

# Xenophobia and quality of life: evidence from South Africa<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examines the associations between immigrant attitudes and various aspects related to quality of life, such as access to public services, social interactions, and national identity in South Africa. Using South African Social Attitudes Survey waves from 2003 to 2018, I find that citizens who are dissatisfied with the government's performance are still welcoming to some immigrants, suggesting that they are more frustrated with the government's underperformance than an aversion to immigrants. However, I also find that anti-immigrant attitudes appear to be associated with beliefs that immigrants increase crime, take away jobs and use up the country's resources. These findings suggest that xenophobia could be a result of negative spillovers from false narratives surrounding immigrants in the country, especially in a climate where competition for economic resources between locals and immigrants can cause tensions under conditions of scarcity.

**Keywords:** xenophobia, quality of life, South Africa, immigrants

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## 1. Introduction

In early 2008, xenophobic attacks broke out in parts of South Africa resulting in injuries and in worse cases, deaths (Human Rights Watch, World Report 2009)<sup>3</sup>. The violence peaked again in 2015 and 2019, often triggered by local disputes, with immigrants being accused of negatively affecting the quality of life of South Africans. The attacks highlight a growing intolerance of immigrants brought on by several socio-economic issues in South Africa, mainly competition over resources (e.g., jobs, housing, healthcare services). According to Statistics South Africa (2021), South Africa is home to about 3.95 million immigrants, which accounts for about 6.5% of the country's total population of around 60 million people. At the same time, statistics show that unemployment in South Africa is high reaching 31.9% in the third quarter of 2023, particularly among the youth, which is averaging at 58% (Statistics South Africa, 2023a). South Africa also has among the highest inequality globally with a Gini coefficient of 0.63.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the country's history with apartheid has seen some of the inter- and intra-racial inequality persist to current times. South Africa opening borders to the rest of the world has also meant an influx of immigrants from other African countries, such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Malawi, to name a few, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities within the country. These conditions, along with uncertain political stability within the current administrative government, have created an ideal environment for societal friction, not only among the citizens of South Africa, but also between the locals and immigrants. For the purpose of this report, the term 'immigrants' or 'foreigners' denotes non-South Africans residing in the country.

The literature widely concurs that horizontal and vertical inequalities in countries can have adverse effects on the economy by inducing conflicts (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Stewart, 2002; Thies & Baum, 2020). However, previous literature on conflicts mostly focusses on civil conflicts, with identity conflicts restricted to ethnicities or religion (Sambanis, 2001). As such, violence towards people of different nationalities, particularly xenophobia, remains a relatively underexplored theme in the conflict literature, mainly because data on attacks or threats against immigrants is not collected in several countries. Despite the paucity in violence data against immigrants, several studies have examined xenophobia using country surveys or case studies on attitudes towards foreigners (Wistrich, 2018; Romero & Zarrugh, 2018), with a few also focussing on South Africa (Gordon, 2015; Ruedin, 2019; Masikane et al., 2020).

However, the increasing anti-immigrant attitudes within South Africa, as evidenced by the 2019 xenophobic violence which displaced many immigrants and destroyed foreign businesses (HRW, 2020), warrant further investigation. My study builds on and contributes to the growing body of evidence on xenophobia, with a focus on South Africa (Gordon, 2015; Ruedin, 2019; Umeh et al., 2024). South Africa makes an interesting case study as it has become apparent over the years that the xenophobia is targeted more at African immigrants

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2009/country-chapters/south-africa>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.forbesafrica.com/current-affairs/2022/04/06/more-could-be-done-combating-south-africas-record-high-unemployment/>

rather than immigrants from other global regions (Gordon, 2015; Olofinbiyi, 2022), a term referred to in several studies as ‘Afrophobia’ (Matsinhe, 2011, Masenya, 2017; Umeh et al., 2024). This stereotyping may be influenced by class and/or race. First, the intersection between xenophobia and race has been attributed by several studies to the legacy of apartheid, a regime that oppressed the majority black population by denying them access to economic resources (Perbady, 2001; Umeh et al., 2024). The shift from apartheid to democracy created a more open foreign policy for immigrants, especially other Africans, to find opportunities in South Africa (Ogunnubi & Aja, 2022). But at the same time South Africa was trying to rectify economic and social inequalities caused by apartheid, and 30 years later, the majority black population continues to experience higher levels of poverty, unemployment and income inequality. According to Umeh et al. (2024), the country’s stance to re-integrate with the rest of the continent and world may therefore cause a previously disenfranchised population to view African immigrants as a potential threat to their recently granted rights and entitlements to public services, especially among existing socio-economic ills. Within these dynamics, a class element may also be at play which can compound the negative attitudes where an emerging class of working and educated black South Africans, who believe that their economic status should be better post-apartheid, may view immigrants as a threat to their newfound status as they must compete for resources and jobs (Gordon, 2015). In a way, immigrants become an easy target caught in the cross-fire between the government and its citizens demanding for better public services delivery (Landau, 2010). The growing negative attitudes may not only signal frustrated citizens blaming immigrants for their economic woes but may also be a lingering effect of the country’s history.

With this context in mind, I pose the following research question: are anti-immigrant attitudes associated with citizens’ views about their quality of life? My research objectives include examining the factors that are associated with immigrant attitudes and establishing which factors are contributing to negative sentiments, as well as determining whether narratives surrounding immigrants’ role in the country are correlated with immigrant attitudes. I argue that the xenophobic attitudes can signal citizens’ dissatisfaction with their government’s underperformance regarding underlying socio-economic issues in the country, such as public goods provision, rather than an actual dislike of immigrants. Indeed, responses from the South African Social Attitudes Surveys (SASAS) between 2003 and 2018, indicate that citizens are not so much frustrated with immigrants as they are with public provision of services and the general economic situation of the country. I find that even among the citizens that are dissatisfied with the conditions of their lives, they are still willing to welcome immigrants into the country. However, I do find that citizens who believe that immigrants increase crime and take away jobs view immigrants as a threat and have increased anti-immigrant sentiments. This is a concerning trend as false narratives about immigrants continue to be stated on public platforms.

The findings highlight the importance of the government maintaining their social contract with citizens (i.e., provision of public services) as one of the mechanisms that can assist in mitigating grievances spilling over into xenophobic attitudes. The implications of my

findings also suggest that a mindset shift is critical in the narratives surrounding immigrants taking jobs, causing crime or being a burden on the state's resources.

### **1.1 Xenophobia in South Africa**

The term xenophobia is derived from two Greek words, 'xeno' meaning stranger and 'phobia' meaning fear (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009; Masenya, 2017). According to the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR, 2001), xenophobia is defined as "attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity." In a way, xenophobia encompasses more than just resenting people from another country, it also includes resentment towards their culture, ethnicity, language, or race. This in part explains why it is not as easy to differentiate xenophobia from other issues, such as race or ethnicity (Wimmer, 1997). Evidence shows that anti-immigrant attitudes can cut across race, class, gender, age, and education (Nyamnjoh, 2006; Bedasso & Jaupart, 2020; Ruedin, 2019; Gordon, 2015). According to Gusciute et al. (2022) and Kuntz et al. (2017), people with lower levels of education, low levels of income and unemployed individuals are economically vulnerable and therefore more likely to view immigrants as threatening in terms of competition over resources. In South Africa, episodes of xenophobic violence have been mainly concentrated in poor informal settlements and townships where previously disadvantaged South Africans already facing difficult economic conditions, such as unemployment, poverty, poor service delivery and high crime rates, now must contend with immigrants competing for resources that they believe are their rights (Misago et al., 2021).

Over the past two decades, anti-immigrant sentiments and actions have been on the rise in South Africa, especially towards African migrants (Gordon, 2015). For example, three African migrants were thrown from a moving train in 1998 (Tella, 2016); sixty-two people lost their lives and many immigrants were displaced in the 2008 attacks in Alexandra, Johannesburg (Hayem, 2013; Tlhabi, 2017); thousands had to abandon their homes in De Doorns, Western Cape, after violent confrontations with local citizens in 2009 (Botha, 2012); seven people lost their lives in the 2015 xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg and Durban<sup>5</sup> and more violent episodes with fatalities were witnessed in the Kwazulu Natal province (Powell, 2019). The African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) has monitored xenophobic attacks in the country since 1994 through its Xenowatch tracker. According to Misago et al. (2021), the years of 2008 and 2019 had the highest episodes of violence on immigrants, with economic hubs such as Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwazulu Natal provinces recording the majority episodes respectively. Between 1994 and 2021, Xenowatch recorded 796 incidents of xenophobic violence, with over 500 deaths, close to 121,000 people displaced and 4,000 shops looted (Misago & Mlilo, 2021). It should be noted that the Xenowatch tracker is reliant on self-reported data and as such incidences may be under reported in some years. The causes of xenophobia range from economic factors, such as competition over jobs, housing, or

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47765863>

healthcare services (Field, 2017; Masikane et al., 2020), to cultural factors related to social status and national identity (Choane et al., 2011; Hayem, 2013), and political factors where the government uses immigrants as a diversionary scapegoat for their failures to deliver public services to their citizens (Choane et al., 2011; Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013).

Unfortunately, xenophobia undermines the beneficial relationships built between countries, with far-reaching consequences. Studies by Bridger (2015), Murenje (2020) and Olofinbiyi (2022) reveal that xenophobic violence is breaking down South Africa's relationship with the rest of the continent, which jeopardises international migration and human development. For example, the dispute between South African and Nigerian governments over the refusal of entry of 125 Nigerians into South Africa in 2012 resulted in Nigeria retaliating by deporting 84 South Africans from its country (Butunyi, 2012). Such political spates over alleged xenophobic behaviour not only cause disruptions for foreign businesses but can create disincentives for businesses to invest in South Africa (Fabricius, 2017). Moreover, immigrants are increasingly becoming political targets for denial of basic services, such as healthcare. Vigilante organisation Operation Dudula has been linked with protests and inciting violence against immigrants, e.g., protesting outside hospitals where they prevent migrants from entering the facilities<sup>6</sup> or demonstrating against the extension of the Zimbabwe Exemption Permits (ZEPs) on the basis that the government is favouring migrants over the well-being of its' citizens.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a video of a public health official rebuking an immigrant in a hospital bed for depleting her province's healthcare resources went viral on social media in 2022 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7wFyPBf4jw>). Again, such xenophobic behaviour in public spaces reinforces anti-immigrant attitudes by citizens.

Other socio-economic consequences of xenophobia include attacks on South African-owned companies in foreign countries as retaliation for the attacks on immigrants' shops in South Africa (Copley, 2017; Bello & Sakariyau, 2017),<sup>8</sup> and uncertainty in the country as a place to explore for opportunities. For example, fear caused by the xenophobic violence has made people reluctant to visit South Africa, invest in the country or seek education opportunities, thus impacting economic growth through decreased tourist flows and foreign investments (Olofinbiyi, 2022). Furthermore, the continuous harassment of immigrants has caused several to develop a phobia of South Africans, as well as damaging South Africa's international image of a 'rainbow nation' (Olofinbiyi, 2022).

A disconcerting observation is the government's lack of response to the rising xenophobic attitudes in South Africa. To date, the attacks are downplayed as rogue criminal incidences, not necessarily motivated by xenophobia (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009; Mlambo et al., 2023). Statements by former heads of state have "swept the problem under the carpet" so to speak. For instance, former President Thabo Mbeki responded to the 2008 xenophobic attacks

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/foreigners-including-pregnant-women-turned-away-from-gauteng-hospitals-doctors-without-borders-00f8062e-ae8c-49da-a74d-a73aedf376ef>

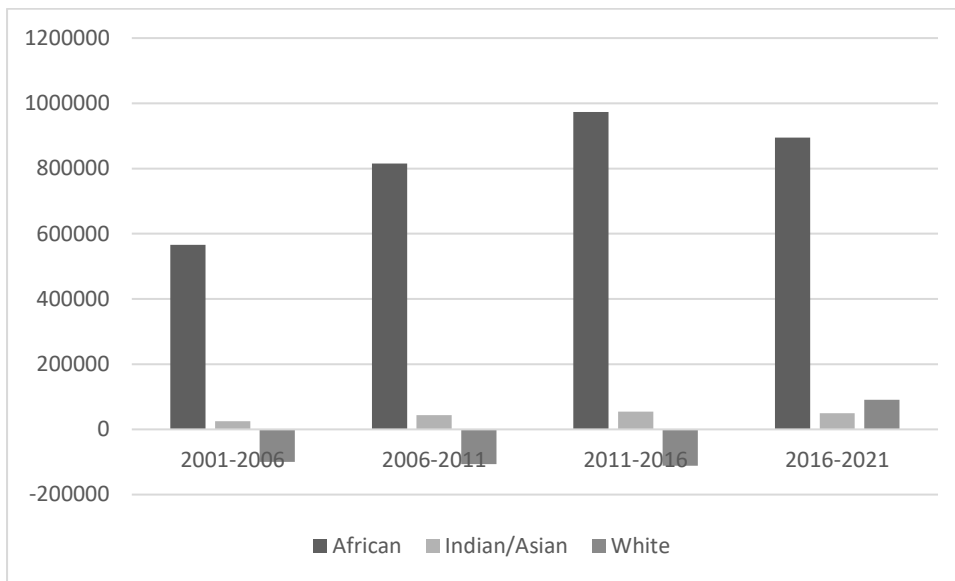
<sup>7</sup> [https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-02-06-operation-dudula-takes-to-the-streets-over-zimbabwe-permit-extension/?utm\\_source=A%E2%80%A6](https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2023-02-06-operation-dudula-takes-to-the-streets-over-zimbabwe-permit-extension/?utm_source=A%E2%80%A6)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/18/south-africa-migrant-workers-protests>

with this speech: “I heard it said insistently that my people have turned or become xenophobic... I wonder what the accusers knew about my people which I do not know” (Dodson, 2010). During the National Assembly in 2013 after xenophobic incidences, former President Jacob Zuma responded with this statement: “I think at times there is a bit of exaggeration where people say xenophobia is a big problem in South Africa.” (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2013). Furthermore, Hayem (2013) argues that the South African government contributed to the negative change in citizens’ attitudes towards foreigners, as well as the repetition of xenophobic violence through their mismanagement of the 2008 crisis and their lacklustre approach to condemning the violence. The previous and current administrations downplaying the seriousness of xenophobia sets a precedence for other leaders to follow suit. For example, the former Mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, was cited in 2017 making xenophobic statements to the effect: “foreigners, whether legal or illegal, are not the responsibility of the city. The city of Johannesburg will only provide accommodation exclusively to South Africans” (SAHRC, 2017a). In the same year, former Deputy Minister of Police, Bongani Mkongi made the following statement: “How can a city in South Africa be 80% foreign nationals? That is dangerous. South Africans have surrendered their own city to the foreigners.” (SAHRC, 2017b). Such rhetoric, with false statistics, only serves to incite citizens that are already discontented about public provision of goods, such as housing. More recently, anti-immigrant vigilante group, Operation Dudula, has been raiding businesses belonging to immigrants in South Africa, forcing them to close their shops (Masiko-Mpaka, 2023). This xenophobic behaviour has continued unchecked by the government. Given the alarming incidences of xenophobia in South Africa, a much stronger and transparent stance is required from the government.

With the increasing economic and political instability in surrounding African countries, the flow of African migrants seeking better economic opportunities in South Africa and elsewhere can be expected to continue, as evidenced in Figure 1 on the international migrant flows by race between 2001 and 2021. The figure shows that net migration into South Africa among the African population has been on the rise, which makes the growing xenophobia against Africans a serious problem in the country. On the other hand, an increasing number of skilled white people have been leaving the country on the back of political instability, crime, poor delivery of services and a reduced quality of life (Integral Human Development, 2021).

**Figure 1:** Net international migration by race, 2001 - 2021



Source: Statistics South Africa (2021). Notes: Positive values indicate net migration to South Africa, while negative values indicate net migration out of South Africa.

## 2. Related literature

Although xenophobia is a complex issue that is sometimes difficult to distinguish from other issues, such as ethnicity and race, it has been a feature for years in various countries around the world. Examples include the targeting of Jews by German nationalists in the 1930s and 1940s (Wistrich, 2018), the expulsion of Nigerians from Ghana in 1969 (Aremu & Ajayi, 2014), the subsequent expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1983<sup>9</sup>, the growing anti-immigration sentiments against Syrians in Turkey (Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019), the 2018 riots in Germany sparked by the killing of a German citizen allegedly by immigrants from Syria and Iraq (Olofinbiyi, 2022), and the xenophobic attitudes towards Mexican immigrants in the United States (Romero & Zarrugh, 2018). South Africa is therefore no exception.

The theoretical underpinnings of xenophobia can be classified under 3 facets: the group conflict theory (Esses et al., 1998; Meuleman et al., 2009), the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and the contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 2021). Within the group conflict theory, the presence of an out-group population elicits fear of competition over resources, such as jobs, land, social welfare, or provision of public services, which can increase prejudice and hostility towards the out-group population (Quillian, 1996; Kuntz et al., 2017). Economic threat is therefore a key component of group conflict theory and one of the main drivers of anti-immigration attitudes (Gusciute et al., 2022). Members of the majority population view immigrants as potential competitors for limited resources, hence as a threat to their quality of life.

<sup>9</sup> <https://atavist.mg.co.za/ghana-must-go-the-ugly-history-of-africas-most-famous-bag/>

Economic threat becomes compounded by citizens' perceived relative deprivation, where the in-group members perceive themselves as worse-off than the out-group members (Davis, 1959). In this case, South African locals, especially those in vulnerable economic status, may feel discontented when they compare their economic positions to immigrants and find that they lack some of the resources that they believe they are entitled to, such as housing, healthcare, jobs, education etc. The interaction between relative deprivation and economic threat can cause feelings of hostility against immigrants (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2016; Pettigrew, 2016) and lead to scapegoating, where marginalised groups are blamed by the more powerful groups for socio-economic ills that they may not necessarily be responsible for (Tella & Ogunnubi, 2014; Masiko-Mpaka, 2023; Mlambo et al., 2023). The economic and political instability in South Africa has created an ideal environment for xenophobic attitudes as frustrated citizens blame the minority migrant population for their on-going deprivation (HRW, 2020; Gordon, 2015; Kaziboni et al., 2022). Moreover, the false narratives about the country being overrun by African migrants only serve to reinforce the mindset of 'us versus them', especially in a post-apartheid country where black South Africans, once denied critical economic resources, are now trying to improve their quality of life (Gordon, 2017). Within this framework, I pose the hypothesis:

1. Poor access to economic resources is associated with negative immigrant attitudes.

Several studies provide evidence for economic factors playing a role in xenophobic attitudes. For example, Gorodzeisky and Semyonov (2018) finds that unemployment rate had a negative impact on immigrant sentiments for cohorts that were entering the labour market for the first time. Similarly, Kuntz et al. (2017) shows that anti-immigrant attitudes increase in countries where perceptions of economic insecurity is high for 14 Western European countries. In addition, Cea D'Ancona (2016) observes that the presence of immigrants in Spain increased the local citizens' fears over competition for employment, access to basic services and increased crime, with these attitudes particularly accentuated during economic recessions. Moreover, local nationals' negative views towards Syrian migrants in Turkey are driven by the fear of loss of economic gains and loss of urban space (Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019). On the other hand, Gusciute et al. (2022) find that positive job growth is associated with pro-immigrant sentiments in Ireland. In South Africa, the rising unemployment rates and a worsening economic climate are attributed to the rising xenophobic attitudes (Field, 2017; Masenya, 2017; Masikane et al., 2020). Specifically, in South African areas where competition for economic resources plays out under conditions of scarcity, the hostility against immigrants is particularly acute (Misago et al., 2021). Other studies show that immigrants in India are believed to be terrorists and are constantly used as scapegoats for the country's problems of unemployment and crime (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009). Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom are also accused of taking jobs from British workers and putting a strain on public services and welfare (Rzepnikowska, 2019). More examples of scapegoating include the former United States President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant sentiments towards Mexicans (Reilly, 2016), and immigration narratives in Europe (Mammone, 2015).



A complement to the group conflict theory is the social identity theory that posits that groups perceived as threatening a nation's distinctive identity are likely to promote hostility (Tajfel, 1982). Cultural differences, such as physical and biological attributes, inability to speak local language or clothing style can promote anti-immigration sentiments between local citizens and foreigners (Davidov et al., 2014; Masikane et al., 2020). In South Africa, the segregation of black populations into bantustans during apartheid may have created low trust among the black populations (Steenkamp, 2009), which may contribute to the present lack of trust of outsiders of similar race. South Africans may be suspicious of African immigrants imposing their identities and cultures on them. According to Ruedin (2019), negative identification against immigrants is a way to increase positive identification within the new in-group, in this case the recently enfranchised majority black population. Within this framework, I pose the hypothesis:

2. Nationalism is associated with negative immigrant attitudes.

Evidence related to identity being a contributor to xenophobia is supported by Cea D'Ancona (2016) who finds that the increasing number of immigrants exacerbated xenophobic attitudes in Spain through locals' fear of losing their cultural identity and national cohesion. Moreover, one of the objectives for the expulsion of Nigerians from Ghana in 1969 was to "purify" the country (Aremu & Ajayi, 2014). According to a study conducted in Turkey, a significant proportion of the population was against granting citizenship to Syrians because the immigrants would then benefit from social rights and economic opportunities, increase support for Islamism through voting rights, and "blur the distinctive secular national identity of Turkey" (Saraçoğlu & Bélanger, 2019). Similarly, Davidov et al. (2014) find that negative attitudes towards immigrants are more prevalent in European countries with high cultural embeddedness (i.e., high traditional and conformity values as opposed to universalism). In South Africa, one of the factors attributed to xenophobia among the local citizens is the fear of losing their social status and identity (Solomon & Haigh, 2009; Choane et al., 2011; Olofinbiyi, 2022). According to Hayem (2013), the xenophobic attacks in South Africa demonstrate a "new national subjectivity" where citizens' attitudes are shifting from an inclusive perception of 'South Africa for all' to an exclusive perception of local nationals against foreigners (#PutSouthAfricansFirst). Likewise in Botswana, xenophobic attitudes are mainly influenced by nationalism and economic factors (Campbell, 2003).

A third framework speaks to the contact theory which posits that prejudice between groups can be reduced if members of different groups interact with each other (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 2021). Therefore, the presence of immigrants in a country may increase the exposure to different nationalities and contribute to less hostility from locals through continuous contact at workplaces, neighbourhoods or schools (Thomsen & Birkmose, 2015; Mlambo et al., 2023). This constant interaction between the two groups reduces animosity by lowering anxiety and increasing knowledge and empathy towards foreigners (Thomsen & Birkmose, 2015). The contact theory is especially applicable to South Africa given its historical past where the country was isolated from the rest of the world during apartheid. As

a result, Duncan (2012) and Harris (2002) suggest that this alienation can cause locals to find differences in outsiders to be threatening. Within this framework, I pose the hypothesis:

3. Social connections with immigrants are associated with positive immigrant attitudes.

Studies by Turner et al. (2007), Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), Ruedin (2019) and Pettigrew (2021) provide evidence that contact with diverse groups is associated with less prejudice, suggesting that the negative attitudes towards immigrants may be a symptom of poor knowledge rather than a response to a threat.

A final dimension related to anti-immigrant attitudes, which is worth mentioning, is the institutional xenophobia where government institutions have hostile attitudes towards immigrants, thus fuelling the local citizens' negative attitudes. Unfortunately, this type of xenophobia compounds an already hostile climate for migrants seeking legal documentation or justice. The police, Home Affairs department and some prominent public officials in South Africa have been accused of hostile attitudes towards immigrants, especially African immigrants, through prolonged delays in processing visas, unjustified arrests or anti-immigrant media statements (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013; Matzopoulos et al., 2009; McKnight, 2008; Umeh et al., 2024).

### **3. Data**

Xenophobia describes the dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries. To capture this qualitative aspect, I use survey data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) collected from 2003 to 2018 (<https://hsrc.ac.za/special-projects/sasas/>). The SASAS 2018 is the latest curated dataset that is publicly available, at the time of this study.<sup>10</sup> Despite the lag in the surveys, I believe the findings and recommendations from this analysis will still be relevant and meaningful to the current environment in South Africa related to xenophobic dynamics. The SASAS is a nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional survey of South African adults, aged 16 years and older, living in private households, that has been conducted annually by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) since 2003. The sample size for the survey averages at around 3,000 respondents per year. The stratification variable is the enumerator areas from the national census. The data has been weighted to the mid-year population estimates published by Statistics South Africa. The survey employs a range of questions designed to capture, better understand and monitor changes in underlying public values and the social fabric of South Africa. The SASAS is ideal for research of this nature as it contains socio-economic information on people's attitudes towards democracy and governance, public provision of goods, national identity and pride, intergroup relations, immigrant related behaviour, moral issues, personal wellbeing, crime and security, poverty, and voting. The survey also contains respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, race, education, and income, as well as household characteristics, such as location and type of dwelling.

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<sup>10</sup> The latest waves were still under curation and yet to be made accessible to the public at the time of this study.

The sample under review consists of 14 survey waves from 2003 to 2018<sup>11</sup>, totalling 47,366 respondents, with an average response rate of 86% across the waves. I do not include responses under the categories “Don’t know”, “Refused to answer” and “No answer”. Most of the sample in Table 1 is represented by South African citizens (98.3%) and blacks (55.9%), which is representative of the national population. Women constitute slightly more than half of the sample (59.7%).

**Table 1:** Demographic statistics by race, gender and citizenship

<i><b>Race</b></i>	Number	Percent
Black	25,831	55.87
Coloured	7,803	16.88
Indian/Asian	5,004	10.82
White	6,527	14.12
Other	1,065	2.30
<i><b>Gender</b></i>		
Male	19,068	40.26
Female	28,298	59.74
<i><b>Citizenship</b></i>		
SA Citizen	39,656	98.31
Non-SA Citizen	682	1.69

Source: SASAS 2003-2018

For the outcome variable on immigrant attitudes, I use responses to statements related to whether the respondent welcomes all, some, or no immigrants. I choose this outcome variable because the statement is posed across all the surveys used in this study. For the explanatory variables, I use responses that capture citizens’ views on their quality of life, such as their personal wellbeing and public provision of goods, their national identity, their social connections with immigrants, as well as their narratives surrounding immigrants.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, I use responses to statements on whether their life has improved in the last 5 years and how satisfied they are with the government’s handling of public services to assess if poor access to economic resources is associated with negative attitudes towards immigrants. Under economic resources, I also use responses to statements on whether immigrants take jobs, increase crime, use up resources and bring disease to the country to examine the association between buying into the negative narratives and poor access to resources (i.e., highlighting elements of scapegoating). To assess the association between nationalism and anti-immigrant attitudes, I use responses to statements on preferring to be a South African citizen in relation to other countries and whether South Africa is a better country than any other country. I also use responses to statements on citizens’ interpersonal connections with immigrants to assess if social interactions with immigrants are associated with positive immigrant attitudes.

<sup>11</sup> 2005 and 2006 are excluded as the surveys did not contain questions related to immigrants.

<sup>12</sup> Please see Table A1 in Appendix A for survey responses that are used in this analysis.

## 4. Methodology

My analysis focusses on the correlations between the explanatory and outcome variables, for which I mainly use descriptive methods. As a robustness check, I specify the following logistic model and report the marginal effects of the explanatory variables on the predicted probability of welcoming immigrants:

$$P(Y_i = 1|X_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + \delta_i Z_i + \mu$$

Where  $Y_i$  is a binary representation of the dependent variable “I generally welcome....” with responses categorised as 1) All immigrants, 2) Some immigrants, 3) No immigrants. I convert the responses to welcome immigrants into a binary measure that is 1 = welcome all or some immigrants and 0 otherwise. The model predicts the probability of welcoming immigrants given the change in determinants.  $X$  is a vector that includes the binary determinants that capture citizens’ perceptions of their quality of life (e.g., well-being, provision of public services, national identity, interpersonal connections with immigrants, and narratives surrounding immigrants).  $Z$  is a vector for the demographic controls (i.e., race, gender, age, education, employment status, personal income, rural vs urban location and province). Evidence suggests that xenophobic attitudes can cut across class, race, gender and location, with some studies finding that people with relatively low education, unemployed and/or living in impoverished areas tend to have hostile feelings towards immigrants as they perceive them as an economic threat (Ruedin, 2019; Bedasso & Jaupart, 2020; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2018). A description of the variables that are used in the analysis can be found in Table A1, Appendix A. I also account for the different survey waves in the estimation by including year effects, which captures the trend effect.

I acknowledge that reverse causality is a potential issue, for example, individuals with negative attitudes to immigrants may have a poor outlook on their wellbeing, have poor access to public services or have less contact with immigrants. But we can also find individuals with negative attitudes to immigrants who have a good outlook on their lives, have no issues with public services delivery or have plenty contact with immigrants. Similarly, individuals may still have positive attitudes towards immigrants, despite their poor quality of lives. While it may be difficult to ascertain causal order in such a survey analysis, I maintain that identifying some of the underlying factors that contribute to anti-immigrant attitudes can provide us with better understanding on how to tackle the issue, especially in a country where negative attitudes to immigrants do not sometimes remain as opinions but can manifest into violent attacks that cost lives and livelihoods. The evidence from this study can be important in drawing awareness to the seriousness of xenophobia as a cause of friction that can potentially implode into a full-blown conflict if left unaddressed.

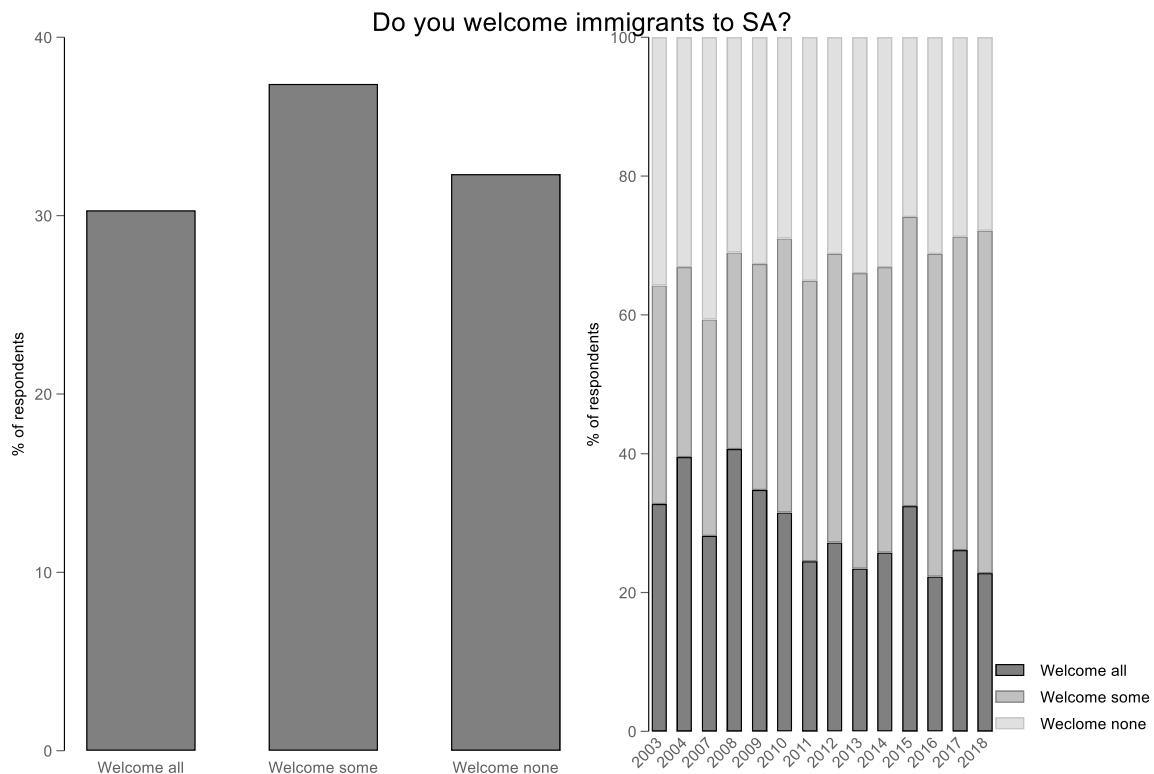
## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Immigrant Attitudes

I begin my analysis by examining the trend of immigrant attitudes. I use responses to statements related to whether the respondent welcomes all, some, or no immigrants, how the respondent feels about immigrants, and which group the respondent least wants to come and

live in South Africa. According to the surveys in Figure 2, a higher proportion of the respondents are selective in welcoming immigrants in relation to complete rejection or complete acceptance. The positive sentiment towards welcoming all immigrants also appears to have been dropping over the years from 2011 to 2018, with the percentage of respondents that would not welcome any immigrants peaking in 2007 (40.6%) leading up to the 2008 xenophobic attacks (Matunhu, 2011), as well as increasing from 2011 to 2014 leading up to the 2015 xenophobic violence (Patel, 2016).

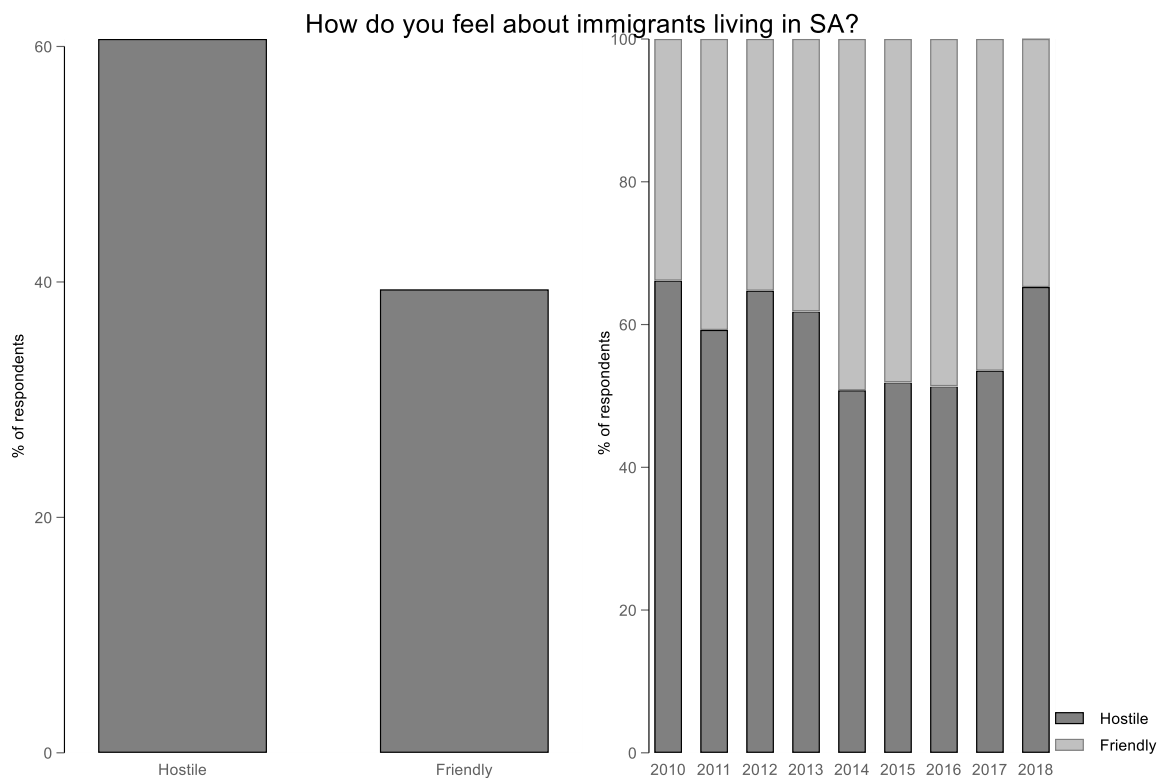
**Figure 2:** Attitudes on welcoming immigrants



Source: SASAS, 2003-2018.

Furthermore, evidence from Figure 3 shows that about 60% of the respondents feel hostility towards immigrants, and these feelings have not abated over the years, with 2018 recording the highest percentage (62.9%).

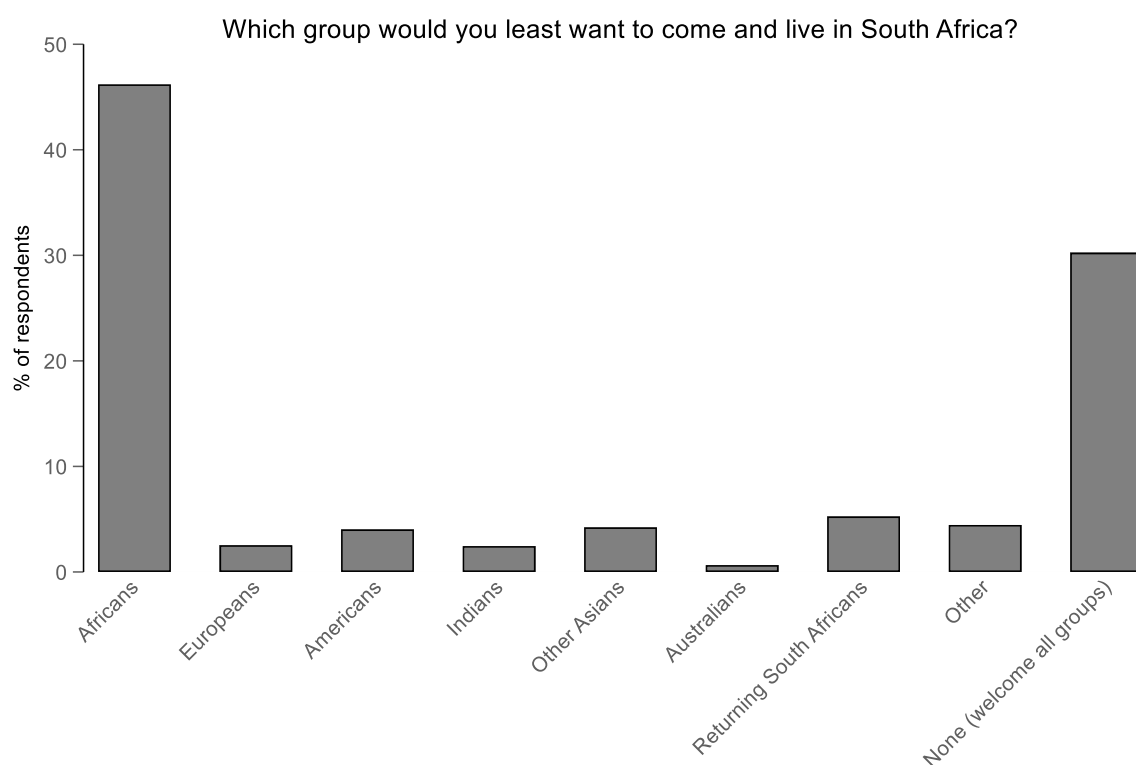
**Figure 3:** Feelings towards immigrants living in South Africa



Source: SASAS, 2010-2018. Note: The question was asked in surveys for 2010-2018.

Of concern is that 46.2% of the respondents, as shown in Figure 4, do not like Africans to come and live in the country compared to other groups, supporting the Afrophobia argument (Matsinhe, 2011; Gordon, 2015). Interestingly, returning South Africans featured second after Nigerians, followed by Zimbabweans of the top three groups not liked (see Figure B1 in Appendix B). This finding for anti-African immigrants is persistent across all races (see Figure B2, Appendix B). These results are disconcerting as they indicate anti-immigrant sentiments targeted towards a particular group in the country, worse people coming from the same continent where one would expect that other Africans would be considered more as an in-group than an out-group population. These sentiments also appear not to have changed over time, as evidenced by a previous study conducted by Gordon (2015) using the 2003 to 2012 SASAS data. The author observes that most of the citizens identified African immigrants as the group they least wanted to come and live in South Africa. In addition, a more recent study by HSRC reveals that just over half of the population have anti-immigrant attitudes, especially towards foreigners of African and Asian origins (HSRC, 2020).

**Figure 4: Least liked group of immigrants**



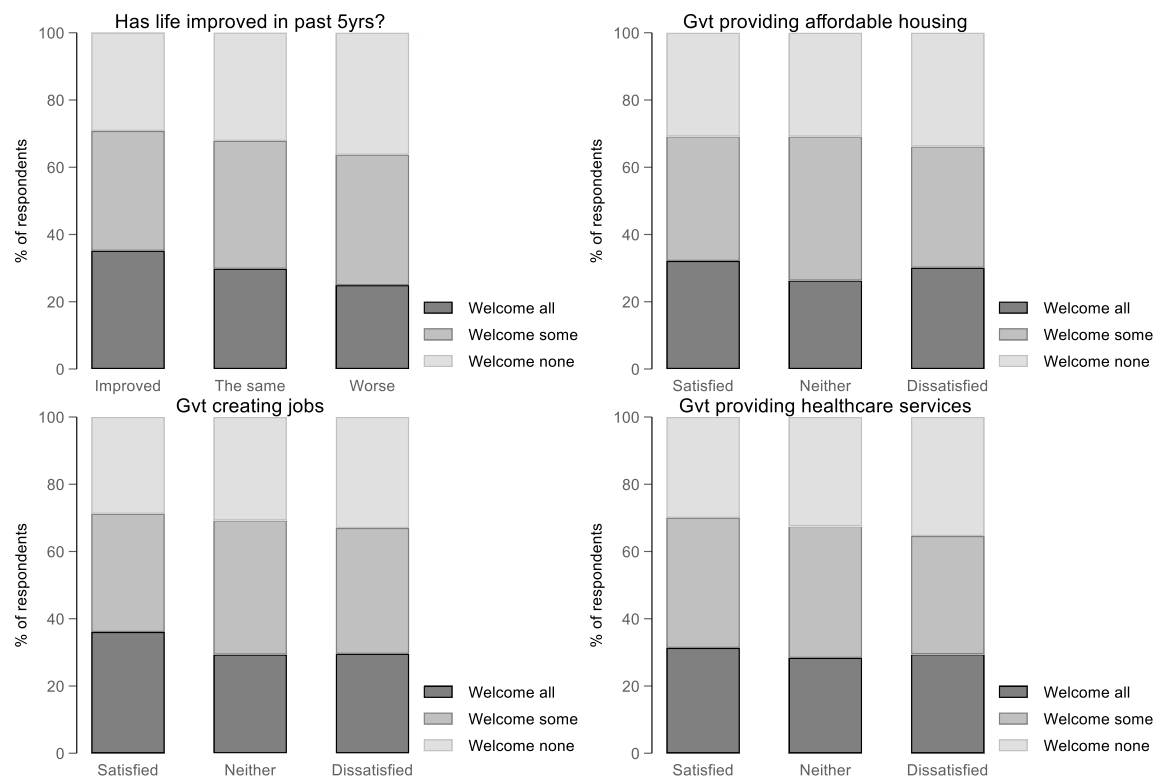
Source: SASAS, 2003-2018.

## 5.2 Economic resources and immigrant attitudes

To investigate my first hypothesis that citizens with poor access to economic resources are more likely to have negative attitudes towards immigrants, I examine the responses on whether people are welcoming to immigrants given how satisfied they are with their well-being in the past 5 years and with the government providing public provision of services, such as job creation, affordable housing, and access to healthcare services. Unemployment, accommodation and healthcare are key challenges that South Africa is currently facing. Interestingly, I observe in Figure 5 that of the respondents that are dissatisfied with the government’s handling of public goods (i.e. providing affordable housing, creating jobs and providing healthcare services), a marginally higher share is still welcoming of some immigrants in relation to no immigrants (about 37% welcome some while about 33% welcome none across the various public services measures, with the exception of access to healthcare where there is no discernible difference). Moreover, of the respondents that view their lives as worse over the past 5 years, a marginally higher share is also still welcoming of some immigrants in relation to none (38.8% welcome some while 36.3% welcome none). As expected among those who are satisfied with the government’s provision of public services and view their lives as improved over the past 5 years, a relatively higher proportion welcomes immigrants to none. While the differences may be marginal between welcoming some immigrants to none, when taken in conjunction with welcoming all immigrants, the overall finding is that even among those who are dissatisfied with the quality of their lives, a

significant proportion have positive attitudes towards immigrants. I also find that among the respondents that are unemployed, a higher share welcomes immigrants to none, which supports the findings for access to economic resources (see Figure B3, Appendix B). The evidence shown here appears somewhat contrary to my hypothesis, suggesting that access to economic resources may not necessarily be a significant factor in fuelling anti-immigrant attitudes. It may simply be a case of citizens being frustrated with the government’s failure to provide for their well-being than their dislike for immigrants.

**Figure 5: Economic resources and immigrant attitudes**



Source: SASAS, 2003-2018

However, these initial findings on positive immigrant attitudes are clouded by misinformation that immigrants commit most of the crime, take jobs and overburden public services, which then plays into the scapegoat theory (Kaziboni et al., 2022). These false narratives are frequently voiced by politicians and government officials, reinforcing and fuelling negative public sentiment towards immigrants. For example, the late King Goodwill Zwelithini from Kwazulu Natal was accused of inciting the attacks that led to the deaths of seven people and displacement of over five thousand immigrants in 2015, when he made a statement to the effect that “foreigners must pack their bags and go”.<sup>13</sup> He later blamed the media for misinterpreting his words. During his political party’s rally in 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa passed the statement that “Everyone just arrives in our townships and rural areas and sets up businesses without licenses and permits. We are going to bring this to an end. And those who are operating illegally, wherever they come from, must now know.” Critics of the President claim that his comments may have fuelled anti-immigrant sentiments, including the subsequent wave of xenophobic attacks on immigrant truck-drivers (Kaziboni et al.,

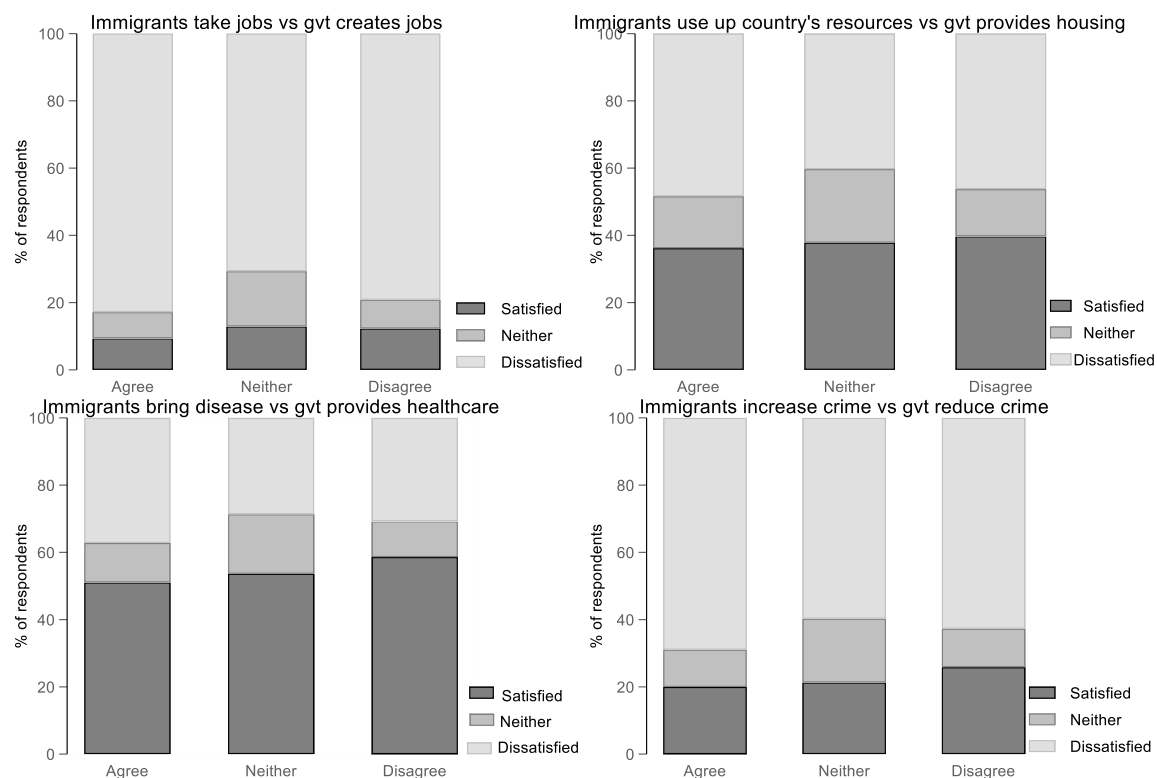
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/20/south-africa-xenophobic-violence-zulu-king-goodwill-zwelithini>



2022). According to the scapegoat theory, vulnerable groups, such as the migrant population can be blamed by local citizens for societal ills, such as high unemployment rates, high crime rates, or lack of resources (Tella & Ogunnubi, 2014; Kaziboni et al., 2022).

To investigate scapegoating as a potential mechanism for the economic threat theory where the poor access of economic resources may be blamed on the immigrants, I examine whether respondents that agree with the negative and false narratives surrounding immigrants in the country are also dissatisfied with public provision of services. The findings in Figure 6 are overwhelmingly in favour of negative views regarding immigrants to South Africa. Among those respondents who agree that immigrants take jobs, a significant proportion (about 80%) are dissatisfied with how the government is creating jobs. Similarly, those who agree that immigrants increase crime, a higher share (close to 70%) are dissatisfied with the government’s efforts in reducing crime. Among the respondents who agree that immigrants use up the country’s resources, about 48% are dissatisfied with the government’s provision of affordable housing. I do however observe that among the respondents who agree that immigrants bring diseases to South Africa, only about 30% are dissatisfied with the government’s provision of healthcare services.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 6:** Negative narratives and satisfaction with public services provision



Source: SASAS, 2003-2018. Note: The questions related to immigrants taking up resources and bringing diseases was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004 and 2007.

These findings support the scapegoat mechanism that immigrants sometimes get caught in the tensions between citizens and the government and blamed for economic issues in the country.

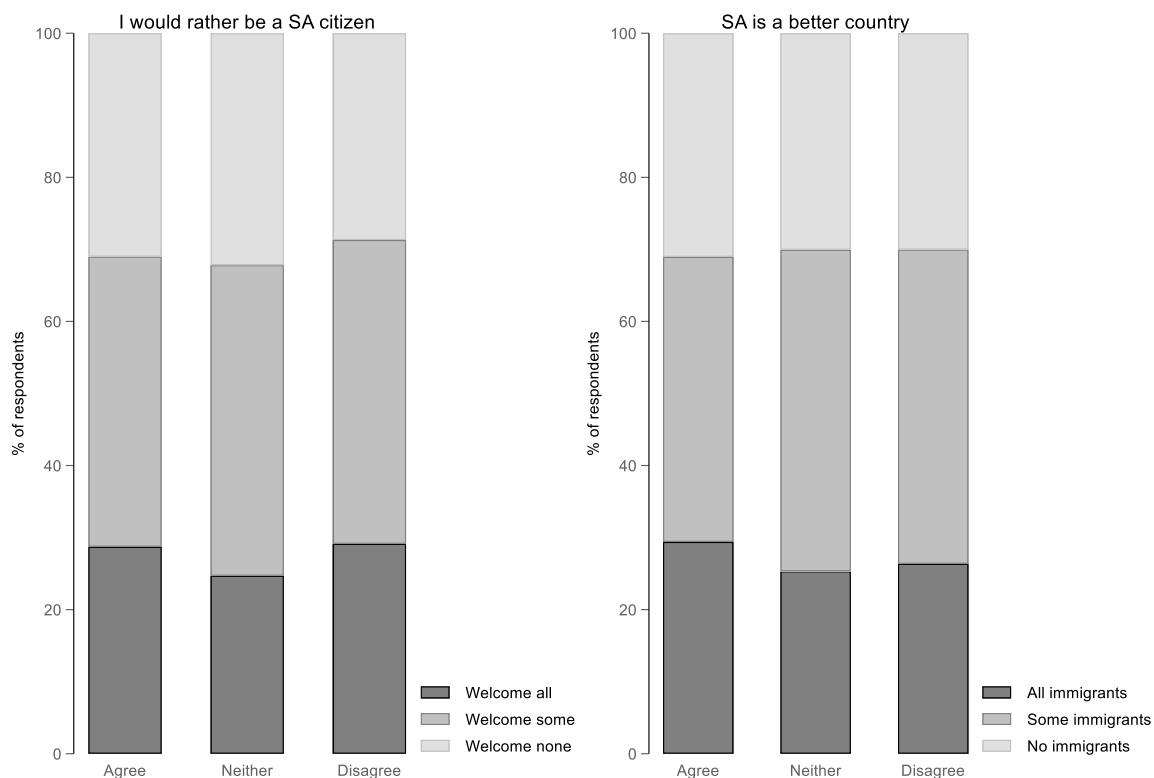
<sup>14</sup> These findings for the scapegoat mechanism are supported when I use a different outcome measure, namely responses to the question on how citizens feel about foreigners, though this question is only posed for the 2010 to 2018 survey waves (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

The hostility can be intensified when the citizens are continuously exposed to false and negative narratives by politicians and the media (Kaziboni et al., 2022; HRW, 2020; Masiko-Mpaka, 2023). The implications of these findings firstly highlight the susceptibility of people to information circulating in the media concerning the migrant population, and secondly the responsibility of media or public officials to report accurate information.

### 5.3 Nationalism and immigrant attitudes

For my second hypothesis, I use responses to statements on national identity to examine the association between nationalism and immigrant attitudes. The statements include “I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world” and “South Africa is a better country than most other countries”. I observe in Figure 7 that among the respondents that either agree or disagree with the statements, about 40% are welcoming to some immigrants in relation to 30% that welcome none. The findings are contrary to the evidence in the literature that suggests that citizens who may view outsiders as posing a threat to their culture and national identity tend to have hostile feelings towards immigrants (Olofinbiyi, 2022; Hayem, 2013).

**Figure 7:** Nationalism and immigrant attitudes



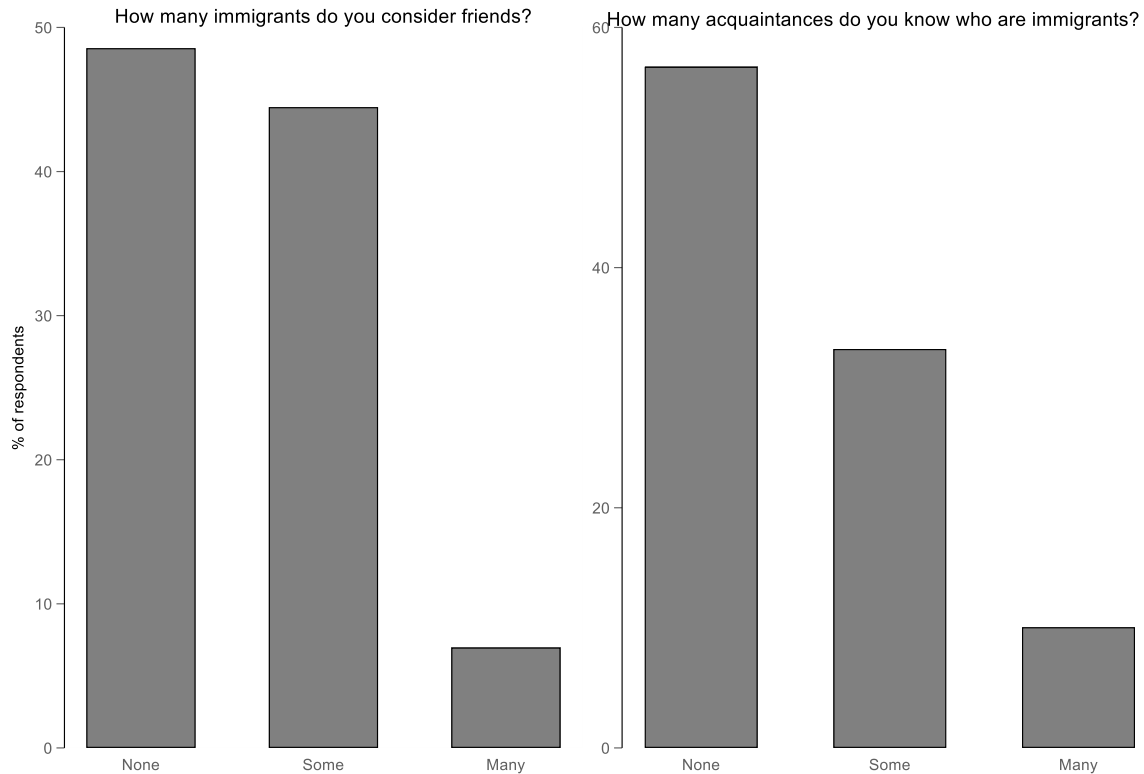
Source: SASAS, 2008-2018. Note: The question was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004 and 2007.

### 5.4 Social connections and immigrant attitudes

Given evidence that suggests that interpersonal connections with immigrants may reduce hostility (Thomsen & Birkmose, 2015; Bedasso & Jaupart, 2020), I first observe how many of the respondents have friends or acquaintances that are immigrants. The statistics in Figure 8 are quite compelling as a significant proportion of the sample do not have friends or

acquaintances that are immigrants. According to Crush and Ramachandran (2009), about 60% of South Africans said that they had minimal contact with migrants from neighbouring countries.

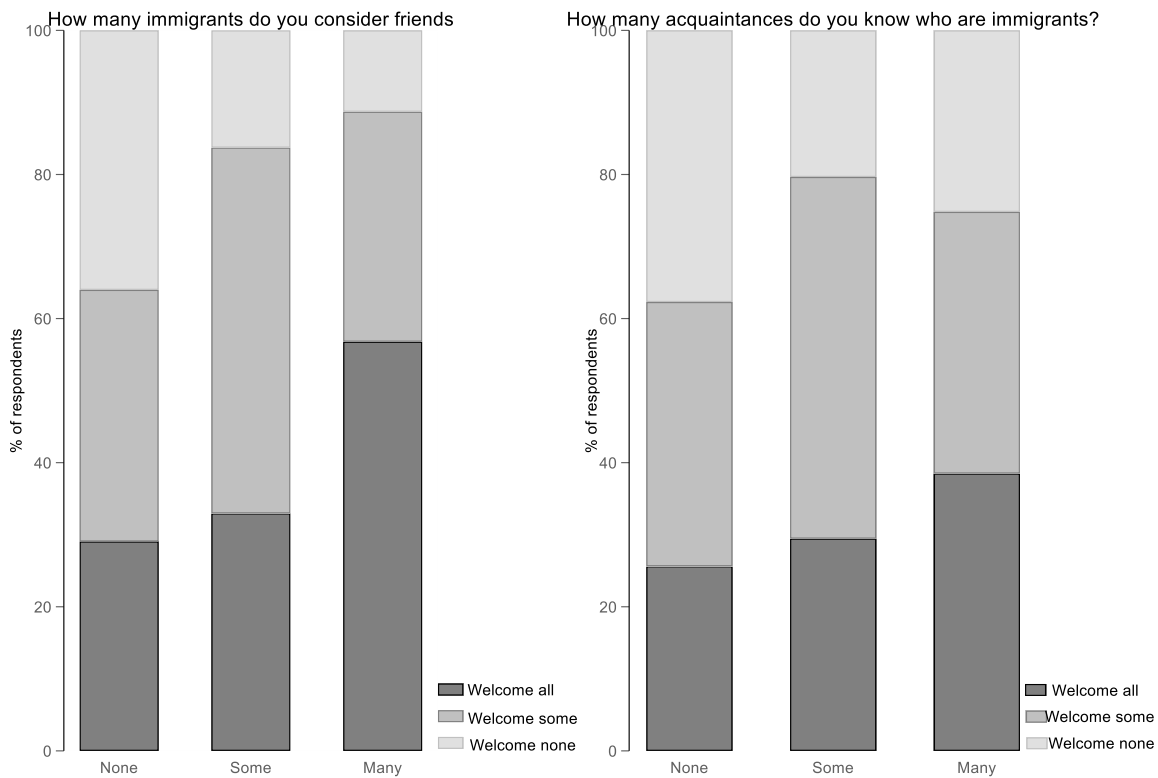
**Figure 8:** Friends/acquaintances that are immigrants



Source: SASAS, 2008-2018. Note: The question was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004 and 2007.

When I examine my final hypothesis that social interactions are associated with positive immigrant attitudes, I find that evidence in Figure 9 supports the hypothesis. Among the respondents with many immigrants that are friends or acquaintances, over 30% welcome some immigrants, and over 50% with friends welcome all immigrants. On the other hand, I find that among those with no immigrant friends or acquaintances, about 36% are not welcoming to any immigrants. The evidence is in line with the contact theory that citizens of a country may update their beliefs through continuous interaction with immigrants (Steinmayr, 2021).

**Figure 9: Social connections and immigrant attitudes**



Source: SASAS, 2008-2018. Note: The question was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004 and 2007.

The findings with the descriptive statistics show that poor access to economic resources and nationalism are not significant contributors to anti-immigrant attitudes, but rather citizens playing into the false narratives about immigrants taking their jobs, using up resources, and increasing crime. These negative narratives may result in citizens then viewing immigrants as an economic threat, not only to resources but to their culture and identity. I also find that exposure to immigrants may be a channel through which citizens can revise their negative prejudices towards immigrants.

### 5.5 Additional analysis

I estimate a logit model as specified in Section 4 to observe the associations between immigrant attitudes and the various measures capturing the arguments that I put forward. I report the marginal effects of these determinants on the predicted probability of welcoming immigrants in Table 2, while holding other variables at their means. Full results for the logit model with demographic controls can be found in Table A4. As a robustness check, I report the predicted probabilities from the logit model in Table A3 where I keep the multiple categories across the determinants, rather than changing them to binary variables as reported in Table 2. I also report the findings from a linear probability model (LPM) in Table A4 as an additional robustness check. The tables can be found in Appendix A. The findings remain consistent across the models.

**Table 2: Welcoming immigrants and quality of life**

<b>Welcome immigrants (Ref: welcome no immigrants)</b>	<b>Marginal effects</b>	<b>Welcome immigrants (Ref: welcome no immigrants)</b>	<b>Marginal effects</b>
<b>Economic resources</b>		<b>False Narratives</b>	
<i>Has life improved? (Ref: Improved or the same)</i>		<i>Immigrants take jobs from South Africans (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>	
Worse	-0.007 (0.010)	Disagree	0.117*** (0.010)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt providing affordable housing? (Ref: Satisfied or indifferent)</i>		<i>Immigrants increase crime rates (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>	
Dissatisfied	-0.010 (0.009)	Disagree	0.095*** (0.011)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt creating jobs? (Ref: Satisfied or indifferent)</i>		<i>Immigrants use up country's resources (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>	
Dissatisfied	-0.010 (0.011)	Disagree	0.011 (0.013)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt providing healthcare services? (Ref: Satisfied or indifferent)</i>		<i>Immigrants bring disease to South Africa (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>	
Dissatisfied	-0.017* (0.009)	Disagree	0.087*** (0.010)
<b>Nationalism</b>		<b>Social connections with immigrants</b>	
<i>I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than any other country (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		<i>How many immigrants do you consider to be friends? (Ref: None)</i>	
Disagree	-0.017 (0.017)	Many	0.118*** (0.010)
<i>South Africa is a better country than most other countries (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		<i>How many acquaintances do you know who are immigrants? (Ref: None)</i>	
Disagree	-0.012 (0.015)	Many	0.066* (0.034)
Observations	7,591		
F-statistic			
Chi-square	772.58***		
Year FE	YES		
Controls	YES		

Marginal effects reported. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The probability of welcoming immigrants relative to none is lower for respondents that view their current lives as having worsened over the past 5 years and those that are dissatisfied with the government's provision of public services. However, the results are not statistically significant, except for health care services. Respondents that are dissatisfied with the government's provision of healthcare services are associated with a lower probability (1.7% less) of welcoming immigrants in relation to those who are satisfied or indifferent. The evidence shows weak support for the argument that poor access to economic resources is associated with anti-immigrant attitudes (Kuntz et al., 2017; Masikane et al., 2020). The findings are in line with the initial descriptive statistics, as well as the predicted probabilities reported in Table A3 which show very marginal differences between respondents who are satisfied vs those who are dissatisfied with provision of public services. For instance, while the respondents who are dissatisfied with the provision of public services have a lower predicted probability of welcoming immigrants (0.84), the predicted probability of welcoming immigrants is only about 0.01 higher for those who are satisfied with their lives and the provision of public services (0.85).

I find a similar weak association between national identity and immigrant attitudes, suggesting that cultural differences may not necessarily be correlated with anti-immigrant attitudes. This result contradicts the nationalism hypothesis that local citizens are hostile towards immigrants because they are afraid to lose their identity and culture (Fetzer, 2000; Cea D'Ancona, 2016; Olofinbiyi, 2022).

However, while the results do not support the argument that poor access to economic resources are associated with anti-immigrant attitudes, I do find strong and statistically significant associations between statements related to false narratives and anti-immigrant attitudes. Respondents that disagree with the negative statements about immigrants have a higher probability of between 8% and 11% of welcoming immigrants in relation to those who agree with the false narratives. These results are supported by the predicted probabilities in Table A3 that show a significant difference of 0.12 between respondents who disagree with the narratives relative to those who agree. These findings support the scapegoat mechanism that people who perceive immigrants as an economic threat because they take jobs away and use up the country's resources are likely to blame them for their economic problems which can reinforce hostility towards immigrants (Tella & Ogunnubi, 2014; Misago et al., 2021; Masiko-Mpaka, 2023).

Respondents with friends and acquaintances who are immigrants relative to none, are likely to welcome immigrants. The association between social connections with immigrants and positive attitudes is statistically significant with relatively larger coefficients to the economic resources' argument. For example, respondents that have friends who are immigrants have a higher probability of 11.8% of welcoming immigrants. In addition, the predicted probabilities in Table A3 support this finding with a larger difference of 0.13 between respondents who have many immigrant friends in relation to those with none. This finding is in line with the proposition that more interaction with immigrants in various social surroundings (work, neighbourhoods, schools, etc.) will lessen hostility towards immigrants (Thomsen and Birkmose, 2015; Steinmayr, 2021).

In terms of demographics (see Table A4 in Appendix), the results show that older people in relation to the youth are less likely to welcome immigrants. According to Gusciute et al.

(2022), older people are more likely to prefer stricter restrictions against immigrants than the youth. The age groups with anti-immigrant sentiments in this sample also represent people in the labour market, with some seeking employment. Given the high unemployment rates in the country, the older people are more likely to clash with immigrants over resources, such as jobs. Respondents with a personal income between R20,000 and R50,000 are associated with positive immigrant attitudes, suggesting that financial access can be a potential mediator for anti-immigrant attitudes. I also find that respondents from most of the provinces have a lower probability of welcoming immigrants. According to Misago et al. (2021), Kwazulu Natal, Gauteng, Eastern and Western Cape provinces have been hit hard with xenophobic violence over the period under review. I do not find any significant associations with immigrant attitudes across employment status, education, race, gender and rural location.

## 6. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to establish if anti-immigrant sentiments are associated with poor quality of life in South Africa. Using SASAS data from 2003 to 2018, I find that South Africans are still welcoming of immigrants, regardless of their dissatisfaction with their lives or governments' provision of public goods, such as housing, jobs and access to healthcare. The citizens are however selective of immigrants based on origin, with Africans being the group that they least want to come and live in the country, supporting the Afrophobia argument (Matsinhe, 2011; Gordon, 2015). Unfortunately, I find an element of scapegoating where individuals who believe that immigrants increase the country's socio-economic problems, such as increasing crime, using up resources, taking jobs away and bringing disease, also have increased anti-immigrant attitudes. Of concern is that the government reinforces these pervasive anti-immigrant attitudes by not making a strong stance against it but using it to justify their failures to deliver public services to citizens. And this has been ongoing for a while as evidenced by Misago (2012) who reports that respondents in his study at that time reiterated government's narratives blaming immigrants for the country's problems. As the country's economic climate remains uncertain, these negative attitudes where local citizens associate their reduced quality of life with immigrants are bound to worsen. Moreover, my findings indicate that a significant proportion of the individuals do not have many acquaintances or friends that are immigrants, suggesting limited social interactions with immigrants.

Contrary to the false narrative that the country is being overrun by immigrants as indicated by politicians in media outlets,<sup>15</sup> the migrant population only accounts for 6.5% of the total population, which happens to be in line with foreign migrant statistics from most countries in the world (Kaziboni et al., 2022; Gordon, 2022). Statements about immigrants increasing crime are also unfounded and again made by politicians in media. For example, the former mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, stated that undocumented immigrants were linked

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/south-african-politicians-play-up-anti-foreigner-sentiments-to-win-votes/2403115#>

to criminal activity in the city.<sup>16</sup> According to the Criminal Justice data, only 2.3% of total prisoners per year are undocumented immigrants (Kaziboni et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the belief that immigrants take away jobs is inaccurate as there is no evidence to support the claim (Gordon, 2022). According to Statistics South Africa (2023b), immigrants constitute about 8% of the labour market and contribute 9% of the country's gross domestic product (OECD/ILO, 2018). Moreover, evidence by a World Bank study finds that immigrants are more likely to generate jobs for locals as they tend to be self-employed (Sarkar et al., 2018). For example, Basten and Siegenthaler (2019) and Beerli et al. (2021) find that immigration of foreign workers reduced unemployment of local citizens and had limited adverse effects on wages and employment in Switzerland. One of the channels they noted was that local citizens shifted to more demanding jobs, such as managerial positions. A similar exploratory study could be conducted in South Africa to investigate the impact of foreign workers on unemployment of local citizens.

Lastly, immigrants do not burden the state's resources. If anything, skilled immigrants contribute to the economy by providing medical and education skills in the health and tertiary sector. According to the 2017 White Paper on International Migration from the Department of Home Affairs, South Africa faces a scarcity of skills in key economic sectors such as healthcare and technology (Integral Human Development, 2021). Moreover, immigrant students at university level do not qualify for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, which means that they pay fees, usually double the fees that local students pay, especially if they come from outside of certain economic regions, such as South African Development Community (SADC). These fees contribute to the national income of the country, as does the money that is spent by immigrants seeking medical assistance in South Africa.

## **7. Conclusion**

While the analysis presented in this study is not causal but limited to exploratory correlations based on the responses from the SASAS surveys, I maintain that the findings highlight important issues related to xenophobia, particularly the scapegoating of immigrants based on false narratives spread on public platforms. This negative mindset needs to be changed in the public domain with both the media and local politicians being held accountable for reporting inaccurate information about immigrants. In this case, transparent statistics on immigrants should be freely available to the public to gain a better understanding of not only the country's population composition, but also of the economic spaces that immigrants operate and their contributions to the country. Public awareness and anti-discrimination training, especially in institutions that deal with immigrants, such as Home Affairs, South African Police Services, schools, universities, hospitals, and labour market can also provide a platform to address anti-immigration attitudes and dispel myths about immigrants.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-12-07-herman-mashaba-defends-his-comments-that-illegal-immigrants-are-criminals/>



Continuous discourse surrounding the causes and consequences of xenophobia is necessary to find effective avenues to deal with the issue.

Moreover, the anti-immigration stance in South Africa runs contrary to some of the African Union's (AU) objectives to "to promote unity and solidarity amongst African States; to coordinate and intensify cooperation for development; to promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples."<sup>17</sup> Achieving these objectives and unity will prove difficult if anti-immigrant attitudes are targeted towards other African countries.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://au.int/en/au-nutshell>.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1:** Variable definitions

Variable	Question	Response	Coverage	No. of obs.
<i>Immigrant attitudes</i> Welcome immigrants	I generally welcome to South Africa...	1=all immigrants; 2=some immigrants; 3=no immigrants	2003-2018	47,274
Feelings towards immigrants	And now again, using the same scale of 0 to 10, please describe how you feel about foreigners living in South Africa in general? Are they hostile or friendly?	0=hostile; 10=friendly	2010-2018	6,359
Group least liked	Which, if any, group would you least want to come and live in South Africa?	1=Nigerians, 2=Angolans; 3=Somalis; 4=Zimbabweans; 5=DRC; 6=Mozambicans; 7=Batswana; 8=Swazi; 9=Basotho; 10=people from other African countries; 11=Europeans; 12=Americans; 13=Indians; 14=Pakistanis; 15=Chinese; 16=Other Asians; 17=Australians; 18=Returning South Africans; 19=Other; 20=None (welcome all groups). Note that 1-10=Africans; 14-16=Other Asians	2003-2018	45,508
<i>Economic resources</i> Life improved	In the last 5 years, has life improved, stayed the same or gotten worse for	1=improved; 2=stayed the same; 3=gotten worse	2003-2018	46,866



	people like you?			
Job creation, healthcare, housing, crime	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that the government is handling the following matters in your neighbourhood? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating jobs</li> <li>- Access to health care</li> <li>- Affordable housing</li> <li>- Cutting crime</li> </ul>	1=very satisfied; 2=satisfied; 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4=dissatisfied; 5=very dissatisfied  Note that 1-2=satisfied; 4-5=dissatisfied	2003-2018	46,537 46,021 45,479 46,712
<b>Nationalism</b> SA identity	I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than of any other country in the world  South Africa is a better country than most other countries	1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=neither nor; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree  Note that 1-2=agree; 4-5=disagree	2008-2018	33,441  33,158
<b>Exposure to immigrants</b> Foreign friends, acquaintances	Of the people you know who have come to live in South Africa from another country, how many would you consider to be friends?  How many acquaintances do you know who have come to live in South Africa from another country?	1=none; 2=few; 3=some; 4=many; 5=very many  Note that 2-3=some; 4-5=many	2008-2018	19,886  31,669
<b>False narratives</b> Immigrants increase crime, take jobs, bring disease, use up resources	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immigrants increase crime rates;</li> <li>- Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in South Africa;</li> <li>- Immigrants bring disease to South Africa;</li> <li>- Immigrants use up our country's resources</li> </ul>	1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=neither nor; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree  Note that 1-2=agree; 4-5=disagree	2008-2018 except crime and jobs=2003-2018	40,563 40,782 31,717 32,529
<b>Demographics</b> Race	Race of respondent	1=Black African; 2=Coloured; 3=Indian/Asian; 4=White; 5=Other	2003-2018	46,230
Gender	Sex of respondent	1=Male; 2=Female		47,366
Age	Age of respondent in completed years	16-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; 66+	2004-2018 missing from 2003 and 2009 surveys	38,418
Employment status	What is your current employment	1=employed full time;	2003-2018	38,186

	status?	<p>2=employed part time;  3=employed less than part time (causal work/piecework);  4=temporarily sick;  5=unemployed, not looking;  6=unemployed looking;  7=pensioner; 8=permanently sick or disabled;  9=housewife, not working, not looking; 10=housewife, looking; 11=student/learner; 12=other</p> <p>Note that 1-3=full or part-time employed; 4-6, 8-10=unemployed; 7,12=pensioner/other</p>	missing from 2013 survey	
Education	What is the highest level of education that you have ever completed?	<p>0=no schooling; 1=Grade R/ Grade 0; 2=Grade 1/ Sub A/Class 1; 3=Grade 2 / Sub B/Class 2; 4=Grade 3/Standard 1/ ABET 1 (Kha Ri Gude, Sanli); 5=Grade 4/ Standard 2; 6=Grade 5/ Standard 3/ ABET 2; 7=Grade 6/Standard 4; 8=Grade 7/Standard 5/ ABET 3; 9=Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1; 10=Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/ ABET 4; 11=Grade 10/ Standard 8/ Form 3; 12=Grade 11/ Standard 9/ Form 4; 13=Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric; 14=NTC 1/ N1/NC (V) Level 2; 15=NTC 2/ N2/ NC (V) Level 3; 16=NTC 3/ N3/NC (V) Level 4; 17=N4/NTC 4; 18=N5/NTC 5; 19=N6/NTC 6; 20=Diploma; 21=Advanced diploma; 22=Bachelor degree; 23=Post graduate diploma (PGD); 24=Honours degree; 25=Master degree; 26=Doctorate degree, Laureatus in Technology; 27=Other (specify)</p>	2003-2018	46,643

		Note that 1-8=primary; 9-13=secondary; 14-19=vocational; 20-26=tertiary		
Personal income	Please give me the letter that best describes your personal total monthly income before tax and other deductions. Please include all sources of income i.e. salaries, pensions, income from investment, etc.	1=no income; 2=R1-R500; 3=R501-R750; 4=R751-R1,000; 5=R1,001-R1,500; 6=R1,501-R2,000; 7=R2,001-R3,000; 8=R3,001-5,000; 9=R5,001-R7,500; 10=R7,501-R10,000; 11=R10,001-R15,000; 12=R15,001-R20,000; 13=R20,001-R30,000; 14=R30,001-R50,000; 15=R50,001 + Note that 2-8=<5,000; 9-12=5,001-20,000; 13-14=20,001-50,000	2003-2018	38,786
Location	Geotype	1=urban, formal; 2=urban, informal; 3=Traditional area; 4=farms Note that 1-2=urban; 3-4=rural	2003-2018	44,069
Province	Province	1=Western Cape; 2=Eastern Cape; 3=Northern Cape; 4=Free State; 5=Kwazulu Natal; 6=North West; 7=Gauteng; 8=Mpumalanga; 9=Limpopo	2003-2018	33,490

The scapegoat mechanism is more nuanced when I use responses on how citizens feel about foreigners. Among the respondents that agree with the negative narratives that immigrants bring disease, increase crime, take jobs away from locals and use up the country's resources in the country, close to 70% have hostile feelings towards immigrants in relation to those who have friendly feelings. I also observe that there are smaller differences in hostile vs friendly feelings among the respondents who disagree compared to the differences in feelings among those who agree with the negative statements.

**Table A2: False narratives and immigrant attitudes (% of respondents)**

	Immigrants bring disease to SA		
	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Hostile	72.63	58.96	41.45
Friendly	27.37	41.04	58.55
How do you feel about foreigners living in SA?	Immigrants increase crime in SA		
	Agree	Neither	Disagree

Hostile	69.91	57.20	34.96
Friendly	30.09	42.80	65.04
<b>Immigrants take local jobs in SA</b>			
	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Hostile	70.25	59.20	36.55
Friendly	29.75	40.80	63.45
<b>Immigrants use up country's resources</b>			
	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Hostile	65.84	57.95	43.85
Friendly	34.16	42.05	56.15

Source: SASAS, 2010-2018. Note: The question related to hostile vs friendly feelings was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004, 2007-2009.

**Table A3: Predicted Probabilities from logit model**

<b>Welcome immigrants (Ref: welcome no immigrants)</b>	<b>Predicted Probabilities</b>	<b>Welcome immigrants (Ref: welcome no immigrants)</b>	<b>Predicted Probabilities</b>
<b>Economic resources</b>		<b>False Narratives</b>	
<i>Has life improved?</i>		<i>Immigrants take jobs from South</i>	
Improved	0.847*** (0.008)	Agree	0.792*** (0.008)
The same	0.844*** (0.008)	Neither	0.871*** (0.012)
Worse	0.844*** (0.008)	Disagree	0.910*** (0.008)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt providing affordable housing?</i>		<i>Immigrants increase crime rates</i>	
Satisfied	0.847*** (0.008)	Agree	0.792*** (0.008)
Neither	0.843*** (0.011)	Neither	0.926*** (0.009)
Dissatisfied	0.844*** (0.007)	Disagree	0.899*** (0.009)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt creating jobs?</i>		<i>Immigrants use up country's resources</i>	
Satisfied	0.847*** (0.014)	Agree	0.841*** (0.006)
Neither	0.840*** (0.016)	Neither	0.854*** (0.012)
Dissatisfied	0.845*** (0.006)	Disagree	0.851*** (0.012)

<i>How satisfied are you with gvt providing healthcare services?</i>		<i>Immigrants bring disease to South Africa</i>	
Satisfied	0.853*** (0.006)	Agree	0.796*** (0.009)
Neither	0.836*** (0.013)	Neither	0.864*** (0.010)
Dissatisfied	0.835*** (0.008)	Disagree	0.889*** (0.007)
<b>Nationalism</b>		<b>Social connections with immigrants</b>	
<i>I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than any other country</i>		<i>How many immigrants do you consider to be friends?</i>	
Agree	0.850*** (0.005)	None	0.763*** (0.010)
Neither	0.801*** (0.025)	Some	0.872*** (0.006)
Disagree	0.821*** (0.017)	Many	0.896*** (0.013)
<i>South Africa is a better country than most other countries</i>		<i>How many acquaintances do you know who are immigrants?</i>	
Agree	0.846*** (0.006)	None	0.782*** (0.033)
Neither	0.846*** (0.013)	Some	0.855*** (0.005)
Disagree	0.841*** (0.014)	Many	0.812*** (0.011)
Observations	7,591		
Chi-square	1008.30***		
Year FE	YES		
Controls	YES		

Predicted probabilities reported. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table A4: Linear Probability Model and Logit full results**

	(1) Linear Probability Model	(2) Logit Marginal effects
<b>Welcome immigrants (Ref: welcome no immigrants)</b>		
<b>Economic resources</b>		
<i>Has life improved? (Ref: Improved or the same)</i>		
Worse	-0.008 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.010)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt providing affordable housing? (Ref: Satisfied or indifferent)</i>		
Dissatisfied	-0.011 (0.010)	-0.010 (0.009)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt creating</i>		

<i>jobs? (Ref: Satisfied or indifferent)</i>		
Dissatisfied	-0.011 (0.012)	-0.010 (0.011)
<i>How satisfied are you with gvt providing healthcare services? (Ref: Satisfied or indifferent)</i>		
Dissatisfied	-0.019* (0.010)	-0.017* (0.009)
<b>Nationalism</b>		
<i>I would rather be a citizen of South Africa than any other country (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		
Disagree	-0.018 (0.017)	-0.017 (0.017)
<i>South Africa is a better country than most other countries (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		
Disagree	-0.012 (0.016)	-0.012 (0.015)
<b>Social connections with immigrants</b>		
<i>How many immigrants do you consider to be friends? (Ref: None)</i>		
Many	0.131*** (0.011)	0.118*** (0.010)
<i>How many acquaintances do you know who are immigrants? (Ref: None)</i>		
Many	0.070* (0.038)	0.066* (0.034)
<b>False Narratives</b>		
<i>Immigrants take jobs from South Africans (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		
Disagree	0.104*** (0.010)	0.117*** (0.010)
<i>Immigrants increase crime rates (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		
Disagree	0.073*** (0.010)	0.095*** (0.011)
<i>Immigrants use up country's resources (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		
Disagree	0.002 (0.011)	0.011 (0.013)
<i>Immigrants bring disease to South Africa (Ref: Agree or indifferent)</i>		
Disagree	0.088*** (0.010)	0.087*** (0.010)
<b>Demographics</b>		
<i>Employment status (Ref: employed)</i>		
Unemployed	-0.015 (0.013)	-0.017 (0.011)
Pensioner/other	-0.018 (0.014)	-0.020 (0.014)

Student	-0.009 (0.021)	-0.014 (0.020)
<i>Education (Ref: no schooling)</i>		
Primary	-0.027 (0.028)	-0.020 (0.022)
Secondary	-0.038 (0.027)	-0.033 (0.021)
Vocational	0.004 (0.031)	0.004 (0.026)
Tertiary	-0.005 (0.030)	-0.001 (0.026)
Other	0.000 (0.067)	0.011 (0.056)
<i>Personal income (Ref: no income)</i>		
<R5,000	-0.004 (0.012)	-0.006 (0.011)
R5,001-20,000	-0.004 (0.017)	-0.005 (0.017)
R20,001-50,000	0.058** (0.027)	0.054** (0.024)
R50,000+	-0.004 (0.012)	-0.006 (0.011)
<i>Age (Ref: 16-25)</i>		
26-35 years	-0.031** (0.015)	-0.029** (0.013)
36-45 years	-0.038** (0.016)	-0.035** (0.014)
46-55 years	-0.035** (0.017)	-0.031** (0.015)
56-65 years	-0.047** (0.019)	-0.042** (0.018)
66+ years	-0.056** (0.023)	-0.049** (0.021)
<i>Race (Ref: White)</i>		
Black	0.002 (0.016)	0.001 (0.016)
Coloured	-0.012 (0.018)	-0.017 (0.018)
Indian/Asian	-0.032 (0.020)	-0.032* (0.019)
Other	-0.022 (0.029)	-0.031 (0.029)
Female (Ref: male)	-0.016* (0.009)	-0.013 (0.009)
Rural (Ref: urban)	-0.003 (0.012)	-0.004 (0.011)
<i>Province (Ref: Western Cape)</i>		
Eastern Cape	-0.016 (0.018)	-0.016 (0.014)
Northern Cape	-0.082***	-0.074***

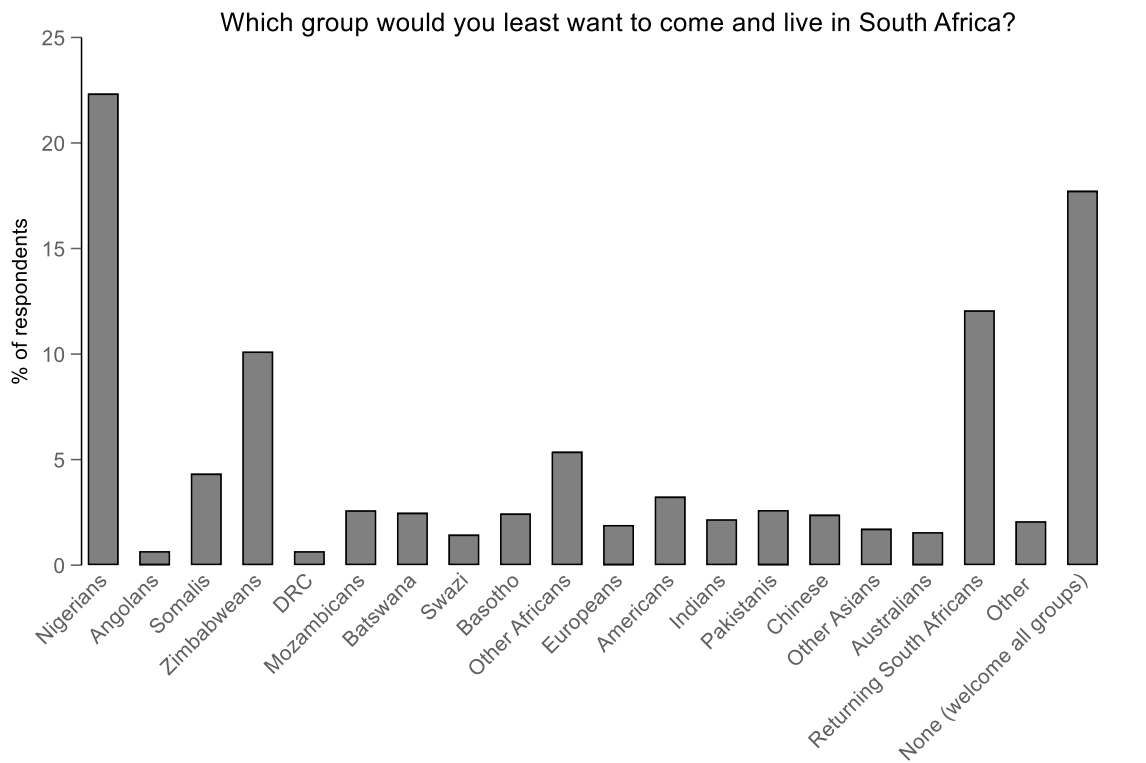
	(0.022)	(0.020)
Free State	-0.147***	-0.152***
	(0.022)	(0.022)
Kwazulu Natal	-0.091***	-0.084***
	(0.018)	(0.015)
North West	-0.116***	-0.110***
	(0.024)	(0.023)
Gauteng	-0.119***	-0.113***
	(0.019)	(0.016)
Mpumalanga	-0.057***	-0.053***
	(0.021)	(0.019)
Limpopo	-0.147***	-0.137***
	(0.021)	(0.019)
Observations	7,591	7,591
F-statistic	26.72***	
Chi-square		772.58***
Year FE	YES	YES

Coefficients for the LPM and marginal effects for the logit reported. Robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1



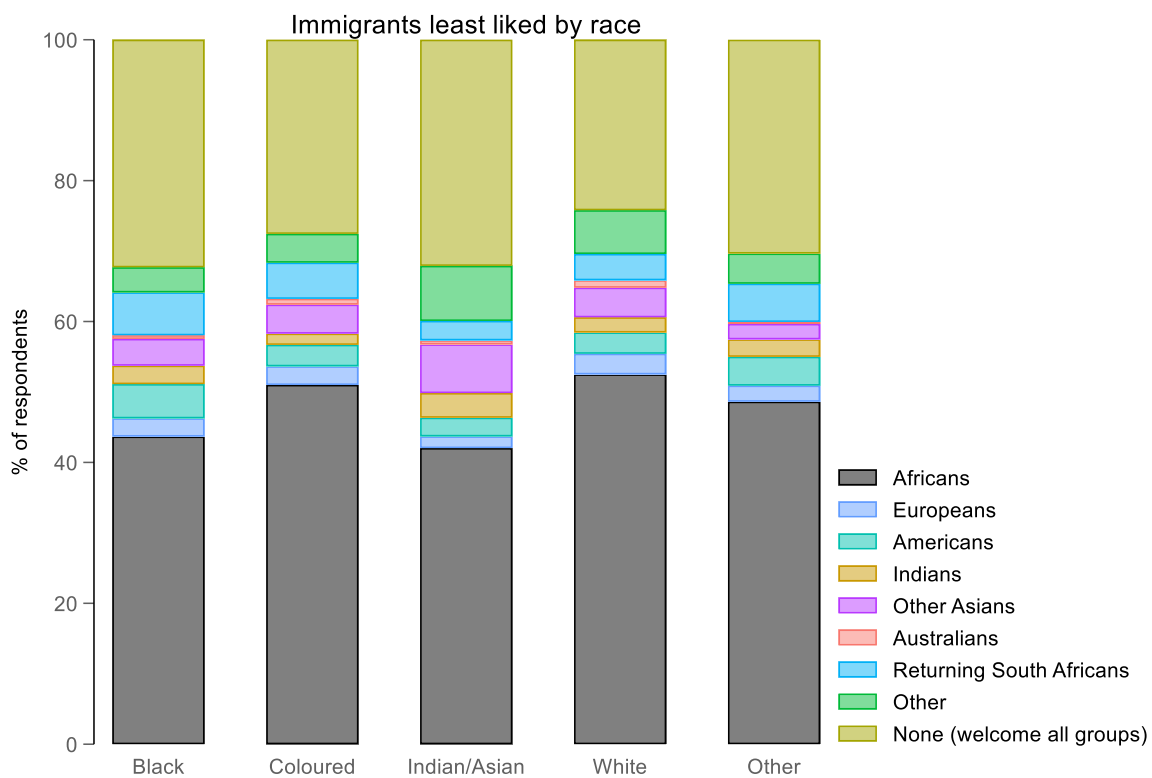
## Appendix B

**Figure B1: Group least liked to live in South Africa**



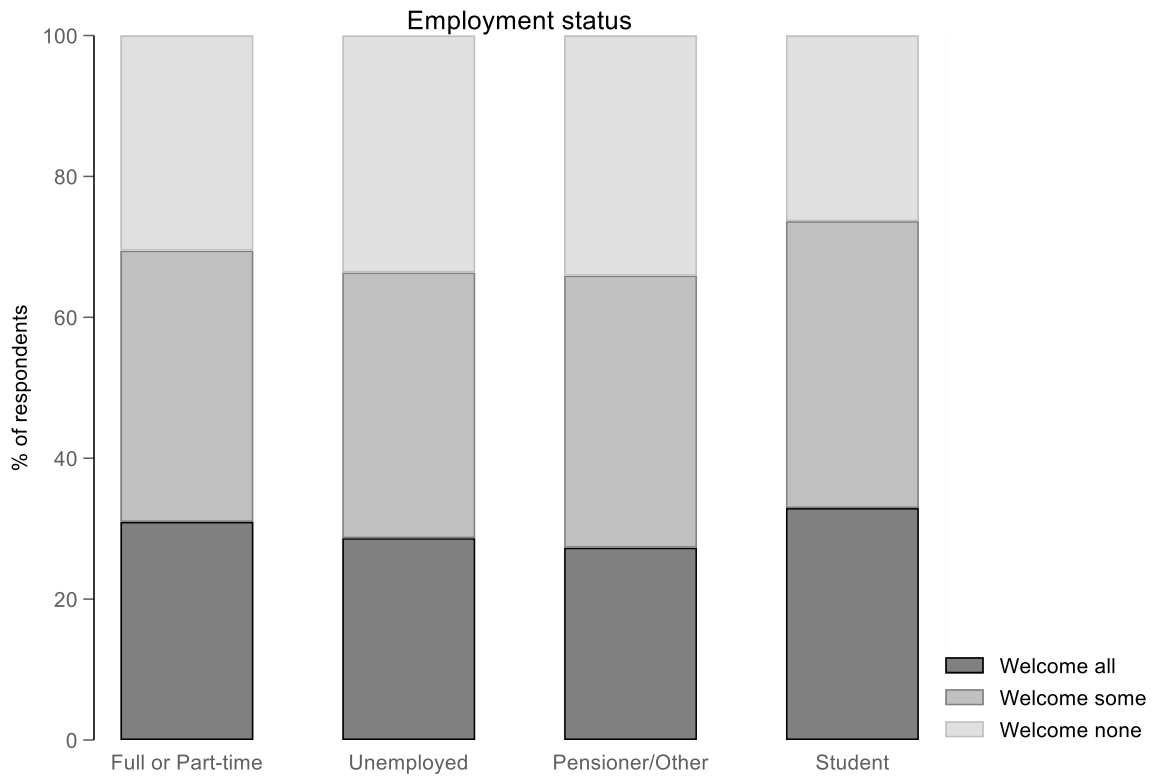
Source: SASAS, 2008-2018. Note: The question was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004 and 2007.

**Figure B2: Group least liked to live in South Africa by race**



Source: SASAS, 2008-2018. Note: The question was not asked in surveys for 2003, 2004 and 2007.

**Figure B3: Employment status and immigrant attitudes**



Source: SASAS, 2003-2018