 2013; Okoli 2012); discriminatory support from government (John 2013); and cultural mistrust (Whaley 2001). Consequently, many researchers (Akinola 2017; Burlacu 2017) state that xenophobia encompasses attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject immigrants. These definitions assist the research reported in the present

article in critically analysing recently published literature on xenophobia and the authors' understanding of it. These interpretations by authors and how they perceive officials' response strategies to combat the effects of xenophobia are espoused in this article.

### ***Economic Competition***

At present, a disproportionately high percentage of South Africans view black immigrants as a threat to their socio-economic well-being (Claassen 2017; Ejoke and Ani 2017; Solomon and Kosaka 2014). There has been stiff economic competition and an outcry from local indigenes in the fight to access scarce resources (Dodson 2010; Dzomonda, Tirivangasi and Masocha 2016; Kgari-Masondo and Masondo 2019; Kinge 2016; Mothibi Roelofse and Tshivhase 2015; Peterside, Ibietan and Deinde-Adedeji 2020; Tirivangasi and Rankoana 2015). A narrative exists that immigrants are favoured in terms of job opportunities as they accept lower wages (Asuelime 2020; Mothibi et al. 2015). Mozambicans and other immigrants from African countries who settle for low wages in the informal sector are perceived as taking opportunities from indigenes. This has resulted in animosity between the two warring groups (Kinge 2016). Citizens' fear of perceived educated immigrants has been provoked mostly by unemployed and poverty-stricken local indigenes (Chibuzor et al. 2017).

### ***The Implication of Xenophobic Rhetorics***

Xenophobia has caused discrimination against immigrants, which includes the living conditions in host countries. In South Africa, undocumented migrants pose a challenge that has paralysed livelihoods (Faturiyeye et al. 2018). In addition, xenophobic statements by the country's leaders such as the Zulu king that foreigners must leave the country are considered to have led to the 2015 xenophobic attacks (Mhlanga 2021; Neocosmos 2008). A host of discriminatory, derogatory and exclusionary terms are directed at immigrants in urban townships in South Africa (e.g. *makwerekwere*, *amagrigamba* and *abangalee*) and are worsening the already poor relations between locals and immigrants (Matsinhe 2011). Different researchers (Haymen 2013; Vromans et al. 2011; Yakusho 2008) opine that these terms have divided locals and immigrants, and have given rise to negative attitudes and increased competition over scarce resources and employment opportunities in the country. The latter has created a persisting hatred and mistrust between warring locals and foreigners (Magwaza and Ntini 2020).

### ***Victims of Xenophobic Violence***

According to Crush et al. (2017), most victims of xenophobic attacks are immigrants from poor SADC countries. These countries include Mozambique, Malawi, the DRC, and Zimbabwe. The immigrants who are targeted are those who rent small (spaza) shops in rural and township areas, and those who come from Somalia, Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Zanker and Moyo 2020). The xenophobic attacks against immigrants in African countries contribute to urban violence, which is an urban management challenge (Crush and Ramachandran 2009; Hassim Kupe and Worby 2008; Tevera 2013). South African History Online (2015) states that minority tribal groups are also regarded as immigrants by South Africans from majority groups. Therefore, South Africans from minority tribal and ethnic groups are often also mistakenly attacked during xenophobia-related violence. Simelane and Nicolson (2015) mention that whites are not the victims of xenophobic violence as they are not attacked during such irrational periods. According to Olarewaju (2020), attacks against Nigerians in South Africa destroy immigrants' ability to secure their daily livelihood needs and financial income (Babatunde 2020) as foreigners' entrepreneurial activities are hampered during periods of violence.

### ***The Role of the Government***

In the meantime, African immigrants have been poorly and unfairly treated or exposed to maltreatment at the hands of employees and citizens, with limited proactive action coming from the government and civil society groups (Crush 2000). According to Crush (2021), xenophobic sentiments are not only prevalent in South Africa but are also found in other areas of the Global South, such as the Caribbean and Latin America, and in the Gulf, India and Singapore, which are influenced by socio-economic challenges. Crush (2021) argues that in the Global South, anti-foreigner sentiment and governments' responses take one of three main forms: mitigation, intensification or indifference. Crush (2021) posits that xenophobic denialism and criminality, and blaming migrants for their governments' failures, are entrenched in South Africa's policy on international migration.

South African government officials, as well as the country's media and citizens, have long regarded immigration as a crisis (Hiropoulos 2020). According to Shishonga (2015), South African nationals' political illiteracy is the result of their lack of knowledge of African politics and the important role that other African countries played in the liberation from colonisers. While recent and earlier authors pinpoint the causalities of most of the xenophobia in South



Africa, a systematic research study focusing on reviewing the published literature to arrive at an understanding of xenophobia, the influence of economic competition, inflammatory statements, the identification of victims of xenophobia, and the role of the government has not been done.

The current systematic synthesis of the literature has carefully been planned and executed according to grounded theory principles by constructing hypotheses and theories on xenophobia and its impacts on the immigrants in South Africa. The use of grounded theory in this study has resulted in the discovery and identification of theories from the existing data, which were systematically obtained and comparatively analyzed (Chun Tie, Birks and Francis 2019).

**Table 1: Study Characteristics**

Article author(s)	Design(s) and method(s)	Emerg ed themes/ findings	Major conclusions
Mhlanga 2021	- Scientific - Mathematical model developed and analysed	The mathematical model suggests that xenophobia is influenced by peers. Counselling and incarceration reverse its growth.	Incarceration to prohibit xenophobia is less important than counselling; the latter in the form of teaching and campaign interventions is central to fighting against xenophobia; incarceration was found to be meaningless without counselling.
Masikane et al. 2020	- Qualitative - Exploratory research study	Xenophobia is a result of socio-economic impacts; leaders' responses are influenced by public opinion on the crisis. Xenophobia is not associated with immigration procedures; migration is a regional problem, and the country cannot solve it unilaterally. Political will is needed to deal with xenophobia, not the government's stance on rejecting it.	Leaders should recognise the existence of xenophobia in the country. Stereotyping and scapegoating lead to xenophobia. The government has failed to keep their initial promises of equal wealth distribution and poverty reduction.
Tirivangasi and Nyahunda 2020	- Qualitative - Descriptive research design - Purposive sampling	The results show that the sustainability and efficiency of efforts to curb xenophobia in South Africa are limited; denialism by state departments	Long-term sustainable strategies are required to prevent future (xenophobic) attacks against immigrants. A lack of policies to fight xenophobia adds

		and agencies that xenophobia exists; and failure to root out the causes of xenophobia.	fire to disgruntled communities who have xenophobic attitudes. Government policies on xenophobia lack sustainability. There is a lack of understanding of the root causes of xenophobia and policies to fight it. The existence of xenophobia is denied in some quarters.
Rabotata et al. 2021	- Qualitative research study - Case study design	Rural inhabitants seldom experience xenophobic attacks; their livelihoods are not adversely affected.	Deportation, displacement and loss of income due to xenophobic attacks are not prevalent in rural areas. Migration management policies should be applied to rural areas because undocumented immigrants are mostly residing in such areas.
Dlamini et al. 2020	- Qualitative approach	The South African government has failed to end attacks against immigrants, which has ruined the state's relationship with other countries on the continent. The porosity of the country's borders and politicians' rhetoric contribute to Afrophobic overtones in the country.	South Africa should curb Afrophobic sentiments through public education in the form of lectures and seminars. Law enforcement agencies should enforce the legal parameters of the country to deal with Afrophobic behaviours and attitudes.
Asuelime 2020	- Qualitative	Direct inflammatory statements, which	The stance of politicians (from

		<p>were deemed to be xenophobic by the ANC and opposition leaders, were associated with the 2019 xenophobic attacks against immigrants of African descent. The nationalistic tone of the ruling party and some leading opposition parties as well as traditional leaders (except the radical EFF leaders) was considered by the South African authorities to be behind the vigilantes' radical and violent stance that led to attacks against immigrants.</p>	<p>the ruling party and opposition parties) on xenophobic attacks has dented the outstanding South African value and principle of ubuntu, especially in the 2019 electoral year, when the extent of violence confirmed that politicians were complicit in such violence. The narrative is that the attacks against immigrants are sporadic acts rather than acts informed by the politically influenced who are hungry for power. The 2019 political campaigns were not central to developmental issues but focused on issues of political exclusion.</p>
<p>Peterside et al. 2020</p>	<p>- Qualitative - Historical design</p>	<p>The historical and cordial relationship between Nigeria and South Africa has been diminished by the recurrence of attacks against immigrants (especially Nigerians), threatening future collaboration between the two major economic giants on the continent.</p>	<p>Applying realist conflict theory, the proactive response of the South African government (in particular to activities that could limit opportunities to attack immigrants) should be that sanctions be meted out against those who are behind xenophobia. Social</p>

			inclusion and cohesion should be driven by effective institutional mechanisms.
Sotonye and Tamunopubo 2020	- Qualitative research approach - Ex-post research design	Nigerians in South Africa contribute to the economy of the country in various ways, including as part of the workforce of universities and as students.	Local indigenes encourage attacks against Nigerian migrants. The Nigerian government has responded to the attacks against its nationals by summoning the South African ambassador.
Hiroopoulos 2020	- Qualitative	The South African government's poor governance has led to the scapegoating of immigrants by public officials. The xenophobic sentiments that are widely shared are perpetuated by the construction of migration as a crisis by public officials; this is evidenced by the constant xenophobic protests by members of the public, a lack of protection for immigrants and their exclusion from accessing basic needs, a discriminatory immigration system, and unjustified arrests and deportations.	When government officials create the impression that there is a crisis, they facilitate the xenophobic reception of immigrants into the country through discriminative immigration prescripts and unlawful practices by security agencies against immigrants. The xenophobia created by the government of South Africa has led to the marginalisation and exclusion of immigrants, making them vulnerable to victimisation and discrimination. The narrative that migration is a crisis

			detracts a focus on broader institutional and structural problems faced by the country. The inability of government officials to explain disproportionately high income inequality, unemployment and poverty in the country has led to the scapegoating of immigrants.
Chibuzor et al. 2017	- Qualitative	This article notes that the Nigeria–South Africa cordial relationship will be adversely affected as a result of xenophobic attacks.	The South African public should be educated on the adverse economic effects that result from attacks against immigrants.
Moagi et al. 2020	Qualitative	Findings on the limited resources among Mozambican immigrants coincide with the extant literature. Immigrants are abused and face discrimination by locals; they are blamed for the social ills in the country (scapegoating).	Mozambican immigrants feel unsafe, traumatised and vulnerable as their lack of proper documentation worsens their frustration.
Magwaza and Ntini 2020	Qualitative	The conceptualisation of xenophobia in the township and its causes varies. Migrants compete with locals for limited resources. Extreme poverty, crime	This study concludes that attacks against immigrants are strategies used by the poor to express their grievances against the government. Such

		and unemployment are behind xenophobia. Denialism and the corruption of the Department of Home Affairs and the security cluster are behind the attacks against immigrants.	grievances are caused by a shortage of job opportunities, poverty and a lack of access to formal housing.
Toh 2020	- Qualitative - Quantitative	Xenophobia manifests as a result of the effects of the apartheid government and its discriminatory policies, which were centred on hatred, race and violence among South Africans.	There is a paradigm shift from white to black dominance, which does not mean that black South Africans are hateful. The seeds of xenophobia have been planted in the minds of locals by the apartheid system and its policies; their frustration is the result of being deprived of skills and education that would have enabled them to be competitive. Xenophobia cannot be rooted out unless the effects of apartheid are dealt with.
Olonisakin and Adebayo, 2020	- Quantitative	Attitudes towards the in-group and the out-group contribute to xenophobia. The positive in-group attitude does not translate into negative out-group attitude.	The Nigerian population centres around ethnicity, which has been bestowed on them by their colonisers, fear that they will be controlled and conflict among themselves.

<p>Obadire 2018</p>	<p>- Qualitative</p>	<p>A non-violent kind of xenophobia has manifested at the university. Social and academic groups are separate, and there is evidence of xenophobia among students and staff members.</p>	<p>An anti-xenophobia campaign is necessary to create a conducive learning and working environment.</p>
<p>Nwobi et al. 2020</p>	<p>- Qualitative - Secondary sources of data - Content analysis</p>	<p>The majority of the Nigerians in South Africa are homeless, and their education has been adversely affected. Their basic needs are not met as they are often unemployed and have no source of income.</p>	<p>The state should provide accommodation and education to victims of xenophobic attacks who become homeless, including Nigerians. The Nigerians should be trained and their skills improved. They should be assisted in meeting their basic needs: clean drinking water, proper sanitation, food and access to healthcare services.</p>
<p>Akande et al. 2018</p>	<p>- Quantitative</p>	<p>There is low anti-immigrant sentiment and an awareness of xenophobia; students are not xenophobic.</p>	<p>Students do not understand the National Action Plan (NAP) on xenophobia, which creates a significant gap that must be overcome through interventions on xenophobia. Forums on immigrants should be initiated to improve students' understanding of</p>



			xenophobia on campuses. Education as a tool is essential to fight anti-immigrant sentiment. Social integration, especially among first-year students, is necessary.
Zihindula, Meyer-Weitz and Akintola 2017	- Qualitative	Refugees encounter medical xenophobia when accessing healthcare centres due to language barriers and documentation requirements.	Comments are insensitive. Owing to unwelcome discriminatory comments, they are denied treatment, which contributes to the unequal provision of healthcare services.

**Source: Author's research**



## Discussion

Table 1 illustrates different research perspectives on the understanding of xenophobia from the government lens. It further paints a bleak picture of the government's inadequate strategies for preventing and proactively responding to the impacts of xenophobic attacks.

### *Understanding Xenophobia*

Xenophobia is defined differently by different disciplines and from different perspectives, and a myriad of strategies have been suggested for curbing xenophobia in South Africa. For instance, Mhlanga (2021) finds that peer pressure is a leading cause of xenophobia, and concludes that counselling, teaching and campaigns would be more beneficial in the fight against xenophobia than punitive measures such as incarcerating instigators and perpetrators. Tirivangasi and Nyahunda (2020) expose the lack of sustainable efficiencies in state departments and agencies in the fight against xenophobia in South Africa. Law enforcement agencies fail to deal decisively with Afrophobic sentiments behind the attacks on immigrants (Dlamini et al. 2020). Many authors (Chibuzor et al. 2020; Moagi et al. 2020; Peterside et al. 2020; Sotonye and Tamunopubo 2020) observe that attacks against immigrants hamper the cordial relationship between South Africa and its African trading partners such as Nigeria and Mozambique. However, Hiroopoulos (2020) believes that immigrants are scapegoated as a result of the South African government's failure to provide basic services to South Africans, meet their basic needs, and create job opportunities. This has led to discrimination against immigrants. The author states that public officials consider migration to be a crisis that influences xenophobic protests; they offer little protection to immigrants, which is construed as scapegoating. This has led to immigrants being discriminated against, victimized and becoming vulnerable to violence at the hands of locals.

In the meantime, empirical studies have been conducted in major townships, for example, Umlazi in Durban, on immigrants as the victims of xenophobia and violence. Immigrants have grievances against the government (Magwaza and Ntini 2020) and its discriminatory policies (Toh 2020), which can be traced back to the policies and legacy of apartheid. Magwaza and Ntini (2020) believe that South Africa's Home Affairs Department is porous and identify this porosity as a direct conflict between locals and immigrants in South Africa. The above authors conclude that the root causes of xenophobia and its associated violence are the struggle for access to limited resources, communities living in extreme poverty, increased unemployment

levels, corruption, crime and xenophobia denialism. The findings from a myriad of commentators are reminiscent of Moagi et al.'s (2020) assertion that Mozambicans in South Africa experience discriminatory attitudes and conditions similar to the above-mentioned realities. As a result, they feel unsafe and abused; they are traumatised by the discriminatory acts perpetrated by both locals and state apparatus.

Some researchers have studied xenophobia occurring in universities. Olonisakin and Adebayo (2020) conclude that the Nigerian population is xenophobic because ethnicism is the norm. Meanwhile, in South Africa, different universities have contrary perceptions and experiences of xenophobia. For instance, Obadire (2018) states that xenophobia is prevalent among students at the University of Venda, while at Durban University of Technology (DUT), anti-immigrant sentiment is low, and an awareness programme aimed at DUT students plays a pivotal role in curbing xenophobia among students. Conversely, Zihindula et al. (2017) focus on the sparsely researched focus area study that examines medical xenophobia experienced by Congolese citizens in Durban.

### ***Response Strategies***

There has been a concerted effort among authors to write about violent attacks against immigrants living in South Africa, particularly against Nigerians. The triggers and the government's response strategies to xenophobia and its socio-economic implications have been discussed by various authors (Chibuzor et al. 2017; Hewitt et al. 2020; Nwobi et al. 2020). These authors have consistently highlighted that the root causes of xenophobia are the socio-economic ills and government's responses to these ills, which lead to the general population's negative views on the crisis. For instance, Hewitt et al. (2020) have observed scapegoating and stereotyping, and government's failure to provide basic services to the population of the country. These cause locals to target vulnerable people, mainly legal and illegal immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

The fascinating stories in recently published research studies on xenophobia in South Africa illustrate the realities that have been identified by researchers such as Rabotata et al. (2021). One of these realities is that immigrants in rural areas are not as vulnerable to xenophobia or xenophobic attacks as their counterparts who reside in urban or peri-urban communities. The researchers (Rabotata et al. 2021) also mention that immigration policies are often not implemented and executed in rural areas. Rabotata et al. (2021) support the latter arguments, stating that deportation, displacement,

and the loss of income due to attacks against immigrants are less prevalent in rural areas.

Recently, scholars (Chibuzor et al. 2017; Sotonye and Tamunopubo 2020) have investigated the ethical implications of xenophobia, as well as the socio-economic impact and political breakdown in relations between South Africa and Nigeria as a result of xenophobic attacks against Nigerians. These authors indicate that the cordial relations between the two largest economies in Africa, namely South Africa and Nigeria, has been compromised. They call upon the South African government to educate its citizens about the adverse economic impacts of attacks against Nigerians. Nwobi et al. (2020) acknowledge the socio-economic effects of attacks against Nigerian nationals in South Africa, focusing on the effects on livelihoods. These authors depict the appalling impacts of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians, including homelessness, the disruption of Nigerian immigrant children's education and the loss of their source of income (Nwobi et al. 2020). The authors appeal to the government of South Africa to provide accommodation for displaced Nigerians, assist them in acquiring skills and meet their basic needs, including their need for clean drinking water, healthy food, proper sanitation and electricity.

Among the critically analysed articles, there is only one research study that has associated xenophobia with the 2019 national elections in South Africa (Asuelime 2020). The author notes with dismay the inflammatory and anti-immigrant sentiments levelled against immigrants by the leaders of the ruling political party (the ANC) and the leaders of the opposition party (mostly the DA) during that time. Asuelime (2020) believes that these sentiments led to the 2019 xenophobic attacks against immigrants of African descent. The author alleges that politicians were complicit in the xenophobic violence of 2019 and acted against the principles of ubuntu. Xenophobia was a result of the political climate of the time, with leaders focusing on attracting voters and winning the national elections rather than on developmental issues.

The systematically analysed literature on government responses to xenophobia in South Africa (see Table 1) is dominated by qualitative face-to-face interviews and desktop analyses and shows similar patterns on xenophobia in South Africa. The literature seems to focus on xenophobic sentiments against Nigerians while downplaying the xenophobia experienced by immigrants from other countries. The literature reveals that xenophobic sentiments and attacks are mainly seen in urban areas, with minimal events

recorded in rural areas. It is quite clear from the literature that government interventions to prevent or respond proactively to xenophobia and xenophobic attacks are ineffective, inefficient or non-existent. Furthermore, denialism by government and politicians, a lack of policies, and scapegoating are central to triggering and exacerbating xenophobia. Lastly, peer pressure, porous borders and Afrocentric rather than xenophobic sentiments are driven by government officials and politicians.

## Conclusion

The present study is the first that extensively, thoroughly and systematically reviews existing literature on the impacts and the effectiveness of government response strategies to xenophobia in the South African context. The reviewed literature is consistent with the perception that fear, deep-rooted dislike, hatred, discrimination, and economic competition characterize xenophobia and overlook other causes of xenophobic attacks, including competition among immigrants. Notably, xenophobia is mainly present in urban areas. It is triggered by political leaders, traditional leaders, and the youth, who are influenced by public opinion. Furthermore, in light of governmental denial, a lack of policies to deal with illegal migration proactively, porous borders, and a lack of political will it is important that future researchers do empirical research into the impacts and effectiveness of governmental response strategies to curb xenophobia in South Africa. It is imperative that those legally responsible for government interventions to prevent and mitigate the impacts of xenophobic attacks and xenophobia should collaborate with all stakeholders to design practical solutions to the scourge of xenophobia.

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