

South Africa:  
Xenophobia, Afrophobia, and the Media



Mahmoud Ameen  
Julia Canty  
Shona Kambarami  
Vanessa Natale

Mobility and Forced Migration  
Professor Daniel Naujoks  
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## Abstract

This paper will examine if the media has a role in perpetuating negative attitudes in South Africa towards immigrants. In trying to examine the role of the media, this paper addresses questions such as the extent to which the media contributes to xenophobic attitudes, and whether the media links the economic anxieties of South Africans to the issue of migration. In addition, the paper examines secondary questions relating to the origin and prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa and whether a specific group of migrants is targeted. We used a qualitative analysis of 147 relevant English language articles published online between October 2014 to April 2015 to operationalize our hypothesis. Our findings suggest that the media maintains a largely pro-immigration tone in reporting, while acknowledging the general anti-immigration sentiment among lower class native South Africans associated with economic insecurities. We found this anti-immigration sentiment to be directed specifically against African immigrants, giving rise to a distinctive form of xenophobia called “afrophobia.”

## Introduction

South Africa has witnessed episodes of xenophobic incidents since the end of apartheid. Given the international and African support and goodwill that South Africa has garnered, it would seem unlikely that South Africa would be a fertile ground for xenophobia. This paper will examine the phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa. Xenophobia is defined as “a deep dislike of foreigners.” However, it goes further than that. Xenophobia manifests itself in the behaviors of governments, the general public and the media (McDonald, 2005). In this paper, we will examine whether South African media plays a role in perpetuating negative attitudes towards immigrants in the country.

This paper will be divided into four sections – literature review, methodology, results, and discussion. In the literature review section, we will look at the immigration policy of South Africa, the South African economy, the origins of xenophobia, and the concept of *afrophobia*. The second section will outline the methodology used in this paper, while the third will detail the results of our media analysis. Finally, we will discuss whether the media contributes to xenophobia, links immigration with the economy, discusses the origin of xenophobia, and whether specific groups are targeted for anti-immigrant attacks.

## Literature Review

### Immigration

When discussing immigration policy in South Africa it is important to note that the majority of the white population are descendants of immigrants arriving in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Crush, 2001). The white minority of those that held power throughout apartheid were descendants of immigrants themselves, although they believed they were the true and rightful natives of South Africa. When contextualizing immigration policy in South Africa today, it is vital to understand apartheid's role in attitudes and opinions of non-nationals.

Immigration policy has been shaped by the post-1994 nation-building, democracy and human rights-prioritized projects that came about through the governmental transition between the National Party and the African National Congress (Peberdy, 2001). Apartheid's legacy of strict segregation influenced an incredibly inclusive constitution and a national identity built on such. South African citizenship was inclusive to all those that were South African, and their identities were bounded in both territory and law, creating a sense of inclusion and exclusion due to national identity (Peberdy, 2001). This began a mindset of entitled nationals with escalating anxieties about limited state resources, housing, and employment and who could benefit from such.

South Africa, and its perceived economic opportunities and inclusive constitution has seen an increase in immigration since 1994. The Aliens Control Act of 1991 was one of the last pieces of apartheid legislation, and while it was amended in 1995, it was not fully changed until the Immigration Act of 2002 (Dodson & Crush, 2004). The new Immigration Act vaguely discussed

preventing xenophobia but had no mention of how to do so. While immigration in South Africa was based upon race and culture during apartheid, the new Immigration Act shifted to replace the old determinants to those based on economic growth by laying out immigration policies that focused mostly on the increase of skilled migrant labor. This act also set in law the concept of “community policing” to control undocumented migration (Warren, 2015). Measures of community policing set in law are in direct opposition to the brief anti-xenophobia rhetoric, suggesting that South Africans should constantly be on watch for undocumented immigrants.

The 2011 census showed 2.2 million documented immigrants in South Africa, consisting of almost 6% of the entire population. While the government has tried to respond to these increasing numbers of immigrants, they have struggled to implement existing laws. Under current law, there are guidelines protecting against the detainment of migrants, but in reality, even based on perception alone one can be detained (Warren, 2015). Between 1994 and 2008, South Africa has deported 1.7 million undocumented migrants. In 2006, 260,000 migrants were arrested and deported (Crush, 2008).

## Economy

With a Gross Domestic Product of 313 billion US dollars in 2015, South Africa has the second largest economy in the African continent (World Bank, 2016). Despite South Africa’s sizable economy, unemployment, income inequality, and poverty are long-standing problems that have affected the country (UNDP, 2014). South Africa has an unemployment rate of 26.6% and the World Bank labeled it as having the highest level of inequality in the world. The formation of

informal industries is a recognized response to the limitations experienced by the black South African population at the time (McKeever, 1998).

In present times, the area of conflict between South Africans and migrants has been in the informal sector. Perceived opportunities for employment in better jobs with higher wages is a major ‘pull’ factor for international migrants who travel to South Africa. However, this is not the reality they face. Despite being educated and skilled, migrants largely have to settle for work in the low paid informal sector (Akintola & Akintola, 2015). Andrew Charman and Laurence Piper (2012) attribute anti-foreigner sentiment to the fact that many South Africans perceive foreigners as a threat to their socio-economic well-being. They argue that the competition between local and foreign storekeepers for a share of the *spaza* (small shop) market has often given rise to xenophobic violence.

Research found that more than 51.5% of the spazas are run by foreigners, typically owned by Somalis, Ethiopians and Bangladeshis (Mail and Guardian, 2015). Evidence shows that foreign operated spaza shops have a competitive advantage because foreign entrepreneurs have greater finances and purchase within buying collectives. These advantages allow foreign operated spazas to obtain products at a lower cost than their South African competitors. The rise of foreign storekeepers has been a cause for envy in township entrepreneurs who feel they cannot thrive as business owners in their own communities.

Foreign storekeepers are given extensive coverage in the media, with some articles referencing the common perception that foreigners “are killing local businesses and they don’t hire locals.”

(Daily Maverick, 2015) Summarizing the findings from different surveys, McDonald et al. (2000) reached the conclusion that regardless of migrant origins, the South African perception is that they are “flooding” the country, “stealing jobs,” and overburdening social services. McDonald et al. argue that much of the negative stereotyping is unfounded. Their findings stress that migration into South Africa is neither chaotic nor overwhelming, rather it is a highly regularized process. Furthermore, data shows that the country’s foreign-born population is more likely to occupy positions that locally-born workers are not willing to accept (Migrating for Work Research Consortium, 2014). Moreover, research argues that migrants create jobs in certain sectors and bring a range of skills and services which are beneficial to the development of the economy in South Africa (Maharaj, 2002).

## Xenophobia

Xenophobia is not new to South Africa. Incidents of xenophobic violence goes back to the end of apartheid. There are many theories that attempt to explain the reason why xenophobia is very prevalent. These theories can be divided into three sets - isolation, scapegoating, and the biocultural hypothesis (Tella, 2016).

The isolation theory suggests that xenophobia is due to the isolation of apartheid South Africa from the rest of the world. This isolation created many underlying conditions that make xenophobia widespread. During apartheid there was considerable white migration while there was very limited black African migration into South Africa. This meant limited contact between South Africans and the rest of Africa. When apartheid ended, the sudden influx of African migrants was met with hostility and hatred (Tella, 2016).

The scapegoating theory states that xenophobia is a result of the need for South Africans, especially black South Africans, to blame others for the lack of improvement to their economic condition after the end of apartheid (Tella, 2016). The end of apartheid brought to South Africa many opportunities and even more promises. However, due to the economic realities, many black South Africans remain poor and unemployment is still high (Steenkamp, 2009). The increase political freedoms of post-apartheid, the increase in the number of migrants, and the lack of economic opportunities led to South Africans using these new political freedoms to blame the newcomers for their economic woes.

The final theory is the bio-cultural hypothesis. This hypothesis states that due to the biological and cultural differences between South Africans and other Africans, it becomes easy for South Africans to distinguish themselves from other Africans. It is important to note that these differences are somewhat arbitrary. They include having darker skin, or not speaking the local language. Furthermore, because of these differences, immigrants are likely to stick together when they come to South Africa and not assimilate, which in turn makes them more likely to be targeted (Tella, 2016).

These three hypotheses are useful in understanding the present trend of *afrophobia*. Christopher Isike and Efe Isike (2012) describe Afrophobia as “Africa’s fear and hatred of itself.” African migrants are imagined and treated as the ‘African Other,’ and seen as inferior to the South African citizen. The reason why this trend has been established is public sentiment accepting European foreigners as tourists or investors, while rejecting African foreigners as taking



resources and jobs, while facilitating crime. Much of this can be attributed to, as briefly discussed previously, post-1994 nation-state building. The post-apartheid state constructed an inclusive, but narrow definition of citizenship based upon notions of territory and nation-states. Gordon (2010) believes this nationalist discourse, when applied to immigration policies, perceives African foreigners as threatening to the social and economic freedoms of South African citizens and thus their incorporation should be limited. Xenophobia, and more specifically afrophobia, can be viewed as state practice through the focus of citizenship and nationalism post apartheid.

### Media and Xenophobia in South Africa

The South African media has written widely on immigration, xenophobia, and afrophobia. While it is hard to specify whether the media itself fuels xenophobic opinions, the media have a responsibility to not exacerbate xenophobia by internalizing the language, reproducing anti-immigrant stories, research and quotes and giving outlets to xenophobic reporters (Danso & McDonald, 2001).

McDonald et al. (2005) understands the South African media as both a reflection of racism and xenophobia as well as an instigator. The media can both represent public sentiment but can inflate or distort, through presentation, the reality on the ground. Research has shown that since 1995 the public opinion in Southern Africa as a whole is incredibly xenophobic. While this is the case, media coverage has continued to polarize, with press rhetoric either being strongly anti-immigrant or pro-immigrant (McDanold & Jacobs, 2000).

## Methodology

Data gathering began with a limited Google search for articles published on South African (.co.za) written online news media websites (“news”) between October 1 2014 and April 31 2015. Using five search phrases: “African Migrant”; “Foreigner”; “Immigrant Zimbabwe”; “Unemployment Migrant” and “Xenophobia,” the search yielded an initial sample population of 215 articles reported across 21 separate media outlets.

It is important to note that more established English language media with higher readership like Sunday Times and Daily Sun did not have electronic archives that could be readily accessible. Times Live, Mail & Guardian and Independent Online proved to be the leading online resources offering readers news and information on South Africa. Visiting these news sites allowed us to find a large number of articles for our analysis.

The articles were distributed among four researchers who read each piece of assigned reporting and, using standardized inclusion and exclusion criteria, chose relevant articles for the final analysis. Each article was read by an individual researcher and was assessed for the tone and rhetoric toward migrants and classified as pro-immigration, neutral, or anti-immigration overall. This classification was based on the tone of reporting, the views of the subjects interviewed and the overall slant of the reporting – articulating the point of view of either side, or remaining neutral.

The articles were also assessed according to linkages between immigration, migrants and the economy or other policy measures. The paper also analysed whether a particular migrant

population was more vulnerable to xenophobic attacks. To do this, the origin of the migrants mentioned in each article were tabulated as was the relationship between migrant origin and xenophobia in each article.

Of the initial 215 articles, 68 were excluded according to the standardized exclusion criteria detailed below, leaving 147 relevant articles which formed the sample used for this research paper. Due to the removal of duplicate articles, where multiple search terms were mentioned in individual newspapers reports, the number of media outlets represented decreased from 21 to fifteen. Duplicate articles were removed at random, and no particular media outlet was prioritized.

The results of this content analysis were tabulated in a spreadsheet and from this raw data, trends were analysed in order to justify the conclusions the research team arrived at in the end of this paper.

### **Inclusion Criteria:**

Each article was read and included if:

- a. It was published in an English language media outlet
- b. The article was written by a South African news organization
- c. The reporting was topical and the search term was central, and not incidental, to bulk of the story
- d. The article was a piece of written reporting, including opinion pieces
- e. The article was written within the specified time frame (October 1 2014 to April 31 2015)

### **Exclusion Criteria:**

Articles were excluded if:

- a. Non-English language reporting
- b. The article was written by a non-South African news media outlet
  - c. The search term was incidental to the reporting and the article did not address immigrants or issues surrounding immigration directly
- d. Non-written forms of reporting, including photo-essays and audio/video reporting
  - e. Reviews of arts, sports and culture, including book reviews, were excluded from analysis

Importantly, while the authors stand by the assertions made in this study, the research was limited in significant ways which may call into question the extrapolation of this data across a wider sample size of South African media.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

- a. The study was limited to English media which excludes the views of a multiplicity of popular newspaper outlets.
- b. Only outlets that have an online presence and allow for google searching of their online archives were included in the study - this methodology excluded many of the more popular and widely circulated outlets in South Africa.
- c. The study is restricted to a short time frame, which may be inadequate to fully appreciate the depth of coverage as well as the general attitude toward immigrants and immigration issues in South Africa.
- d. The study has been undertaken outside of South Africa by a research group mostly unfamiliar with the local attitudes toward immigrants and immigration and not versed in the nuances of the local-migrant relationship.

## Results

**Table 1: Relevant Articles**

	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE (%)
Times Live	30	20
Mail & Guardian	27	18
Independent Online	23	15
Daily Maverick	18	12
Eye Witness News	18	12
Rand Daily Mail	9	6
News24	7	5
The Citizen	6	4
Defence Web	3	2
Financial Mail	1	1
Herald Live	1	1
The Sowetan	1	1
The Daily Vox	1	1
Tourism Update	1	1
Zootnet	1	1

Total	147	100
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As shown in Table 1, the top five news outlets that reported most on migrants and immigration using the search terms provided were the Times Live (20%), Mail & Guardian (18%), Independent Online (15%), Eye Witness News (12%) and the Daily Maverick. Of these, only the Times Live is among the top ten big daily newspaper list (#5) (Manson, 2016).

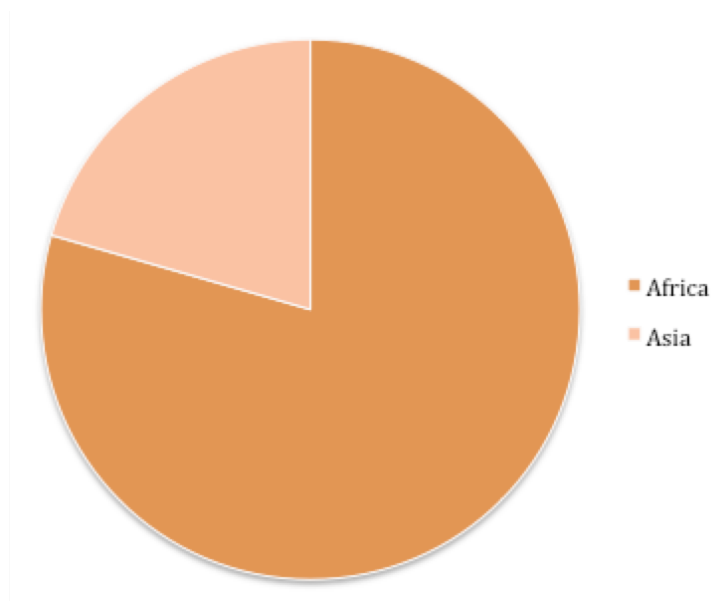
Although we conducted our search using a range of search terms, the most number of articles were yielded using the search phrases “African migrant,” (31%) “xenophobia,” (28%) and “foreigner” (22%) (see Table 2). This was consistent with our qualitative and quantitative assessment that when discussed, the term “immigrant” most often referred to an immigrant, refugee or asylum seeker from within the African continent (79.4%) (see Figure 1).

**Table 2: Search Terms**

SEARCH TERM	NUMBER OF TERMS	PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE (%)
African Migrant	46	31
Foreigner	37	25
Immigrant Zimbabwe	22	15
Unemployment Migrant	1	1
Xenophobia	41	28
Total	147	100

Qualitatively, there was an association between reporting on migrants and the term “xenophobia,” (28%) however a secondary finding of this research introduced the concept of “afrophobia.”

**Figure 1: Region of Origin of Migrant**



Amongst those African migrants mentioned in the article, Somalis were mentioned most (21.4%), although this statistic is likely inflated due to reporting of targeted violence against Somali *spaza* owners in Soweto in 2005, an incident which spurred similar violence, and subsequent news media reporting, in January 2015 (see Table 4). Zimbabweans (13%), Ethiopians (12.1%), Mozambicans (10.7%), and Pakistanis (9.3%) rounded out the top 5 nationalities mentioned in association with migrants in the newspaper articles (Table 3). This is significant as, overall, the country of origin of the immigrants in the story was mentioned 64% of the time.



**Table 3: Origin of Migrant**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Somali	46	21.4
Zimbabwean	28	13.0
Ethiopian	26	12.1
Mozambican	23	10.7
Pakistani	20	9.3
Bengali	19	8.9
Malawian	15	7.0
Congolese	11	5.1
Nigerian	10	4.7
Chinese	3	1.4
Burundian	3	1.4
Tanzanian	2	1.0
Indian	2	1.0
Ghanaian	2	1.0
Senegalese	1	0.5
Rwandan	1	0.5

Malian	1	0.5
Eritrean	1	0.5

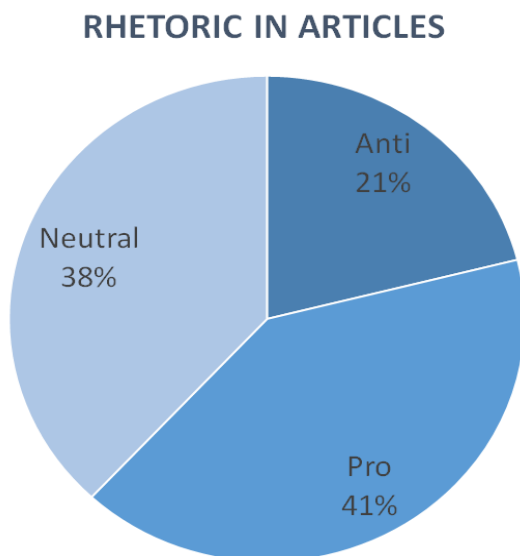
Coverage of the issue of immigration and migrants was shown to be dependent on the timing of reporting. The number of articles written increased significantly between in January 2015, and again in April 2015, months in which qualitative analysis shows increased violence against immigrants in different communities prompted more media coverage of the issue (Table 4).

**Table 4: Date of Reporting**

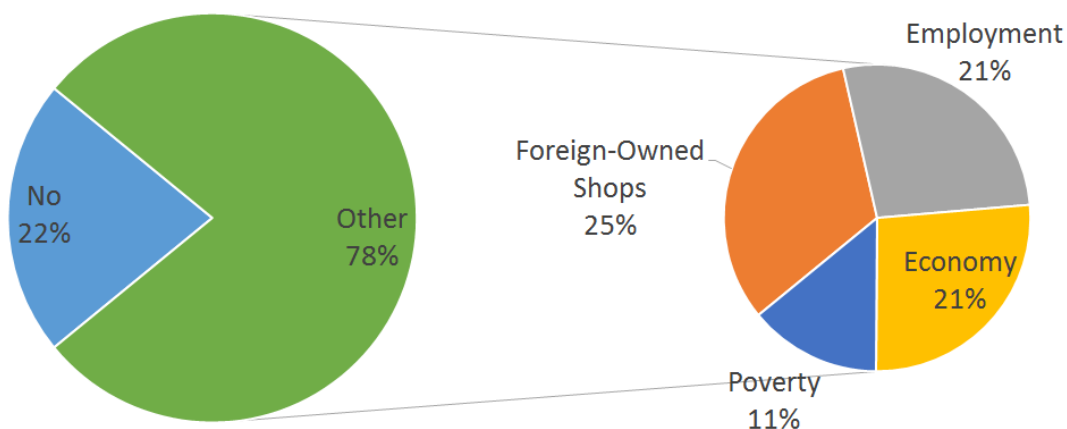
MONTH OF PUBLICATION	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE (%)
October 2014	10	7
November 2014	7	5
December 2014	7	5
January 2015	40	27
February 2015	18	12
March 2015	15	10
April 2015	50	34
Total	147	100

Drawing from the 147 articles from English language newspapers between October 2014 and April 2015, the findings suggest that coverage of immigration by the South African press has been overwhelmingly positive or neutral. The trends from the analysis reveal more pro-immigration (41%) articles than anti-immigration (21%). We also see a large number of neutral (38%) articles. Although the reportage is not entirely positive, it would appear to be improving over time.

It was common to see reference made to the economy, with an overwhelming 78% of the articles containing references to the economy (21%), employment (21%), foreign-owned shops (25%), or poverty (11%). By contrast, the media paid less attention to policy, with mention of other policies such as immigration policies or community policing found in 43% of the sample.



## PERCENTAGE OF ARTICLES THAT MENTION THE ECONOMY



### Discussion

The purpose of this research paper was to begin to understand the role, if any, that South African press had in influencing xenophobic attacks in April 2015. From our findings, it can be assessed that the press widely discussed xenophobia and immigration, but the majority of it was interpreted as pro-immigrant. While acknowledging xenophobia, the press had very little influence on anti-immigrant sentiments but represented a multiplicity of voices.

These results, when paired with other quantitative and qualitative research on the subject prove sound. Recalling that xenophobic press relies on public sentiment and reality, there has certainly been an increase in immigration so the initial shock of African migrants in post-1994 South Africa has certainly waned over the years. While xenophobia continues to be experienced on the ground, the level of xenophobic press has certainly dropped which can be attributed to a shift in public sentiment regarding immigration (MacDonald & Jacobs, 2005).

This shift in public sentiment also aligns with previous research showing the increase of polarization of coverage in the press. Danso and McDonald (2001) noted in their research regarding immigration in the press that there was an increasing number of articles beginning to represent a pro-immigrant rhetoric or challenge stereotypes about immigrants. This research supports both of these notions as the press coverage analyzed has been polarized as pro-immigrant.

It is also important to note the increase in pro-immigrant rhetoric can be attributed to those that control the media. Xenophobic rhetoric can be harmful to the interests of corporations, as skilled migrant labor is vital to their business. The Immigration Act of 2002 put heavy weight on the invitation of skilled migrant labor and xenophobic sentiments in the media could disturb this influx of labor. Corporations rely on immigration, and it is usually those corporate elites that fund the media (Macdonald & Jacobs, 2005). All of these factors considered, our findings both differ and align with previous research as there has been a shift in anti-immigrant rhetoric to pro-immigrant rhetoric in the media.

Although the results of our data found a fairly large portion of pro-immigrant and neutral articles suggesting a more balanced media debate on immigration in South Africa, when scrutinizing the content of the articles, this study found that there is a dominant discourse that makes a connection between immigration and the economy. In a sizable portion of articles, foreign owned businesses were portrayed as having an impact on the livelihoods of South Africans. By representing migrants as successful during times of economic hardship, the media may be inadvertently encoding a message of competition into news articles.

In the literature review section, we presented three different sets of theories on the origin and prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa – the isolation theory, scapegoating, and the bio-cultural hypothesis. In this section, we will test which one of those theories are most in line with our findings.

The isolation theory suggests that South Africa's xenophobia is mainly due to its isolation during the apartheid era. The theory also states that this isolation made South Africans think of their country as if it is separate from the rest of the African continent. The results of our research do not contradict these explanations. The majority of those targeted during the period of our research were African immigrants. However, the isolation theory fails to explain the economic connection to the xenophobic attacks.

On the other hand, the scapegoating theory looks at xenophobia in South Africa from an economic prism. It suggests that the economic promises of post-apartheid South Africa has mainly failed to materialize for the majority black South Africans. The results of our research are also supported by this theory. We have seen how the majority of the articles reviewed (78%)

linked the issue of immigration to the economy. Furthermore, qualitative analysis suggests the majority of xenophobic attacks were targeted against entrepreneurs and shop owners.

Finally, the bio-cultural hypothesis suggests that xenophobia is due to the biological and cultural difference between South Africans and the immigrants. In order to test our finding, we need to make the assumption that the further the origin of an immigrant from South Africa, the more cultural and biological differences exist. Therefore, if this theory is accurate, we should expect to see fewer attacks on Southern Africans compared to other parts of Africa. Our results indicate that the highest targeted group are Somalis. However, it is important to note, as mentioned earlier, that the number of attacks on Somalis increased during our research timeframe due to a specific incident involving a Somali immigrant in January 2015. Therefore, we cannot conclude that our results are in line with the bio-cultural theory, especially given that the second highest targeted group are Zimbabweans.

Furthermore, all these theories have some other shortcomings. The isolation theory fails to take the economic aspect into account. Scapegoating fails to account for the reasons specific ethnic groups are targets. Finally, the bio-cultural hypothesis, even if it were accurate, does not explain why are non-Africans not targeted more (since they would differ more from South Africans than other Africans).

In fact, xenophobic violence in South Africa has been suggested to belong to a special, separate, category called 'afrophobia'. Matsinhe (2011) suggests that "both black and white South Africans equate the word 'foreigner' with 'black foreigner', which in turn is given 'all different negative connotations'."

Anecdotally, there was some suspicion that perhaps, due to the protracted severe economic crisis in neighboring Zimbabwe, our research would reveal that Zimbabweans were especially vulnerable to xenophobic violence. Rather, our findings suggest that Zimbabweans were mentioned more than any other group of migrants (13%) not directly linked with ongoing attacks, but that in general, African migrants were almost exclusively the victims of xenophobic attacks reported on in the media.

The findings of this paper support this research. In 84% of the articles chosen, the word xenophobia was used, while the origins of the associated migrants were African 79% of the time, strongly suggesting that xenophobia in South Africa is almost exclusively afrophobia.



## Conclusion

This paper analyzed news articles published online on South African websites between 1 October 2014 and April 31 2015. The paper looked at the issue of xenophobia and its relation to the media. We have concluded the even though our findings suggests that the majority of articles were pro-immigrations, there is a unique type of xenophobia in South Africa, which is *Afrophobia*.

Our discussions section was divided into four main parts - the extent to which the media contributes to xenophobic attitudes in South Africa, whether the media links the economic anxieties of South Africans to the issue of migration, the origin and prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa, and whether a specific group of migrants is targeted.

As mentioned above, the media was mainly pro-immigration. However, the media is also perpetuating a link between the economy and immigration that might be contributing to the ongoing xenophobic attitudes. We also tested the validity of theories introduced in our literature review section on the origins of xenophobia – the isolation theory, scapegoating, and the bio-cultural hypothesis. Our findings support the isolation theory and scapegoating. However, we could not test confirm the bio-cultural hypothesis. Finally, this led us to test for the emerging concept of *afrophobia*, and our finding concur with it. Therefore, we conclude that there is a unique type of xenophobia in South Africa that is directed specifically against non-South African Africans.

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