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Article

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DYNAMICS OF XENOPHOBIA IN AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA-NIGERIA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

This study examined the dynamics of xenophobia in Africa and its implications for Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations. The study was motivated by the increasing incidents of xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals, particularly Nigerians residing in South Africa, and the resulting tensions on bilateral and regional relations within Africa. The study was anchored on the Frustration-Aggression Theory and the Realistic Group Conflict Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 320 respondents consisting of academics in International Relations, foreign policy analysts, government officials, Nigerian returnees from South Africa, and postgraduate students. A sample size of 178 respondents was selected using the Taro Yamane formula, while stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting the respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Dynamics of Xenophobia and Diplomatic Relations Questionnaire (DXDRQ)." The instrument was validated by experts in Political Science and International Relations, while a reliability index of 0.81 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data collected. The findings revealed that unemployment, poverty, economic inequality, weak governance, and competition over scarce resources were major causes of xenophobia in South Africa. The study also found that xenophobic attacks against Nigerians were characterized by physical violence, destruction of businesses and properties, displacement, and insecurity. Furthermore, the study established that xenophobia negatively affected diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa through diplomatic tensions, weakened bilateral cooperation, and negative public perceptions. The findings equally revealed that xenophobia undermined African unity, regional integration, and the ideals of

Pan-Africanism. The study concluded that xenophobia poses serious threats to peaceful coexistence, continental cooperation, and regional stability in Africa. The study recommended improved economic policies, stronger protection for migrants, enhanced diplomatic engagement, and intensified public enlightenment campaigns to promote tolerance and African unity.

Keywords: Xenophobia, Diplomatic Relations, Nigeria, South Africa, African Unity, Regional Integration, Pan-Africanism, Frustration-Aggression.

Introduction

Xenophobia refers to an irrational deep dislike or fear of non-nationals, manifesting as attitudinal hostility, discrimination, and violence directed at individuals or groups perceived as foreign (Human Rights Watch, 2020). According to Ibeabuchi and Bierenenu-Nnabugwu (2025), xenophobia is one among several possible forms of reactions generated by anomic situations in modern societies, with South Africa serving as a quintessential case. Globally, xenophobia has intensified with rising migration flows, economic anxieties, and nationalist populism. In the African context, however, xenophobia presents a particularly paradoxical phenomenon given the continent's historical foundation of humanity, oneness, and Pan-African solidarity (Ogunnubi & Aja, 2022). Migration and inter-state movement within Africa have accelerated due to economic hardships, political instability, and the search for better livelihood opportunities, yet these movements have simultaneously triggered rising anti-foreigner sentiments across host nations. Across the African continent, anti-foreigner sentiments have been escalating, undermining the spirit of African brotherhood and continental integration. According to Ochogwu *et al.* (2025), xenophobic attacks have led to a significant deterioration in relations between African states, affecting bilateral ties and regional stability. The factors promoting xenophobia in Africa are multifaceted, encompassing economic competition, political scapegoating, and social frustration. Crush (2020) argued that governance by displacement, where governments fail to address structural inequalities creates fertile ground for xenophobic mobilization. The effects of migration pressures on host countries have been profound, particularly in urban centers where competition for scarce resources intensifies. As noted by Sempijja and Mongale (2022), xenophobic attacks in South Africa were triggered by drivers such as income inequality, inter-group hatred, racism, poverty, unemployment, and competition for resources, alongside the quest for social justice emanating from historical socio-economic grievances.

South Africa remains the most economically attractive destination for African migrants, offering comparatively advanced infrastructure, industrial capacity, and employment opportunities (Olanrewaju & Nwozor, 2022). The post-apartheid era witnessed significant migration inflows as the democratic transition opened borders that were previously restricted under apartheid's racialized migration controls. Between 2010 and 2017, the immigrant community in South Africa increased from 2 million to 4 million people (Ezeji & Mbagwu, 2024). Nigerians constitute a significant portion of these African migrants, drawn by South Africa's economic opportunities in trade, education, and professional services. However, this influx has simultaneously fueled resentment among segments of the South African population who perceive migrants as competitors for jobs and social benefits. The roots of xenophobia in South Africa are deeply embedded in the country's apartheid legacy. According to Tafira (2018), as cited in University of Cape Town research, the legacy of institutionalized racism, labour control, and nationalist ideologies continues to marginalize

migrants, particularly from neighboring African countries. Under apartheid, the state imposed rigid racial and ethnic divisions, using pass laws and segregationist policies to control the movement of Black South Africans and foreign nationals. Although apartheid formally ended in 1994, xenophobic attitudes shaped by that period persist in the post-apartheid context, with migrants still constructed as the “other” (Mlilo & Misago, 2019). Poverty and unemployment remain critical drivers of xenophobic violence. Ibeabuchi and Bierenenu-Nnabugwu (2025) observed that manufacturing employment fell from 1.49 million in 1994 to 1.35 million in 2003, while mining employment declined from 800,000 in 1984 to 450,000 in 2004. These economic contractions have disproportionately affected Black South Africans, creating a reservoir of frustration that frequently targets foreign nationals. Inequality and social frustration are further compounded by the government's service delivery failures, leaving communities without adequate housing, water, sanitation, or electricity (Managa, 2012; Chigudu, 2019). According to Gordon (2020), competition over jobs and resources, combined with crime perceptions and stereotyping of foreigners as drug traffickers and criminals, provides the immediate triggers for xenophobic mobilization.

South Africa has witnessed periodic waves of xenophobic violence that have claimed hundreds of lives and displaced thousands. The 2008 xenophobic violence stands as the most devastating episode, leaving 62 people dead and tens of thousands of migrants displaced, with widespread looting of property and businesses (Ezeji & Mbagwu, 2024). In 2015, another nationwide spike in attacks occurred following inflammatory remarks by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, resulting in 7 deaths and over 2,000 foreigners displaced (Ezeji & Mbagwu, 2024). The 2019 attacks marked a resurgence of violence, with scores of foreign nationals attacked in Durban and Johannesburg, prompting international condemnation (SABC, 2019). According to Ochogwu *et al.* (2025), these attacks have led to destruction of lives and properties, with Nigerians particularly affected. The murder of Mrs. Elizabeth Ndubuisi-Chukwu, Deputy Director-General of the Chartered Insurance Institute of Nigeria, in a South African hotel in June 2019 exemplifies the lethal consequences of this violence. Nigeria and South Africa share a complex diplomatic history rooted in Nigeria's unwavering support during the anti-apartheid struggle. Olanrewaju and Nwozor (2022) note that Nigeria's championing of the African Centre Piece policy and its support against the apartheid regime led to the termination of apartheid government in 1994. Following democratization, both countries established robust bilateral relations encompassing economic, political, and cultural cooperation. Nigeria provided a robust market for South African businesses such as MTN and MultiChoice, while South Africa became a destination for Nigerian professionals and entrepreneurs (Abdulyakeen & Rabi, 2024). Both nations have assumed leadership roles in Africa, with Nigeria dominating West Africa through ECOWAS and South Africa exerting influence in Southern Africa via SADC. However, as Seteolu and Okuneye (2017) observe, this relationship has been characterized by intense rivalries and competitiveness that are not always healthy for intra-Africa trade and political relations.

The recurrent xenophobic attacks have severely strained Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations. According to Ogunnubi and Aja (2022), relations between Abuja and Pretoria have been marked by stages punctuated by rivalry, conflict, cooperation, and competition. The Nigerian government has reacted to attacks through diplomatic protests, recall of ambassadors, and condemnations. In 2019, Nigeria recalled its ambassador to South Africa following widespread xenophobic violence (Ochogwu *et al.*, 2025). The attacks have led to strict visa regulations, travel restrictions, and a decline in the spirit of African

brotherhood. Okonkwo (2024) argues that while historical and systemic factors have combined with South Africa's socio-economic configurations to promote xenophobia, the government, police, and judiciary must take responsibility for the concerns generated. The economic consequences have been substantial, with an estimated N1.5 trillion in business relationships between the two countries affected by the simmering rivalry (Ochogwu *et al.*, 2025). Xenophobia poses an existential threat to Pan-Africanism and African integration. According to Martin (2025), xenophobic violence critically undermines the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and free movement policies by creating an environment of fear and distrust among African nations. The persistence of xenophobic violence contradicts the foundational principles of the African Union and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. As noted by Ochogwu *et al.* (2025), xenophobic attacks have led to a decline in the spirit of African brotherhood and an externally negative image of South Africa as a xenophobic state. The implications for regional peace and cooperation are profound, as the violence affects not only bilateral relationships but also regional stability and security. Crush (2020) emphasizes that without addressing the governance failures and structural inequalities that underpin xenophobia, the vision of an integrated, prosperous Africa remains jeopardized. The relevance to AfCFTA is particularly significant, as the success of continental free trade depends on the free movement of people, goods, and services objectives fundamentally incompatible with xenophobic exclusion and violence.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the long-standing diplomatic, economic, and political relations between Nigeria and South Africa, recurring xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals, particularly Nigerians living in South Africa, have continued to threaten peaceful coexistence and bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Over the years, incidents of violence, looting, destruction of businesses, and loss of lives involving African migrants have raised serious concerns about the increasing spread of xenophobia in Africa. These attacks have not only endangered the safety and security of Nigerians residing in South Africa but have also generated diplomatic tensions, public protests, and negative perceptions between citizens of both nations. Although several interventions have been introduced by governments, regional organizations, and international bodies to address xenophobia, the problem persists, thereby undermining the ideals of African unity, regional integration, and Pan-Africanism. Furthermore, persistent xenophobic violence poses threats to trade relations, investment opportunities, migration policies, and continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It is therefore necessary to examine the dynamics of xenophobia in Africa and assess its implications for South Africa-Nigeria diplomatic relations with a view to identifying measures that can promote peaceful coexistence, strengthen bilateral relations, and enhance regional stability in Africa.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the dynamics of xenophobia in Africa and its implications for South Africa-Nigeria diplomatic relations. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the causes of xenophobia in South Africa;
- ii. investigate the patterns and nature of xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa;
- iii. assess the effects of xenophobia on diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa;

- iv. determine the socio-economic and political implications of xenophobia on African unity and regional integration.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the causes of xenophobia in South Africa?
- ii. What are the patterns and nature of xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa?
- iii. How has xenophobia affected diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa?
- iv. What are the socio-economic and political implications of xenophobia on African unity and regional integration?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Frustration-Aggression Theory and the Realistic Group Conflict Theory. The Frustration-Aggression Theory was propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears in 1939. The theory explains that aggression often arises when individuals or groups are frustrated in achieving their economic, political, or social goals. In the context of xenophobia in South Africa, high levels of unemployment, poverty, social inequality, and inadequate access to opportunities have generated frustration among some South Africans. As noted by Gordon (2020), many citizens perceive foreign nationals as competitors for scarce resources such as employment, housing, and social services. This frustration is often redirected toward immigrants, especially Nigerians and other African migrants, leading to hostility and violent attacks. The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how socio-economic dissatisfaction contributes to xenophobic violence and strained diplomatic relations. The Realistic Group Conflict Theory, developed by Muzafer Sherif in 1966, posited that conflict emerges when groups compete over limited resources and perceived advantages. The theory emphasizes that prejudice and discrimination are likely to occur when one group believes another group threatens its economic or social position. In South Africa, migrants are often perceived as threats to local economic survival and community security. Sempijia and Mongale (2022) observed that xenophobic attacks are largely driven by economic competition, political narratives, and perceptions that foreigners dominate informal businesses and employment opportunities. The theory is therefore suitable for explaining the persistent hostility toward foreign nationals and the diplomatic tensions resulting from such attacks.

Conceptual Review

Diplomatic Relations: Diplomatic relations refer to the formal and structured interactions between sovereign states and other recognized international actors for the purpose of promoting national interests, maintaining peaceful coexistence, negotiating agreements, managing conflicts, and fostering cooperation in political, economic, security, cultural, and humanitarian affairs. Diplomacy serves as one of the principal instruments of foreign policy through which governments communicate, negotiate, and build mutually beneficial relationships without resorting to coercion or the use of force. Contemporary diplomacy extends beyond traditional state-to-state interactions to include engagement with international organizations, multinational corporations, civil society organizations, and non-state actors, reflecting the growing complexity of global governance (Berridge, 2022). Diplomacy is understood as the peaceful conduct of relations among states through official

representatives accredited by their respective governments. However, Berridge (2022) argued that diplomatic relations encompass not only the exchange of ambassadors and embassies but also the institutionalized mechanisms through which states negotiate treaties, resolve disputes, protect citizens abroad, facilitate international trade, and coordinate responses to transnational challenges such as terrorism, climate change, pandemics, and migration. This perspective recognizes diplomacy as an evolving institution shaped by globalization, technological advancement, and increasing interdependence among nations. Harold Nicolson defined diplomacy as the management of international relations through negotiation, emphasizing tact, communication, and compromise as indispensable tools for preventing conflicts and advancing national interests. Similarly, Ernest Satow described diplomacy as the application of intelligence and tact in conducting official relations between governments, highlighting its role in sustaining international peace and cooperation (Nicolson, 1963; Satow, 1979). It is a multidimensional process involving continuous communication, bargaining, representation, information gathering, and confidence-building among states.

Xenophobia: Xenophobia refers to the fear, hatred, discrimination, or hostility directed toward foreigners or people perceived as outsiders within a society. According to Gordon (2020), xenophobia in South Africa is often expressed through hate crimes, violent attacks, intimidation, and exclusion of migrants from social and economic opportunities. Crush (2020) argued that xenophobia in South Africa has evolved beyond mere prejudice into systemic violence reinforced by governance failures and weak migration management systems. Xenophobia in Africa is closely associated with socio-economic frustrations, identity politics, nationalism, and competition over limited resources. Mlilo and Misago (2019) explained that xenophobic violence in South Africa became more visible after the end of apartheid in 1994, particularly between 2008 and 2018 when attacks on foreign nationals intensified across several communities. The authors maintained that migrants from other African countries, especially Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Somalis, Ethiopians, and Mozambicans, became major targets of violence and discrimination. Human Rights Watch (2020) further revealed that many foreign nationals in South Africa experienced robbery, displacement, physical assault, and destruction of businesses during xenophobic outbreaks. Ibeabuchi and Bierenenu-Nnabugwu (2025) linked xenophobia in South Africa to the post-apartheid crisis of development characterized by unemployment, poverty, inequality, and poor service delivery. The study emphasized that the inability of the government to adequately address socio-economic challenges has contributed to public frustration, which is frequently directed toward immigrants. Similarly, Misago and Landau (2022) argued that xenophobia in South Africa is not only physical violence but also includes social and spatial exclusion of migrants from communities and economic spaces.

Nigeria-South Africa Diplomatic Relations: Nigeria and South Africa occupy strategic positions in African politics and diplomacy. Seteolu and Okuneye (2017) argued that both countries have historically competed for political and economic influence in Africa since the end of apartheid. According to the authors, although the two countries cooperate on several continental issues, rivalry for regional dominance has occasionally generated tensions. Olanrewaju and Nwozor (2022) described Nigeria-South Africa relations as a form of hegemonic rivalry within Africa. The study explained that the two countries often seek leadership roles in continental politics, peacekeeping, and economic integration. Despite these rivalries, both countries maintain important trade, diplomatic, and cultural relations.

Ogunnubi and Aja (2022) examined citizen diplomacy in Nigeria-South Africa relations and found that xenophobic attacks have created a paradox in bilateral relations. While both governments officially promote cooperation and African unity, hostile attitudes toward Nigerians in South Africa undermine people-to-people relations and weaken diplomatic trust. Martin (2025) further argued that xenophobia poses threats to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and regional integration efforts. According to the author, persistent violence against foreign nationals discourages economic cooperation, investment, and mobility across African states.

Causes and Drivers of Xenophobia in South Africa: Several factors have been identified as responsible for xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Sempijja and Mongale (2022) identified unemployment, poverty, economic competition, and political incitement as major drivers of xenophobia. The authors noted that many South Africans blame immigrants for job scarcity and rising criminal activities despite insufficient evidence supporting such claims. Gordon (2020) also emphasized that hate crimes against foreigners are often fueled by stereotypes, misinformation, and community frustrations. Crush (2020) argued that weak governance and poor migration policies have contributed significantly to xenophobic violence in South Africa. According to the author, ineffective responses by security agencies and government institutions have encouraged repeated attacks on migrants. Human Rights Watch (2020) similarly observed that inadequate protection of foreign nationals and limited accountability for perpetrators have sustained the cycle of violence. Ezeji and Mbagwu (2024) maintained that xenophobic attacks threaten international relations because they create insecurity and distrust among African countries. The study explained that anti-immigrant sentiments are often manipulated by political actors who seek public support by blaming foreigners for domestic economic problems. Misago and Landau (2022) added that xenophobic violence in South Africa is often organized and aimed at excluding migrants from economic participation and community spaces.

Xenophobic Attacks Against Nigerians in South Africa: Nigerians have remained among the major victims of xenophobic violence in South Africa. Abdulyakeen and Rabi (2024) explained that recurrent attacks on Nigerians have resulted in deaths, injuries, displacement, and destruction of businesses and properties. The study revealed that many Nigerians in South Africa have suffered intimidation and economic losses due to repeated outbreaks of violence. Ochogwu, Abdul, and Luka (2025) conducted an exploratory study on xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa between 2008 and 2024 and found that the attacks significantly affected the image of South Africa among Nigerians. The authors noted that repeated attacks triggered diplomatic protests, public outrage, and calls for retaliatory actions against South African businesses in Nigeria. Human Rights Watch (2020) documented several cases where foreign nationals, including Nigerians, were attacked, displaced, or denied access to protection during xenophobic crises. Similarly, Okonkwo (2024) observed that xenophobic attacks have increasingly become a major issue in Nigerian foreign policy discussions due to their implications for citizen protection and bilateral relations.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined xenophobia and its implications for international relations in Africa. Abdulyakeen and Rabi (2024) reviewed the implications of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations. The study found that repeated attacks negatively affected bilateral relations, weakened diplomatic trust, and generated public hostility between citizens of both countries. Ezeji and Mbagwu (2024)

investigated xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa and concluded that xenophobia constitutes a serious threat to international relations and regional peace in Africa. The study emphasized the need for stronger migration policies and improved diplomatic engagement. Ochogwu *et al.* (2025) explored xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa from 2008 to 2024 and found that the attacks resulted in strained diplomatic relations, economic losses, and negative perceptions of South Africa among Nigerians. The study recommended stronger bilateral cooperation and protection of migrants. Ibeabuchi and Bierenenu-Nnabugwu (2025) examined post-apartheid xenophobic violence and concluded that socio-economic inequalities and poor governance contributed significantly to anti-immigrant violence in South Africa. The study stressed the importance of addressing poverty and unemployment to reduce xenophobia. Ogunnubi and Aja (2022) found that citizen diplomacy between Nigeria and South Africa has been undermined by repeated xenophobic violence. The study recommended public education, diplomatic dialogue, and stronger regional cooperation to improve relations between the two countries.

Summary of Literature Reviewed and Gap Identified

The literature reviewed indicated that xenophobia in South Africa is driven by socio-economic inequality, unemployment, political incitement, weak governance, and competition over scarce resources. The reviewed studies also established that xenophobic attacks against Nigerians have negatively affected diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa by creating tensions, mistrust, and public hostility. Furthermore, scholars emphasized that xenophobia threatens African unity, regional integration, and continental initiatives such as AfCFTA. However, most of the reviewed studies focused mainly on the causes and effects of xenophobia or on broader migration issues without adequately examining the contemporary implications of xenophobia on Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations within the wider African integration framework. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the dynamics of xenophobia in Africa and assessing its implications for South Africa-Nigeria diplomatic relations.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the dynamics of xenophobia in Africa and its implications for South Africa-Nigeria diplomatic relations. The population of the study comprised 320 respondents drawn from academics in International Relations, foreign policy analysts, officials of relevant government agencies, Nigerian returnees from South Africa, and postgraduate students in selected universities. The population distribution consisted of 80 academics, 60 foreign policy analysts, 70 government officials, 50 Nigerian returnees from South Africa, and 60 postgraduate students, making a total population of 320 respondents. A sample size of 178 respondents were selected for the study using the Taro Yamane formula. The respondents were selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques to ensure fair representation of all categories of participants. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Dynamics of Xenophobia and Diplomatic Relations Questionnaire (DXDRQ)." The instrument was validated by experts in Political Science and International Relations to ensure content and face validity. A pilot study was conducted using 20 respondents outside the study area, and the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha statistical method, which yielded a reliability index of 0.81, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions.

Results

Causes of Xenophobia in South Africa

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Causes of Xenophobia in South Africa

S/N	Causes Of Xenophobia in South Africa	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	High rate of unemployment in South Africa contributes to xenophobia against foreigners.	178	3.52	0.71	Agree
2	Poverty among South African citizens promotes hostility toward immigrants.	178	3.41	0.82	Agree
3	Competition for jobs between citizens and foreigners causes xenophobic attacks.	178	3.63	0.66	Agree
4	Poor service delivery by government increases frustration toward migrants.	178	3.28	0.87	Agree
5	Political leaders sometimes use anti-foreigner rhetoric to gain public support.	178	3.33	0.91	Agree
6	Foreign nationals are wrongly blamed for criminal activities in South Africa.	178	3.47	0.79	Agree
7	Weak immigration policies contribute to xenophobic violence.	178	3.21	0.85	Agree
8	Economic inequality in South Africa fuels resentment against immigrants.	178	3.55	0.73	Agree
9	Lack of public awareness about African unity encourages xenophobia.	178	3.18	0.92	Agree
10	Media stereotyping of foreigners contributes to xenophobic attitudes.	178	3.25	0.81	Agree

Table 1 shows the causes of xenophobia in South Africa as perceived by the respondents. The table indicates that all the questionnaire items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, showing agreement among respondents. The highest mean score of 3.63 was recorded on competition for jobs between citizens and foreigners, while the least mean score of 3.18 was recorded on lack of public awareness about African unity. This implies that unemployment, poverty, economic inequality, and competition for resources are major causes of xenophobia in South Africa.

Patterns And Nature of Xenophobic Attacks Against Nigerians in South Africa

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Patterns and Nature of Xenophobic Attacks Against Nigerians in South Africa

S/N	Patterns And Nature of Xenophobic Attacks Against Nigerians in South Africa	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Nigerians in South Africa are often subjected to physical attacks during xenophobic outbreaks.	178	3.61	0.65	Agree
2	Nigerian-owned businesses are frequently looted during xenophobic violence.	178	3.56	0.71	Agree
3	Xenophobic attacks often lead to the destruction of properties belonging to Nigerians.	178	3.48	0.78	Agree
4	Nigerians are often threatened and intimidated by local groups in South Africa.	178	3.39	0.82	Agree
5	Xenophobic violence usually occurs in urban communities with high migrant populations.	178	3.22	0.89	Agree
6	Nigerians are sometimes unfairly accused of criminal activities in South Africa.	178	3.45	0.80	Agree
7	Xenophobic attacks have caused displacement of Nigerians living in South Africa.	178	3.51	0.74	Agree
8	Security agencies in South Africa are often unable to adequately protect foreigners during attacks.	178	3.27	0.88	Agree

9	Social media platforms sometimes intensify anti-Nigerian sentiments in South Africa.	178	3.19	0.90	Agree
10	Xenophobic attacks have resulted in injuries and deaths of Nigerians in South Africa.	178	3.58	0.68	Agree

Table 2 shows the patterns and nature of xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa. The findings reveal that all the items had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating agreement among respondents. The highest mean score of 3.61 was recorded on physical attacks against Nigerians, while the lowest mean score of 3.19 was recorded on social media intensification of anti-Nigerian sentiments. The result suggests that xenophobic attacks are characterized by violence, intimidation, destruction of properties, displacement, and loss of lives among Nigerians in South Africa.

The Effect of Xenophobia on Diplomatic Relations Between Nigeria and South Africa

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Effects of Xenophobia on Nigeria–South Africa Diplomatic Relations

S/N	Effect of Xenophobia on Diplomatic Relations Between Nigeria and South Africa	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Xenophobic attacks have created diplomatic tension between Nigeria and South Africa.	178	3.66	0.61	Agree
2	Recurrent attacks on Nigerians have negatively affected bilateral relations.	178	3.58	0.69	Agree
3	Xenophobia has weakened public trust between citizens of both countries.	178	3.42	0.77	Agree
4	Diplomatic protests have increased due to xenophobic violence in South Africa.	178	3.31	0.84	Agree
5	Xenophobia has affected trade and investment relations between both countries.	178	3.27	0.86	Agree
6	Nigerian citizens now perceive South Africa negatively because of xenophobic attacks.	178	3.54	0.73	Agree
7	Xenophobic violence has led to calls for retaliation against South African businesses in Nigeria.	178	3.36	0.81	Agree
8	Xenophobia has undermined people-to-people relations between both countries.	178	3.44	0.76	Agree
9	Government interventions have not fully resolved diplomatic tensions caused by xenophobia.	178	3.25	0.89	Agree
10	Xenophobia has damaged the image of South Africa within Africa.	178	3.60	0.64	Agree

Table 3 shows the effects of xenophobia on diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa. The table indicates that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, showing agreement among respondents. The highest mean score of 3.66 was recorded on diplomatic tensions between both countries, while the lowest mean score of 3.25 was recorded on the inability of government interventions to fully resolve diplomatic tensions. This implies that xenophobia has negatively affected bilateral cooperation, public perception, and diplomatic trust between Nigeria and South Africa.

The Socio-economic and Political Implications of Xenophobia on African Unity and Regional Integration

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Socio-Economic and Political Implications of Xenophobia on African Unity and Regional Integration

S/N	Socio-economic and Political Implications of Xenophobia on African Unity and Regional Integration	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Xenophobia threatens peaceful coexistence among African	178	3.59	0.67	Agree

	countries.				
2	Xenophobic violence weakens the ideals of Pan-Africanism in Africa.	178	3.47	0.75	Agree
3	Xenophobia discourages free movement of people within Africa.	178	3.38	0.80	Agree
4	Recurrent xenophobic attacks negatively affect regional economic cooperation.	178	3.31	0.86	Agree
5	Xenophobia poses challenges to the implementation of AfCFTA.	178	3.24	0.88	Agree
6	Xenophobic violence discourages foreign investment and business partnerships.	178	3.43	0.78	Agree
7	Xenophobia contributes to instability and insecurity in African societies.	178	3.55	0.70	Agree
8	Xenophobic attacks weaken diplomatic cooperation among African states.	178	3.36	0.82	Agree
9	Xenophobia promotes mistrust and hostility among African citizens.	178	3.49	0.74	Agree
10	Regional organizations have not adequately addressed xenophobia in Africa.	178	3.22	0.90	Agree

Table 4 shows the socio-economic and political implications of xenophobia on African unity and regional integration. The findings reveal that all the questionnaire items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating agreement among respondents. The highest mean score of 3.59 was recorded on xenophobia threatening peaceful coexistence among African countries, while the least mean score of 3.22 was recorded on the inability of regional organizations to adequately address xenophobia. The result implies that xenophobia undermines African unity, regional integration, economic cooperation, and the objectives of Pan-Africanism in Africa.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that xenophobia in South Africa is largely associated with socio-economic and political conditions that create resentment toward foreign nationals within local communities. The findings further showed that social frustrations arising from economic hardship and public dissatisfaction have contributed significantly to hostility against migrants, particularly Africans residing in South Africa. The finding is in agreement with Gordon (2020), who explained that xenophobic hate crimes in South Africa are strongly connected to social inequality, economic insecurity, and widespread negative perceptions about foreigners. According to Gordon, many South Africans perceive immigrants as competitors for scarce opportunities and social amenities, thereby increasing anti-foreigner sentiments in society. The finding also aligns with the position of Sempijia and Mongale (2022), who identified political narratives, poor living conditions, and intense economic pressure as major conditions fueling anti-immigrant violence in South Africa. The authors emphasized that social tensions often intensify when citizens believe that outsiders are benefiting from opportunities unavailable to local populations. In a similar manner, Crush (2020) argued that governance failures, ineffective migration management systems, and inadequate institutional responses have worsened xenophobic tendencies in South Africa. According to the author, the inability of public institutions to effectively manage migration issues has contributed to the normalization of hostility toward migrants across several communities. The agreement between the present study and previous studies indicates that xenophobia cannot be separated from broader developmental and governance challenges confronting post-apartheid South Africa. The findings suggests that unless issues relating to poverty, unemployment, social inequality, and migration governance are adequately addressed, xenophobic attitudes and violence may continue to threaten peaceful coexistence and regional harmony within Africa.

The findings of the study also revealed that xenophobic violence directed toward Nigerians in South Africa has taken different forms involving attacks on persons, businesses, and properties belonging to migrants. It also further indicated that the hostile actions experienced by Nigerians have generated fear, displacement, insecurity, and economic losses among affected individuals and communities. The finding is in agreement with Abdulyakeen and Rabi (2024), who observed that recurrent attacks against Nigerians in South Africa have exposed many migrants to intimidation, injuries, destruction of businesses, and social exclusion. According to the authors, many Nigerians residing in South Africa have continued to face insecurity and discrimination due to repeated anti-foreigner violence in different communities. The findings also corroborate the report of Human Rights Watch (2020), which documented numerous incidents involving physical assault, robbery, forced displacement, and denial of protection to non-nationals during xenophobic crises in South Africa. According to the organization, many foreign nationals experienced traumatic conditions as a result of weak security responses and inadequate protection mechanisms during violent outbreaks. In addition, the findings agree with Ochogwu, Abdul, and Luka (2025), who noted that anti-Nigerian attacks between 2008 and 2024 created widespread fear and contributed to negative perceptions of South Africa among Nigerians both within and outside the country. The authors maintained that repeated incidents of violence not only affected the welfare of migrants but also heightened tensions between citizens of both nations. The similarity between the current findings and previous studies demonstrates that xenophobic attacks in South Africa have evolved beyond isolated incidents into a recurring security and humanitarian concern affecting African migrants. This further implies that stronger legal protection, security reforms, and public sensitization programs are necessary to safeguard migrants and reduce anti-foreigner violence in South Africa.

The findings of the study revealed that xenophobia has negatively influenced diplomatic engagements and bilateral cooperation between Nigeria and South Africa. The findings also showed that recurring attacks on Nigerians have weakened trust, generated public criticism, and created tensions capable of affecting relations between both countries. The finding is in agreement with Ogunnubi and Aja (2022), who argued that xenophobic violence has created contradictions within Nigeria-South Africa relations despite official diplomatic cooperation between the two states. According to the authors, repeated anti-foreigner attacks undermine citizen diplomacy and reduce mutual confidence among the populations of both countries. The findings also align with Abdulyakeen and Rabi (2024), who stated that persistent attacks against Nigerians have contributed to strained diplomatic interactions, retaliatory sentiments, and increased hostility toward South African interests in Nigeria. The authors explained that such incidents frequently provoke public outrage and compel governmental responses aimed at protecting national interests and citizens abroad. Similarly, Martin (2025) maintained that xenophobia poses serious challenges to bilateral relations and continental economic cooperation because violence against migrants discourages regional trust and cross-border partnerships. According to Martin, anti-immigrant violence threatens not only state-to-state relations but also broader African integration initiatives linked to economic cooperation and mobility. The consistency between the present findings and previous studies suggests that xenophobia has become an important issue in African diplomacy and interstate relations. This therefore indicates that sustainable diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Africa require deliberate efforts toward protecting migrants, strengthening citizen diplomacy, and promoting mutual respect among African states and their populations.

The findings of the study revealed that xenophobia constitutes a major obstacle to African unity, peaceful coexistence, and regional integration across the continent. The findings further indicated that anti-foreigner violence weakens cooperation among African states and creates barriers to continental development initiatives designed to promote integration and collective progress. The finding is in agreement with Martin (2025), who asserted that xenophobia threatens the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) because insecurity and hostility toward migrants discourage free movement, economic partnerships, and regional business cooperation. According to the author, continental integration cannot be effectively achieved where fear, discrimination, and violence against fellow Africans continue to exist. The findings also support the position of Olanrewaju and Nwozor (2022), who explained that rivalry, mistrust, and competing national interests between African powers often undermine collective continental objectives. The authors argued that tensions between Nigeria and South Africa have broader implications for African leadership and regional political stability. In the same vein, Seteolu and Okuneye (2017) observed that struggles for influence and dominance within Africa have sometimes weakened collaborative efforts among leading African states. According to the authors, strained relations between influential countries can negatively affect the realization of Pan-African ideals and collective development goals. The agreement between the present study and earlier studies demonstrates that xenophobia extends beyond domestic violence and has wider continental implications affecting regional peace, diplomacy, and economic integration. This therefore implies that African governments, regional organizations, and continental institutions must intensify efforts toward promoting tolerance, cooperation, and policies that strengthen African unity and peaceful coexistence among member states.

Conclusion

The study concluded that xenophobia remains a significant socio-political challenge in South Africa with far-reaching implications for Nigeria-South Africa diplomatic relations and African regional integration. The study established that socio-economic inequalities, unemployment, poor governance, political narratives, and competition over scarce resources have contributed greatly to anti-foreigner sentiments and recurrent attacks against Nigerians and other African migrants in South Africa. The persistent violence, destruction of properties, displacement, and insecurity experienced by migrants have not only strained bilateral relations between Nigeria and South Africa but have also weakened the ideals of African unity, Pan-Africanism, and peaceful coexistence on the continent. Furthermore, xenophobia poses serious threats to regional economic cooperation, citizen diplomacy, and continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The study therefore concludes that addressing xenophobia requires collaborative efforts by African governments, regional organizations, civil society groups, and citizens through effective governance, economic reforms, public enlightenment, and stronger protection of migrants' rights in order to promote sustainable peace, mutual trust, and regional stability in Africa.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The government of South Africa should strengthen economic and social development policies aimed at reducing unemployment, poverty, and inequality in order to minimize frustrations the supposed root of xenophobic attitudes and violence against foreign nationals.

- ii. Security agencies and relevant government institutions in South Africa should improve the protection of migrants and ensure that perpetrators of xenophobic attacks are promptly investigated and prosecuted to discourage future occurrences.
- iii. The governments of Nigeria and South Africa should strengthen diplomatic dialogue, citizen diplomacy, and bilateral cooperation mechanisms to address tensions arising from xenophobic incidents and promote mutual understanding between their citizens.
- iv. The African Union (AU) and other regional organizations should intensify public enlightenment campaigns and regional integration programmes that promote Pan-Africanism, peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and respect for the rights of African migrants across the continent.

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