

# Chapter 5

## Immigration Policy in South Africa: Public Opinion, Xenophobia and the Search for Progress



Steven Lawrence Gordon

### 5.1 Introduction

The African Union Commission (AUC) (2015) prepared and published Agenda 2063, a strategic framework that lays out a roadmap for regional integration on the African continent. In the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023), the AUC (2015) made it clear that regional cooperation and harmonisation of labour migration policies was central to that roadmap. As part of the plan, the AUC (2018) produced the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA) and its plan of action for the period 2018–2030. In the MPFA, the commission expressed its concern about growing levels of xenophobia on the African continent, arguing that this type of prejudice undermines regional integration efforts. Hostility towards international migrants is a serious issue in South Africa. In recent years, collective anti-immigrant violence has soured relationships between South Africa and its neighbours, damaging the country's participation in regional integration projects. The government has struggled to develop meaningful strategies to deal with anti-immigrant hostility.

To solve the problem of anti-immigrant prejudice, we need to adequately understand it. The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive examination of anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviours in South Africa. Xenophobia is explored using public opinion data from the nationally representative dataset of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS). First, the study will be placed into its proper context. This will include a brief outline of the country's immigration policy before the problem of anti-immigrant violence is reviewed. Second, the findings are presented, examining public attitudes towards anti-immigrant stereotypes, selection criteria preferences, welfare chauvinism and views on combatting xenophobic hate crime. Self-reported public participation in anti-immigrant violence is also assessed.

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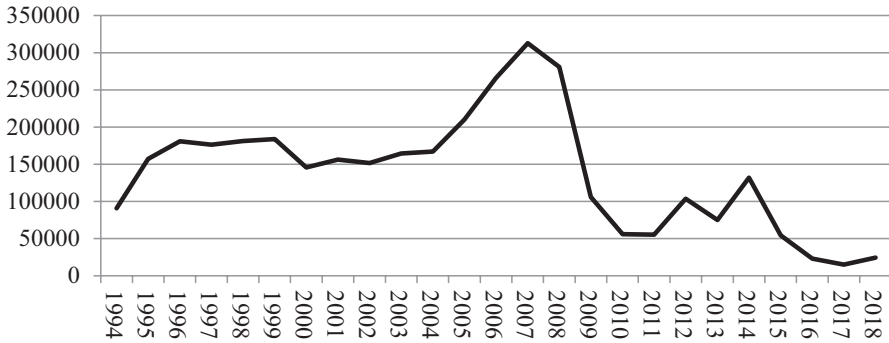
It will show that many believe dangerous lies about immigrants, stereotyping foreigners as criminals and ‘job stealers’. The chapter concludes by outlining what needs to be done to reduce xenophobia in the country.

## 5.2 Immigration Policy Reform in South Africa

It is not possible for us to comprehend xenophobia in South Africa without understanding the evolution of the country’s immigration policy during the modern period. For most of the twentieth century, two distinct policy frameworks governed migration flows. The first accorded migrants basic rights and protections and, eventually, the benefits of full citizenship. This framework was preserved primarily for white migrants. The second migration framework focused on contract labourers of colour and was this track was design to provide workers for certain industries (such as the minerals industry). These contract workers were subject to draconian movement controls. Legislation in the country was only amended to ostensibly deracialise immigration law in 1986 (for a review of immigration policy during this period, see Klotz, 2013).

Following the democratic transition, the new post-apartheid government joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1994. A regional organisation founded in 1992, the SADC was dedicated to a paradigm of linear market integration, pursuing the stepwise harmonisation of goods, labour and capital markets. During this period, the free movement of persons was becoming a more essential goal of those supporting Pan-African integration. Opening national borders for the creation of economic and social growth was outlined as a key priority of the new African Economic Community launched in 1991. Some regional organisations in Africa (such as the East African Community) were making great strides to eliminate visa requirements and liberalise rights of residence and establishment in this period (Abebe, 2017). However, the South African government was initially resistant to calls for visa liberalization within SADC and in the 1990s fought against the creation of visa-free zones which would have allowed the free cross-border movement of people (Maunganidze & Formica, 2018).

The resistance to visa liberalisation in SADC by the South African state was part of a generally restrictive approach to immigration policy. Severe limitations were placed on the number of international migrants that could be legally admitted into the country (Segatti, 2011). In particular, the government worked to limit opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled immigrants. Employers were encouraged to reduce their formal foreign workforce, and state officials placed restrictions on the number of work permits that could be issued. The new democratic government granted wide-ranging powers to immigration officials and police to detain individuals suspected of being undocumented migrants, and significant capital was laid out for border control. The state conducted about 2.9 million deportations between 1994 and 2009 (Fig. 5.1). This approach was very expensive and was criticised as an extremely unproductive method of controlling migration inflows.



**Fig. 5.1** Deportations of undocumented migrants by the South African Department of Home Affairs, 1994–2018. (Source: Data was compiled by the author from annual reports of South Africa’s Department of Home Affairs. Data from 2011 and 2012 is from the 2013 Parliamentary Portfolio Commission on Home Affairs)

Following the passage of comprehensive immigration reform in 2002, the policy environment became more welcoming for skilled foreigners. Further progressive changes followed these initial reforms in the following years, and the country’s immigration policy has been repeatedly amended (in 2004, 2007, 2011 and 2016) with the stated aim of encouraging more skilled labour migration. During this period, the South African government also appeared to soften on the question of border harmonisation in the SADC (Maunganidze & Formica, 2018). New agreements on travel were reached that facilitated intra-regional migration. As a result, the number of deportations between 2009 and 2018 dropped dramatically. The international migrant stock living in the country grew from around two million in 2000 to more than four million in 2019.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the number of SADC citizens moving in and out of South Africa has increased considerably over the last decade.

Despite progressive policy change, the government has remained highly concerned with border security and the risks associated with international migration. This concern is best expressed by the agency most responsible for managing immigration in the country, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). The department often places security concerns above the economic goals outlined in the current immigration policy. Consider an important example, the requirements of the special visa for entrepreneurial migration. The entrepreneurial visa was designed by policy-makers to help foreign entrepreneurs start new businesses in South Africa. The visa requirements designed by the DHA (especially the investment condition), however, have been described by the Helen Suzman Foundation as excessive and internationally uncompetitive (van Lennep, 2019). This limits entry for foreign businesspeople and undermines enterprise development in the country.

<sup>1</sup>The figure is based on estimates from the United Nations Development Programme.

### 5.3 Results: The Extent of Anti-immigrant Sentiment and How It Influences Policy

I will now outline the extent of anti-immigrant sentiment in the country as well as attitudes towards immigration policy using data from SASAS. This dataset was selected because, following xenophobic violence in May 2008, a comprehensive set of questions on migration was introduced into the survey series. This data allowed me to look more closely at how ordinary people feel about immigration in South Africa and what kind of migration regime they would like to see. Each SASAS round was planned to produce a representative sample consisting of 3000 individuals aged 16 years and older in households which are geographically spread across the country's nine provinces.<sup>2</sup> In order to create a nationally representative dataset, benchmark weights are then applied to the data. All data portrayed in this chapter is weighted unless otherwise specified.

#### 5.3.1 *Crime Narratives of Immigration*

Following the democratic transition in South Africa, the country experienced a considerable surge in reported crime. Reports of drug-related crime have, in particular, grown exponentially in the past two decades according to data from the South African Police Services.<sup>3</sup> Many have attributed this upsurge in criminality to international migrant flows. Indeed, the alleged link between international migration and incidence of crime is one of the most widespread anti-immigrant narratives in South Africa. SASAS respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that foreign nationals increase crime rates. Figure 5.2 displays the distribution of answers to this question during the period 2008 to 2018 for the general populace. Approximately two thirds of the adult public saw foreign nationals as detrimental to public safety. Responses to this question did not fluctuate noticeably over the period, implying the stability of this stereotype.

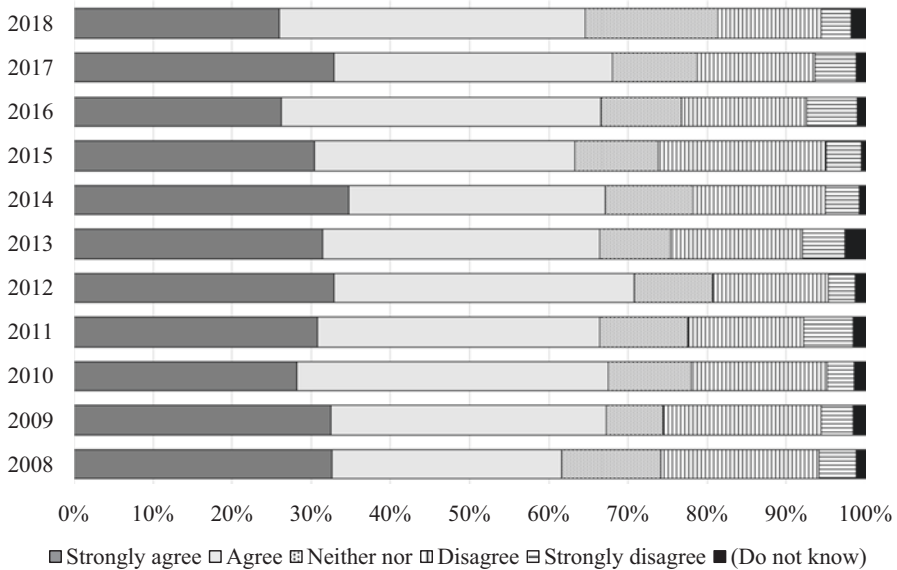
The question of whether international migrants contribute to existing crime levels in South Africa is a difficult one to answer. Data published by state authorities contain insufficient information about perpetrators' identities to establish a clear relationship between international migration and crime rates in the country. Using advanced statistical techniques, Kollamparambil (2019) looked to circumvent this

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<sup>2</sup>The primary sampling units of each round of SASAS are 500 population areas, stratified by province, geographical sub-type and majority population group. These areas were selected using data from the national census. Seven households were selected by fieldworkers at random in each area. Using a Krish grid, an individual aged 16 years or older within each household is chosen to be interviewed.

<sup>3</sup>There were 45,928 drug-related crime incidents recorded by South African Police Services in 1994. In 2018 this figure had risen to 323,547.

*Do you agree or disagree that immigrants increase crime rates?*



**Fig. 5.2** Public attitudes about whether foreign nationals increase crime rates in South Africa, 2008–2018. (Source: South African Social Survey (SASAS) series 2008–2018)

problem by mapping data from 1141 police stations onto datasets from the 2011 National Census and 2016 Community Survey, both conducted by Statistics South Africa. The study tested the association between international migration and crime across 231 municipalities and found *no* evidence of a significant impact. The research suggests that other factors (such as income inequality) better explain crime patterns in South Africa.

The results outlined above are consistent with empirical research in other countries. Let us consider, for example, the existing scholarship on how international migration affects crime levels in the United States. Many ordinary Americans believe that there is a robust relationship between crime and immigration, and several scholars have looked into this question. MacDonald et al. (2013), for instance, found that levels of immigrant concentration were *not* correlated with high crime rates. Immigrant concentration, in fact, seemed to reduce neighbourhood-level crime in their study. Similar findings were observed by Ousey and Kubrin (2014), who discovered that immigration seems to reduce serious levels of crime in American cities. The research from the United States, much like the work of Kollamparambil (2019), tends to show that factors other than migration play a much more important role in determining crime patterns.

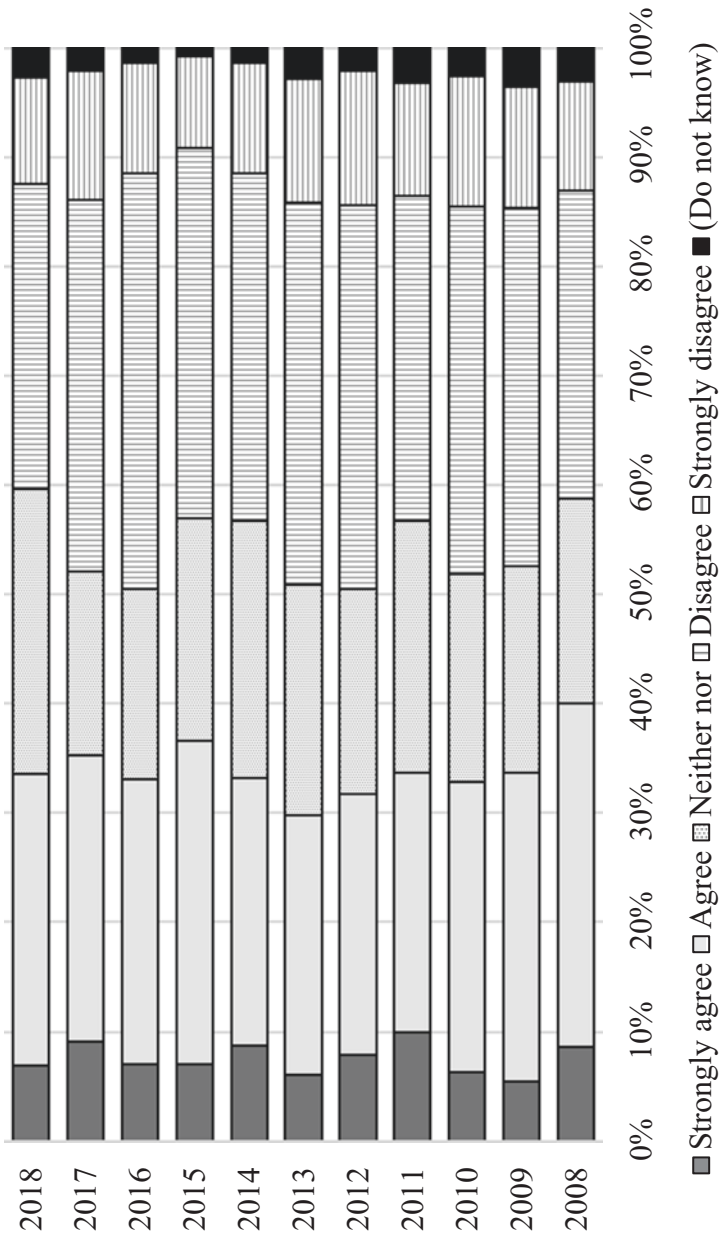
### 5.3.2 *Economic Narratives of Immigration*

One of the most consistent anti-immigrant narratives in South Africa concerns the economic effect of international migration. Many seem to believe external migrant flows have a distinctly negative effect on national economy. To gauge the extent of this belief, SASAS respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that foreign nationals were generally good for South Africa's economy. Responses for the adult population were presented for the period 2008–2018 in Fig. 5.3. The general public is divided on this issue. Almost a third of the adult population saw international migrants as having a beneficial fiscal effect. A similarly sized segment disagreed, and approximately a quarter said that they were unsure about this issue. Public responses to this question did not vary considerably over the period, suggesting the durability of the observed division in national public opinion.

Several recent studies have looked into whether international immigration is beneficial for the South African economy. There is significant empirical evidence to suggest that people are correct to assume that foreign nationals have a positive impact on the economy. Data from a World Bank study shows that levels of immigration into the country were economically beneficial for the nation (Hovhannisyan et al., 2018). During the study period 1996–2011, immigrant inflows were discovered to have a positive effect on the employment and wages of the native-born. Findings from an OECD-ILO (2018) study confirmed these results and found that international migration raises the country's income per capita by as much as 5%. This may be driven by the higher than average educational attainment rate observed amongst foreign-born workers.

The results outlined above are consistent with what empirical scholars have found in other countries. Economists have built models to estimate the gains for the world economy from eliminating various barriers to migration. Without delving into the specifics, the general conclusion of these models is unmistakably positive. The projected gains are frequently in the range of 50–150% of gross domestic product globally (for a detailed discussion, see Clemens, 2011). Indeed, the available evidence suggests that the fiscal returns from lowering international barriers to migration are much greater than returns from reducing trade barriers between countries. The economic benefits of international migration are amongst the reasons that visa reduction and free movement are prioritised as part of the AU's own migration policy framework, as well as Agenda 2063 (AUC, 2018).

*Do you agree or disagree that immigrants are generally good for South Africa's economy?*



**Fig. 5.3** Public attitudes about whether foreign nationals are good for the economy in South Africa, 2008–2018. (Source: South African Social Survey (SASAS) series 2008–2018)

### 5.3.3 *Welfare Chauvinism*

South Africa's welfare system is one of the largest in Africa<sup>4</sup> and the government allocates billions of rand each financial year to a range of different social welfare programmes. A powerful anti-immigrant narrative is that international migration depletes state resources and is a burden on this welfare system. But existing evidence suggests that, in fact, migrant inflows have a net positive impact on public finances. The OECD-ILO (2018) study outlined in the previous section concluded that international migration had a net positive impact on public finances between 1996 and 2011. This may be due to the fact that foreign nationals were found to pay more in taxes (especially income and value added taxes) than locals. In other words, the foreign national community seemed to help strengthen the welfare state in South Africa. Despite their aggregate positive contribution to state finances, many ordinary people would like to exclude all foreign-born persons from accessing welfare.

In SASAS 2016, respondents were asked when they thought foreign nationals should obtain the same rights to social grants and services as citizens already living in the country. The five response categories were: (i) immediately on arrival; (ii) after living in South Africa for a year, whether or not they have worked; (iii) only after they have worked and paid taxes for at least a year; (iv) once they have become a South African citizen; and (v) they should never get the same rights. What was surprising about the public's responses to this question was that heritage and not reciprocity emerged as the main driving mechanism for granting welfare. The most popular response was also the most exclusionary, with 47% of the adult public supporting the strongest form of welfare chauvinism while 29% backed welfare based upon citizenship. A tenth of the adult population said that welfare should be conditional upon payment of taxes and 7% took an unconditional stance on this issue.

'Welfare chauvinism' refers to the unwillingness of the native-born to grant welfare rights to outsiders. This term has been employed in Europe to explain the emergence of right-wing nationalist parties who advocate that the welfare state should be an exclusive system of social protection which is bounded by heritage. At their most extreme, welfare chauvinists argue for excluding the foreign-born from welfare based on their place of birth. In weaker forms, chauvinists of this kind contend that benefits for immigrants should be conditional on, for instance, time spent in the country or citizenship status (for further discussion, see Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2012). It is apparent from data presented here that there is widespread support for an extreme form of welfare chauvinism in modern South Africa. This is troubling as it suggests that a significant segment of the general populace display a deep-seated exclusionary animosity towards outsiders.

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<sup>4</sup>For a comparative discussion of social protection programmes in Africa, see Borat et al. (2017).



### 5.3.4 *Immigrant Selection Criteria*

In immigration policy, admission criteria can be seen as an expression of how ordinary citizens conceive of the nation's boundaries. This can be especially true if the criteria involve cultural factors (such as ethnicity or religion). Throughout South Africa's history, the character of selective immigration regulation has been publicly (and ferociously) debated (Klotz, 2013). In the modern period, factors broadly related to human capital (such as education or work-related skills) have come to dominate debates on access criteria. But, of course, credential-based selection criteria are not neutral concepts and constitute instances of symbolic boundary making (albeit of an acquired variety). In addition, we must consider supranational policy-making on admission criteria. As previously discussed, the AU's Agenda 2063 outlines plans to both harmonise members' immigration control regimes and establish a visa-free zone (AUC, 2015). Under this proposal, selection criteria would be geographical in nature. An individual has to be a citizen of an AU member state (that is, an 'African') to qualify for free movement.

The 2018 round of SASAS included an array of questions about the standards for admitting migrants. On a scale running from extremely unimportant (0) to extremely important (10), respondents were asked to rate four different criteria for immigration. The four were: (i) educational qualifications; (ii) Christian background; (iii) work skills that the country needs; and (iv) African. Using this data, it is possible to acquire a deeper understanding of what selection conditions people think should be placed on immigrants. It would appear that many people want human capital conditions placed on foreigners wishing to settle in the country. Being skilled and well-educated were the most highly-rated criteria while less importance was placed on being African (Fig. 5.4).

During the pre-democratic period, religion (specifically Christianity) was a crucial aspect of public debates on immigrant selection (Klotz, 2013). Given how much the immigration debate has changed since that period, it is surprising that Christianity remains such an important criterion of selection for many. It was interesting to examine how public views on preconditions were distributed against general hostility towards international migrants: people who had a negative view of foreign nationals rated the four criteria, on average, as less important than those with a more positive view. This seems to indicate that there is no precondition that can be placed on immigration that would satisfy this group. There is a segment, in other words, of the general population that would reject all foreign nationals regardless of their cultural or economic character.

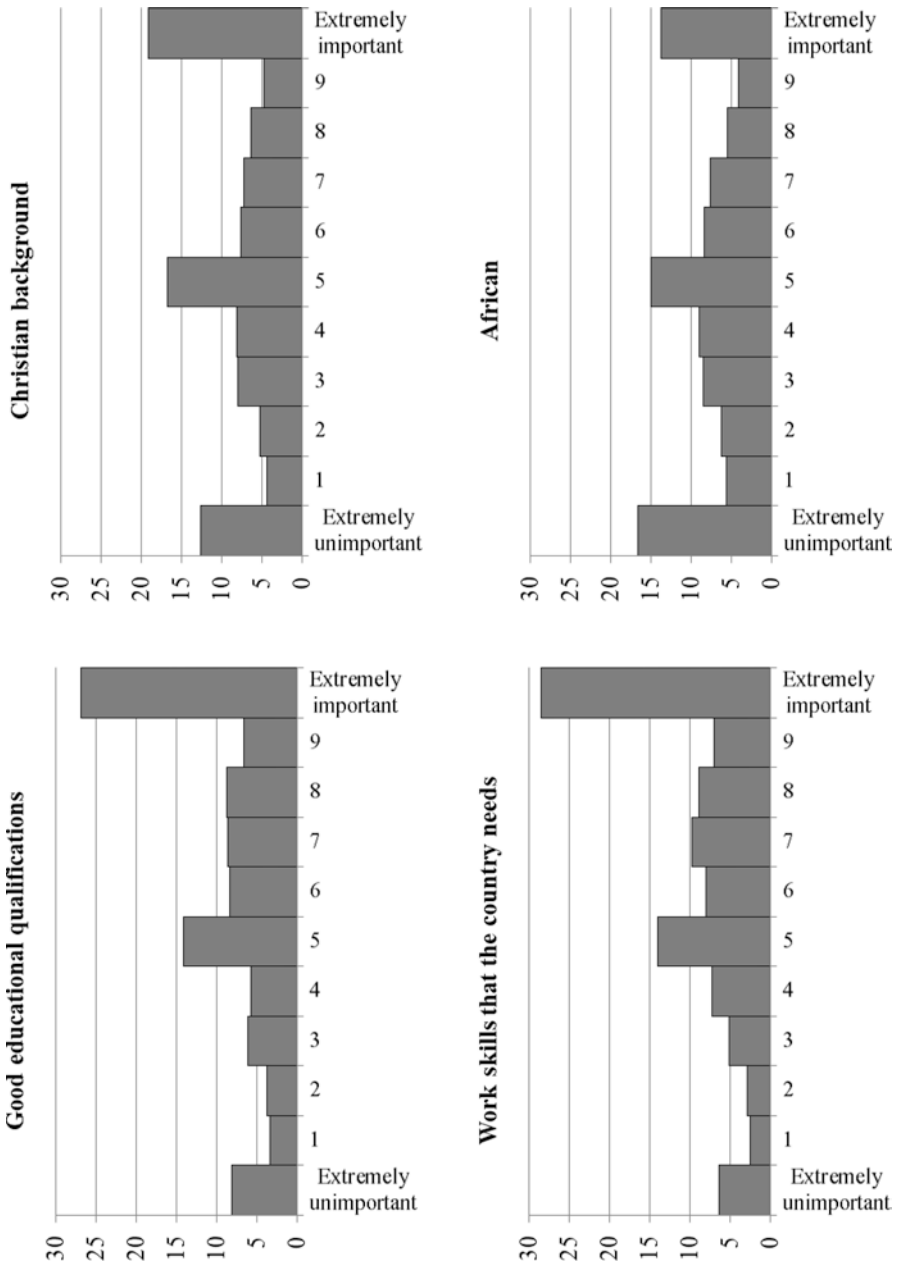


Fig. 5.4 Support for boundary making in immigration selection criteria. (Source: South African Social Survey (SASAS) series 2018)

### 5.3.5 *Discrimination Is a Doorway to Participation in Anti-immigrant Hate Crime*

At the time of writing, South Africa does not have hate crime legislation and the authorities did not gather data on this type of crime<sup>5</sup> However, we can use self-reported public opinion data to obtain an understanding of participation rates in xenophobic violence. In 2015, SASAS introduced a single item which attempted to measure public participation in violence against foreigners living in the country. The question was worded as follows: “Have you taken part in violent action to prevent immigrants from living or working in your neighbourhood?” The results for the period 2015–2018 are presented in Table 5.1. The vast majority of the adult population reported that they had not participated in this form of anti-immigrant aggression and would never do so. The share of the general public who gave this answer varied very little over the period 2015–2018.

Possible participation in anti-immigrant aggression amongst non-participants was found to be much higher than anticipated: more than a tenth of the general public claimed that they had not taken part in an assault on foreign nationals but *would* be prepared to do so. Although most of the South African populace rejected anti-immigrant hate crime, this finding is disturbing. Psychological studies (for example, Webb & Sheeran, 2006) have tended to show that behavioural intention is a reasonably good (albeit not perfect) predictor of future action. In a recent study, Gordon (2020b) found that negative stereotypes about foreign nationals were a robust driver of behavioural intention amongst non-participants. These findings

**Table 5.1** Count of adult population who reported participation in anti-immigrant violence, 2015–2018

	'000 s (% of total adult population of the country)			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Have done it in the past year	892 (2.41)	1224 (3.24)	355 (0.90)	804 (1.99)
Have done it in the more distant past	1272 (3.44)	2052 (5.43)	1673 (4.24)	2966 (7.35)
Have not done it but might do it	4869 (13.16)	3827 (10.14)	4592 (11.64)	4468 (11.07)
Have not done it and would never do it	29,723 (80.34)	30,087 (79.69)	32,510 (82.43)	31,319 (77.58)
(Can't choose)	240 (0.65)	565 (1.50)	310 (0.79)	815 (2.02)

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey 2015–2018

<sup>5</sup>The Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill (B9–2018) has been put forward for debate. But there was significant opposition to the bill and at the time of writing, it was under consideration by the National Assembly.

seem to suggest that anti-immigrant attitudes can have a rallying effect, goading individuals into adopting a violent stance towards foreigners.

It is difficult to corroborate the rates of participation observed in Table 5.1. Using publicly available data, the non-proprietary platform Xenowatch has tracked the number of xenophobic incidents in the country from 1994 to 2019. Hosted and supported by the University of the Witwatersrand, Xenowatch has recorded 529 such incidents over the past 25 years (42 of which occurred in 2018 alone and resulted in 12 deaths). The managers of Xenowatch acknowledge, however, that these figures may be underestimations of the true extent of hate crime victimisation in the country.<sup>6</sup> Because of poor data quality, there are many important questions about xenophobic violence we cannot answer. We do not readily understand, for instance, which foreign groups are the most discriminated against.

Violence is not the only form in which xenophobia may manifest itself. Different types of non-violent discrimination against foreign nationals have also been reported in South Africa. Consider, for instance, anti-immigrant demonstrations or boycotts. Research has shown that participation in such actions is often the first step in a process of escalation that can result in xenophobic violence (Gordon, 2019). Indeed, violent anti-immigrant hate crime cannot be explained without understanding non-violent anti-immigrant discrimination. Policymakers must consider non-violent anti-immigrant activity as an important early warning sign. If sufficient resources were marshalled to nip such activities in the bud, future outbreaks of xenophobic violence could be mitigated.

### 5.3.6 *Explanations for Anti-immigrant Hate Crime*

There is widespread disagreement about the drivers of anti-immigrant hate crime, with ordinary South Africans polarised on who (or what) is to blame for the seeming rise of xenophobic violence. This is an important area of discord. It has been claimed that the causal attribution process is essential to almost all decision-making. Weiner (2006) considers causal explanations to be a powerful force in structuring an individual's attitudes towards injustice in society (also see Sahar, 2014). Indeed, it could be argued that such interpretative schemas are at the heart of how many people think about societal problems such as hate crime. Research shows that certain types of lay attributions can be used to justify violence or exonerate perpetrators (for a discussion of this research, see Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019). Let us look at what the general public think the primary causes of anti-immigrant hate crime in South Africa are.

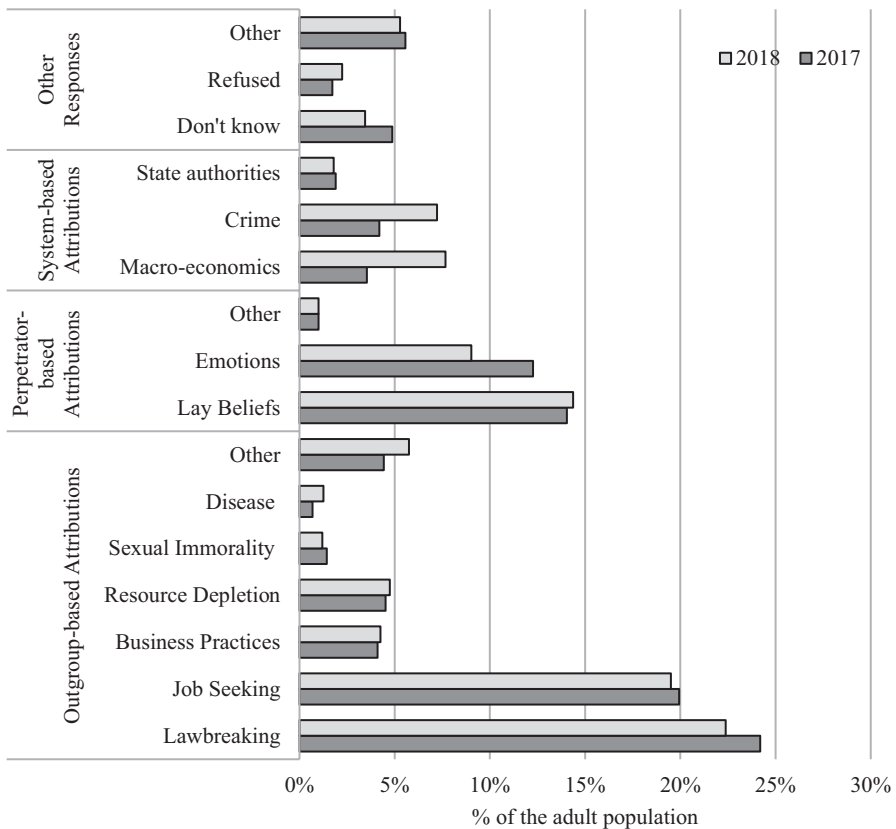
Respondents in both SASAS 2017 and 2018 were asked the following question: "There are many opinions about why people take violent action against foreigners living in South Africa. Please tell me the MAIN REASON why you think this

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<sup>6</sup>For an outline of the complexity of documenting hate crime statistics in South Africa, see Mlilo and Misago (2019).

happens.” The question was open-ended, which allowed survey participants to answer in their own words. The open-ended format reduced bias in answering and allowed respondents to give salient information about the issue. After an extensive review, each response was then evaluated and sorted into one of the 16 predetermined categories (Fig. 5.5). Some respondents put forward multiple reasons for the violence and, therefore, the data was captured with multiple responses. Reviewing these results, it is clear that the crime and economic narratives outlined earlier in the chapter play a decisive role in how people thought about the causes of anti-immigrant hate crime.

The most popular answers identified in the given textual responses were outgroup-based attributions. About half of the adult population blamed the violence on the activities of foreign nationals. The most common of these outgroup-based reasons was lawbreaking. Roughly a fifth of the total population ascribed the



**Fig. 5.5** Main reasons given to explain why people take violent action against foreigners living in South Africa in 2017 and 2018 (multiple responses). (Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey 2017–2018)

violence to the criminal behaviour of foreigners.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by economic outgroup-based schemas, of which foreign labour market activity was the most prevalent. A fifth of the populace listed the labour practices of foreigners and this was the most popular of all economic outgroup-based attributes given. Other outgroup-based attributions (including sexual immorality and disease transmission) were far less popular. A minority made a highly general statement about foreigners being a threat (for example that immigrants were trying to ‘destroy’ and/or ‘take over’ the country).

When compared to outgroup-based attributions outlined above, perpetrator-based answers were far less popular. The most common type of perpetrator-based attributions concerned lay beliefs about foreigners and their behaviours. A seventh of the populace said that it was people’s own views about immigrants that drove them to violence. The second most frequently cited perpetrator-based attribute was emotion, with respondents saying that locals were motivated by their emotive state (such as fear or hatred) to attack the foreign-born. Of all the emotions listed by respondents as main causes, jealousy or envy were the most common. Only about a tenth of the adult population identified system-based attributes, such as macro-economic forces (for example, poverty or unemployment) or a culture of law-breaking, as primary causes.

### ***5.3.7 Preferences for Strategies to Combat Anti-immigrant Hate Crime***

In the current period, the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (hereafter, the NAP) is the main policy instrument to address xenophobia in South Africa. Developed through a comprehensive consultation process that began in 2015, the plan serves as the nation’s guide to eradicating societal intolerance.<sup>8</sup> The document acknowledges the existence of anti-immigrant hate crime and the serious challenge it presents to South African society. Here xenophobia is defined as an “attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-nationals in a given population” (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2019: 9). The NAP includes a targeted set of actions to reduce xenophobia centred on immigrant integration, improved migration management, and better law enforcement.

Using SASAS data, it is possible to ascertain which anti-xenophobia interventions enjoy the most public support. In the 2018 SASAS round, fieldworkers asked respondents what could “be done to *STOP* attacks against foreigners living in the

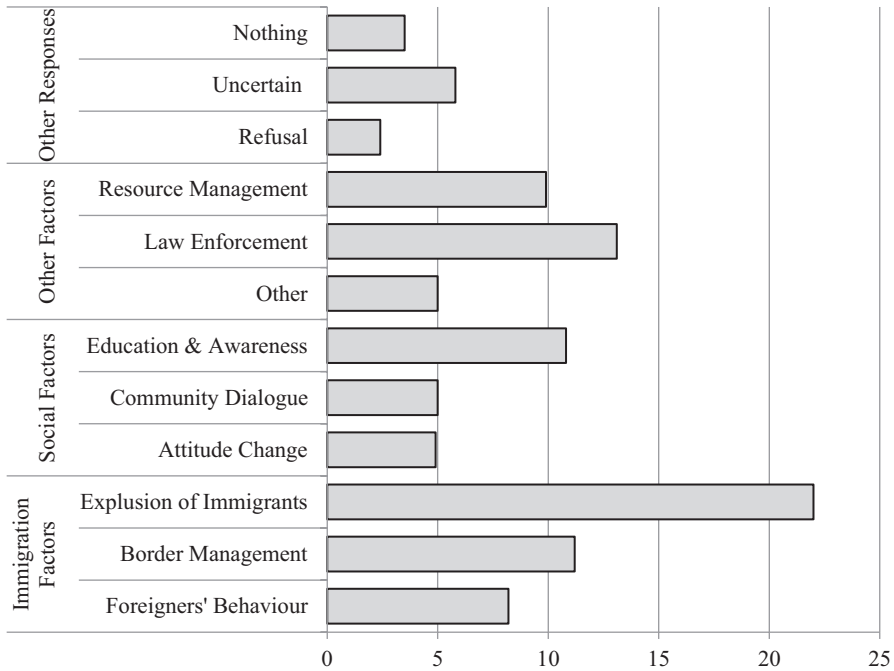
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<sup>7</sup>A surprisingly large share of the general public blamed the attacks on the alleged involvement of foreign nationals in the sale of illegal narcotics. About a fifth of the adults who opted for outgroup blaming (or 13% of the total) specifically mentioned drug trafficking.

<sup>8</sup>The NAP was written to provide the foundation to develop a comprehensive public policy.

country.” The question was open-ended and this format allowed respondents to provide an unbiased answer to fieldworkers. A substantial proportion of the general adult population (88%) gave a valid answer to this question, suggesting a powerful desire amongst the public to end xenophobic violence. A surprising diversity of responses were given and no single proposal commanded a majority of popular support. After the data was reviewed, a set of 12 codes for the open-ended question were developed based on typologies adopted for classifying similar types of studies. Public preferences for the 12 categories are displayed in Fig. 5.6.

The most popular anti-xenophobia solutions proposed by the adult population concerned migration management. A fifth of the public felt that deporting all (or most) foreign nationals from the country would resolve the problem of xenophobic violence. A tenth identified better border controls, while 8% told fieldworkers that migrants should change their behaviour. Many identified public awareness and community-based approaches to xenophobia. A tenth preferred education campaigns and a twentieth championed community dialogue while a similar proportion advocated for attitudinal change. Resource management strategies (for example, job creation and poverty reduction) were preferred by 10% of the general population. Overall, it is clear from Fig. 5.6 that the general public is divided on how xenophobic violence should be addressed, with many favouring solutions that could be described as reactionary.



**Fig. 5.6** Main solutions proposed to solve anti-immigrant violence in South Africa (multiple response). (Source: South African Social Survey (SASAS) series 2018)

Citizen preferences for combatting xenophobic hate crime can be linked to lay attributes of anti-immigrant violence. In a comprehensive study of public opinion, Gordon (2020a) found that public beliefs about the etiology of an intergroup conflict influenced their desire for conflict resolution as well as the type of solutions preferred. Outgroup-based attributions were found to influence the espousal of prejudicial solutions to anti-immigrant violence (for example, mass expulsion of foreign nationals). If a person attributed hate crime to perpetrator-based causes (such as beliefs about foreigners or emotions) then they were more likely to favour liberal solutions (for example, education campaigns). The results of this study show how anti-immigrant crime and economic narratives undermine popular support for anti-xenophobia strategies in South Africa.

## 5.4 Discussions and Conclusions

The modern South African migration regime is not perfect, and significant reform is required. The current task is to make the regime more beneficial for people living in the country by encouraging more skilled and entrepreneurial immigration. Progressive reform will not be easy given the current state of public opinion. The data presented in this chapter demonstrates both the extent and depth of anti-immigrant sentiment in South Africa. As discussed in this chapter, there is no empirical justification for anti-immigrant stereotypes (such as foreign nationals are a major cause of unemployment or crime). Public attitudes towards immigration in South Africa are probably influenced by the lack of knowledge people have about this issue.<sup>9</sup> The general populace needs to be better informed about immigration and its economic and social impacts on the country. In addition, given the climate of public opinion outlined in this chapter, reformers must show courage and find ways to generate support for their policies and programmes.

The persistent preoccupation of some policymakers with restrictionism seems to have compromised the use of international immigration to boost economic growth. A preventive regime driven by a preoccupation with security forces foreigners into spaces of exploitation. The effect is an unproductive immigration regime focused primarily on control and deterrence to the detriment of human rights. Moreover, it is important to consider the relationship between public opinion and policy in South Africa. In immigration policy, we can observe an overemphasis on the securitisation of borders and this overemphasis only exaggerates anti-immigrant perceptions amongst the public. There is a need to move the general focus of the immigration debate away from deterrence and control towards management and integration.

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<sup>9</sup> Consider, for example, how the general public answered the following question: “What is the size of the international migrant population in South Africa?” Gordon et al. (2020) examined lay beliefs about the number of foreign nationals living in the country and the results showed that the most of the adult populace are out step with official estimates. A distinct majority was found to overestimate the nation’s international immigrant stock by a substantial margin.



Policymakers can persuade the general public to embrace a more progressive view of migration. Many people already view migrants as good for the national economy and would be more positive about immigration if it were framed in terms of its economic benefits.

There are several progressive reforms that would greatly benefit foreign nationals already living in South Africa. Consider, for instance, the case for the regularisation of undocumented migrants. Without documentation, foreigners can be deprived of their access to basic services such as healthcare, education and work. In addition, the welfare of this group cannot be monitored and managed. Past regularisation programmes have been effective in improving immigrant livelihoods (Klotz, 2013) and similar programmes could be just as successful if introduced timeously. Another intervention that deserves greater state investment is immigrant integration programmes that would help foreign nationals establish positive contacts in the communities where they live. According to existing public opinion research, positive (that is, friendly and cooperative) contact with foreign nationals reduces anti-immigrant attitudes in South Africa (for a review of this research, see Gordon, 2018).

The chapter has advanced our understanding of mass attitudes towards immigration policy in South Africa. Using a unique longitudinal public opinion dataset, it has mapped attitudes for the period 2008–2018. Crime and economic narratives about immigration have been highlighted, issues also noted by other scholars (e.g., Klotz, 2013). Disaggregated data showed how durable these narratives were over the period. In addition, the chapter explored welfare chauvinism and public preferences for immigration admission criteria. These issues have received little attention in the existing scholarship on xenophobia in South Africa. The data presented in this chapter has shed new light on public attitudes towards anti-immigrant hate crime. It has shown how crime and economic narratives undermine existing efforts to fight this particular form of hate crime. Based on a review of the available evidence, a number of anti-xenophobia interventions can be put forward.

This chapter established that a clear minority in the country support participation in anti-immigrant hate crime. South Africa has strong anti-discrimination laws but the mechanisms to enforce them are often weak when it comes to immigrants. In addition, many migrants suspect enforcement agencies are not on their side and many victims do not report violations of their rights. Interventions that could improve the situation include shorter procedures, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and greater assistance for victims. This can include legal aid so that immigrants can better access justice via the legal system. The country also needs adequate hate crime legislation. This would allow authorities to target hate crime and to gather data on this type of crime. As this chapter has outlined there is still a lot we don't know about hate crime in South Africa and this undermines anti-xenophobia policy.

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