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XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE AGAINST NIGERIAN IMMIGRANTS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA–SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS: A DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines xenophobic violence against Nigerian immigrants in South Africa and its implications for Nigeria–South Africa relations across political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. The study responds to a gap in the literature: existing scholarship has extensively examined the drivers, patterns, and consequences of xenophobia in South Africa, but comparatively less attention has been given to the way documented episodes of violence are reflected in bilateral diplomatic engagement and cross-border economic and socio-cultural interaction over time. The study employs qualitative documentary analysis, complemented by descriptive trend analysis of selected diplomatic, trade, investment, migration, and socio-cultural indicators drawn from official reports, bilateral documents, institutional records, scholarly studies, and media archives. The study does not estimate an independent causal effect of xenophobic violence; rather, it identifies temporal patterns and documented linkages between major episodes of violence and changes in bilateral relations. The documentary evidence suggests that xenophobic violence contributed to business uncertainty, property losses, and reduced confidence among some Nigerian businesses, although broader economic factors—including global commodity price fluctuations, macroeconomic conditions, and regulatory environments—also influenced bilateral trade. The findings indicate that periods of intensified xenophobic violence coincided with deterioration in selected indicators of bilateral diplomatic engagement, economic interaction, and socio-cultural exchange. The evidence also shows stronger Nigerian diplomatic responses, increased emphasis on consular protection, and greater concern about migration governance and continental integration. The study concludes that xenophobic violence constitutes a recurring source of bilateral tension and a challenge to Pan-African cooperation, while the available documentary evidence warrants cautious interpretation because changes in trade, investment, travel, and diplomacy are also shaped by wider political and economic conditions. The study recommends strengthened bilateral migration governance, early-warning and consular mechanisms, sustained political dialogue, and measures consistent with the objectives of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA.

Keywords: Xenophobia, Afrophobia, anti-Nigerian sentiment, Nigeria–South Africa relations, migration governance.

Introduction

Nigeria and South Africa are major political and economic actors in sub-Saharan Africa, and their bilateral relationship has developed through changing phases of solidarity, cooperation, and competition. Nigeria played a prominent role in opposition to apartheid, while post-apartheid relations expanded through trade, investment, diplomacy, migration, education, and people-to-people contacts (Seteolu & Okuneye, 2017). At the same time, the relationship has been periodically strained by disagreements over foreign policy, economic interests, migration, and the treatment of Nigerian nationals in South Africa (Adebisi, 2017; Ogunnubi & Amusan, 2018).

Xenophobic violence has become an important issue in this relationship. The May 2008 attacks marked a major episode of anti-immigrant violence, followed by further outbreaks in 2015 and 2019 and continued reports of harassment and violence in subsequent years (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009; Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). Nigerian nationals have featured prominently in public and diplomatic discussions of these incidents because of their visibility in commerce, migration networks, and community life. The consequences extend beyond immediate security concerns to questions of consular protection, diplomatic trust, business confidence, travel, education, and the broader prospects for African regional integration.

Previous studies have established several important findings. Research by Crush and Ramachandran (2009), Nyamnjoh (2006), and Matunhu (2008) has highlighted the historical, institutional, and social dimensions of xenophobia in Southern Africa, including questions of citizenship, belonging, migration governance, and the construction of foreigners as outsiders. Studies focused on Nigeria–South Africa relations have examined diplomatic reactions, bilateral tensions, and the political consequences of attacks on Nigerians (Adebisi, 2017; Ogunnubi & Amusan, 2018; Ojukwu et al., 2019; Nesiama et al., 2022). Other studies have considered economic and political triggers, including competition, unemployment, scapegoating, and governance failures (Olutuche & Okolie, 2021; Whose & Malitani, 2014). However, the literature remains comparatively limited in integrating political diplomacy, economic interaction, and socio-cultural exchange within a single documentary assessment across major episodes of violence. It is also necessary to distinguish general xenophobia from Afrophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and nationality-specific anti-Nigerian sentiment rather than treating these concepts as interchangeable. This study advances the literature by bringing these distinctions into the analysis and by systematically examining documented temporal patterns across the three dimensions of Nigeria–South Africa relations without making unsupported causal claims.

Statement of the problem

The scholarship on xenophobia in South Africa is extensive, but important analytical gaps remain. Existing studies have provided substantial explanations of the social, political, economic, and

institutional conditions associated with xenophobic violence, including labour-market competition, scapegoating, citizenship and belonging, migration governance, and political rhetoric (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Olutuche & Okolie, 2021; Whose & Malitani, 2014). Research on Nigeria–South Africa relations has also documented diplomatic responses to major attacks and the resulting tensions between the two governments (Adebisi, 2017; Ogunnubi & Amusan, 2018; Nesiama et al., 2022). What remains inadequately examined is how these documented episodes correspond over time with changes in political diplomacy, economic interaction, and socio-cultural exchange, and how the evidence should be interpreted where several competing explanations may account for the same trend.

This study addresses that gap through a documentary analysis of major xenophobic episodes involving Nigerian immigrants and selected indicators of Nigeria–South Africa relations. It contributes to the literature in three specific ways. First, it brings political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions together rather than treating diplomatic relations only as a foreign-policy question. Second, it distinguishes xenophobia, Afrophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and anti-Nigerian sentiment, thereby improving conceptual precision. Third, it uses descriptive temporal comparison to identify periods in which intensified violence coincided with changes in bilateral relations while explicitly avoiding claims that xenophobic violence independently caused those changes. The study therefore treats the evidence as showing documented associations and plausible linkages that require cautious interpretation rather than as proof of causality.

The study asks: How have documented episodes of xenophobic violence against Nigerian immigrants coincided with changes in Nigeria–South Africa relations across political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions, and what policy measures can strengthen migration governance, consular protection, bilateral trust, and Pan-African cooperation?

Conceptual clarifications

Xenophobia and Afrophobia

Xenophobia refers broadly to negative attitudes, hostility, discrimination, or violence directed at people perceived to be foreigners or outsiders (Nyamnjoh, 2006). It is therefore an umbrella concept concerning foreignness and exclusion. Afrophobia is narrower and refers to hostility toward Africans or people of African origin, including forms of racialized anti-Black or anti-African discrimination. In the South African context, some scholars have used the term to draw attention to the fact that much documented xenophobic violence has targeted migrants from other African countries (Matunhu, 2008). However, the terms should not be treated as exact synonyms: xenophobia may target foreigners irrespective of nationality or race, whereas Afrophobia specifically emphasizes anti-African or racialized dimensions. Claims that African migrants receive

differential treatment from non-African foreigners should therefore be made only where comparative evidence supports them.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is a broader attitudinal and political category referring to negative perceptions or opposition toward immigrants, whether or not such attitudes result in violence. Anti-Nigerian sentiment is more specific: it denotes negative stereotyping, discrimination, hostility, or violence directed particularly at Nigerian nationals. It may overlap with xenophobia and, in some contexts, Afrophobia, but the concepts are analytically distinct. Accordingly, this study uses xenophobia as the principal descriptive term for documented hostility toward foreign nationals, uses Afrophobia only where the evidence supports an anti-African or racialized interpretation, and uses anti-Nigerian sentiment when the evidence specifically identifies Nigerians as the target. This distinction helps prevent all forms of hostility toward Nigerians from being automatically classified as Afrophobia.

Diplomatic Relations

Diplomatic relations encompass the formal mechanisms through which states conduct external affairs, including political dialogue, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and consular protection (Akinboye, 2019). In the Nigeria–South Africa dyad, relations operate across multiple tracks: Track I (government-to-government), Track II (non-governmental elite engagement), and Track III (people-to-people). Xenophobic attacks disrupt all three tracks (Ogunnubi & Amusan, 2018). Diplomatic relations are, at their foundation, relationships between people. When they deteriorate, the consequences fall on individuals: the shopkeeper who cannot get consular assistance, the student whose scholarship is suspended, the family separated by visa restrictions.

Migration Governance

Migration governance refers to the framework of laws, policies, institutions, and practices that states employ to regulate the entry, stay, and exit of foreign nationals (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009). The South African case illustrates the pathologies of fragmented governance, where institutional incoherence between the Department of Home Affairs, South African Police Service, and diplomatic corps exacerbates vulnerability among immigrants (Bond et al., 2010). When governance fails, the consequences are human beings left undocumented, unprotected, and to violence.

Theoretical framework

Constructivism in International Relations

This study adopts Alexander Wendt's social constructivism as its primary theoretical framework. Constructivism holds that international politics is shaped not only by material capabilities but also by socially constructed identities, norms, shared meanings, and expectations (Wendt, 1999;

Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). The framework is particularly suitable because the study examines how repeated incidents of violence, official responses, public narratives, and ideas about national identity can influence the meanings attached to Nigeria–South Africa relations. In this study, constructivism performs the central analytical function: it explains how perceptions of foreigners, national identities, norms of African solidarity, and interpretations of bilateral behaviour may shape diplomatic interaction.

The constructivist framework is applied to three analytical issues. First, it helps examine how repeated episodes of violence can contribute to changing representations of South Africa among Nigerian policymakers and publics. Second, it provides a basis for assessing how xenophobia challenges norms of Pan-African solidarity and regional integration. Third, it helps interpret official diplomatic responses as part of an evolving social relationship in which identities, expectations, and shared meanings matter alongside material interests.

The study does not use constructivism to claim that xenophobic violence mechanically determines foreign-policy behaviour. Rather, it uses the framework to interpret documented changes in diplomatic narratives, official statements, bilateral engagement, and perceptions of trust. This distinction is important because the documentary record cannot, by itself, establish that xenophobic incidents were the sole or independent cause of subsequent diplomatic or economic changes.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory is used as a secondary explanatory framework. Gurr (1970) links collective violence to perceived discrepancies between expected and attainable conditions. In this study, the framework helps interpret literature that associates xenophobic mobilisation with unemployment, inequality, service-delivery grievances, competition, and the scapegoating of migrants (Olutuche & Okolie, 2021; Whose & Malitani, 2014). Its function is therefore to illuminate possible domestic conditions associated with xenophobic mobilisation; it does not constitute the primary framework for explaining bilateral relations.

Relative Deprivation Theory is particularly useful for understanding why immigrants may become targets during periods of social and economic stress. However, the study treats these factors as contextual explanations identified in previous scholarship rather than as independently tested causes. The documentary design does not permit estimation of the relative causal contribution of deprivation, political rhetoric, migration governance, or other factors.

Ubuntu Philosophy: An Ethical Framework

Ubuntu philosophy is retained as a normative and policy-oriented framework rather than as a second primary theory. Ubuntu, commonly expressed through the idea of shared humanity and interdependence, emphasizes dignity, community, mutual recognition, and solidarity (Metz, 2011;

Tutu, 1999). Its function in this study is to evaluate policy responses and reconciliation options, particularly measures concerning victim protection, dialogue, acknowledgment of harm, and restoration of social trust. Ubuntu therefore complements, rather than competes with, constructivism's explanatory role.

From an Ubuntu perspective, xenophobic violence is inconsistent with principles of mutual recognition and shared human dignity. The concept is used here to assess the normative implications of documented violence and to inform recommendations for bilateral engagement, migration governance, and community-level reconciliation. It is not presented as an empirical causal theory.

Ubuntu also provides a basis for evaluating whether diplomatic and migration policies promote dignity and reciprocal recognition. This is particularly relevant to the study's recommendations on consular protection, dialogue, survivor participation, and measures intended to rebuild confidence between Nigerian and South African communities.

Accordingly, the theoretical architecture of the study is deliberately hierarchical: social constructivism is the primary explanatory framework; relative deprivation provides a secondary lens for interpreting domestic conditions associated with xenophobic mobilisation; Ubuntu provides a normative lens for evaluating policy and reconciliation; and realism is used only as a contextual consideration of material constraints on state behaviour.

Realist Consideration

Realism is therefore treated as a contextual, not primary, framework. It helps explain why material interdependence, relative power, and economic interests may constrain the range of diplomatic responses available to Nigeria and South Africa (Akinboye, 2019). Its function is limited to interpreting material constraints that may coexist with normative and identity-based considerations. The study does not employ realism to explain the occurrence of xenophobic violence or to establish a causal hierarchy among competing explanations.

Methods

Study design and rationale. This study uses a retrospective documentary analysis combining quantitative trend analysis with qualitative thematic analysis. The design is appropriate because the study examines events that occurred in the past and relies exclusively on documentary and archival evidence rather than newly collected participant data. The quantitative component describes changes over time in selected diplomatic, economic, migration, and socio-cultural indicators, while the qualitative component identifies recurring themes, policy responses, narratives, and documented consequences surrounding major xenophobic episodes. The design is descriptive and interpretive; it does not employ an experimental, quasi-experimental, or econometric causal-

identification strategy and therefore does not estimate an independent causal effect of xenophobic violence.

Data universe and selection strategy. The data universe consists of publicly available documentary records relevant to xenophobic violence against African, and specifically Nigerian, immigrants in South Africa and to Nigeria–South Africa relations. Documents were purposively selected for their direct relevance to the study questions and for their ability to provide evidence on political diplomacy, economic interaction, migration governance, and socio-cultural exchange. The unit of analysis is the documented xenophobic episode or period and the corresponding bilateral or cross-border indicator. Selection was substantive rather than probabilistic: documents were included when they contained information directly relevant to the study period, the identified xenophobic episodes, or the selected outcome indicators.

Number and types of documents reviewed. The study did not maintain a separate document-level inventory from which a defensible exact number of individual documents can be reconstructed. Accordingly, no artificial numerical count is introduced. The documentary corpus comprised the source categories actually used in the manuscript: bilateral communiqués and government statements; African Union and AfCFTA materials; UNHCR and human-rights assessments; South African migration and administrative records; Nigerian trade, migration, and diaspora records; World Bank and other international statistical indicators; scholarly journal articles and books; institutional and business reports; and credible media archives and published testimonies. For the final journal submission, an appendix/source inventory should be added and the verified document count inserted if the journal requires an exact number.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Documents were included when they (a) addressed xenophobic or anti-immigrant violence in South Africa; (b) contained information specifically concerning Nigerian immigrants or Nigeria–South Africa relations; (c) reported political, economic, migration, or socio-cultural indicators relevant to the research questions; (d) covered the study period or provided directly relevant historical context; and (e) were sufficiently identifiable to permit attribution to an institution, publication, author, or media outlet. Documents were excluded when they were duplicative, unrelated to the Nigeria–South Africa relationship, lacked substantive information relevant to the research questions, or consisted only of unverified commentary without identifiable provenance. Social-media material and personal testimonies were treated as documentary evidence only when preserved or reproduced in identifiable archival, institutional, or published sources; they were not treated as primary interview data.

Study period. The principal study period is 2008–2024. The analysis begins with the May 2008 xenophobic attacks, treats the 2015 and 2019 episodes as major comparison points, and considers the 2020–2024 period of intermittent incidents and post-2019 diplomatic, economic, migration, and

socio-cultural developments. Earlier material is used only where necessary to establish historical or institutional context.

Qualitative sources and analytical procedures. Qualitative evidence was drawn from official statements and communiqués, African Union and other intergovernmental documents, migration and human-rights reports, scholarly publications, institutional/business reports, media archives, and published accounts of affected persons. The analysis used thematic interpretation to identify recurring patterns relating to xenophobic violence, nationality and racialized targeting, diplomatic responses, migration governance, economic disruption, socio-cultural interaction, trust, and regional integration. The analysis did not claim to reconstruct causal mechanisms from participant testimony because no primary interviews or focus groups were conducted.

Determinants of xenophobic violence

The apartheid legacy and the social construction of foreignness

The apartheid legacy provides an important historical context for understanding contemporary constructions of citizenship, foreignness, and belonging in South Africa (Crush & Ramachandran, 2009; Matunhu, 2008). Previous scholarship links the institutional legacies of apartheid and persistent socioeconomic inequality to tensions over access to resources and belonging. In the present study, these factors are treated as historical and structural contexts identified in the literature rather than as independently tested causes of specific attacks.

The literature also points to the continuing significance of social boundaries and perceptions of insiders and outsiders. These boundaries can shape public interpretations of migrants and citizenship, but the documentary evidence reviewed here does not permit a direct measurement of the extent to which apartheid-era attitudes independently determine contemporary xenophobic violence.

Institutional pathologies in migration governance

Migration-governance weaknesses have also been identified in the literature as important contextual conditions. Documentation and administrative backlogs, enforcement practices, institutional capacity, and the relationship between immigration authorities and law-enforcement agencies can affect migrants' vulnerability and access to protection (Bond et al., 2010; Crush & Ramachandran, 2009). Reports of police misconduct or inadequate responses to attacks should, however, be distinguished between documented individual incidents and claims about institutions as a whole. The study therefore reports such evidence cautiously and does not generalize beyond what the sources establish.

Where migrants lack secure documentation or effective access to public protection, their exposure to exploitation and violence may increase. This provides an important context for understanding the documented experiences of Nigerian immigrants, while recognizing that migration status, institutional capacity, local politics, and community conditions may vary across locations and periods.

The political economy of scapegoating

Political rhetoric and scapegoating have been identified in previous research as factors associated with anti-immigrant mobilisation, particularly where immigration is linked in public discourse to unemployment, crime, or service-delivery problems (Olutuche & Okolie, 2021; Whose & Malitani, 2014). Nigerian nationals may be especially visible in some commercial and migration networks, and negative stereotypes concerning crime or economic competition have appeared in public debates. These claims should be understood as documented narratives and perceptions, not as evidence that Nigerians as a group engage in criminal activity. The study examines how such narratives may contribute to the social construction of outsiders, consistent with its constructivist framework.

DIAM measurement and construction.

DIAM means Diplomatic Index Assessment Matrix. In the manuscript, DIAM is used as a composite descriptive measure intended to summarise changes in the political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of Nigeria–South Africa relations. The term appears in the cited source material, particularly Ochogwu et al. (2025), but the present manuscript does not identify DIAM as an established, standardised, psychometrically validated instrument. Accordingly, this study does not present DIAM as a pre-existing validated scale comparable to a survey instrument or a formally normed index.

Constituent dimensions and indicators.

For the purposes of this study, the DIAM framework is organised into three dimensions: political diplomacy, economic interaction, and socio-cultural interaction. The political-diplomacy dimension is represented by documentary indicators such as the intensity of bilateral political engagement, official diplomatic responses to major incidents, bilateral consultations, high-level contacts, and documented changes in diplomatic trust or tension. The economic dimension is represented by bilateral trade, Nigerian exports to South Africa, South African exports to Nigeria, trade balance, South African FDI stock in Nigeria, reported business confidence, and relevant mobility or market-entry indicators where documented. The socio-cultural dimension is represented by student and academic exchange, tourism and visitor flows, cultural exchange, sports and people-to-people interaction, and other documented indicators of cross-border social confidence. These indicators are drawn from the sources already cited in the study, including bilateral and government

records, AU/AfCFTA materials, UNHCR and human-rights reports, South African administrative records, Nigerian statistical and diaspora records, international statistical sources, scholarly studies, institutional/business reports, and credible media archives.

Scoring procedure and weighting.

The reported DIAM values are expressed on a 0–10 scale, with higher values interpreted as indicating stronger or more favourable bilateral conditions on the relevant dimension. However, the source material available for this study does not provide a complete indicator-by-year matrix, explicit transformation rules for converting each raw indicator to a 0–10 score, or a documented weighting schedule. For this reason, the present revision does not invent or retroactively assign weights that cannot be demonstrated from the underlying data. The DIAM scores already reported in Tables 1 and 2 are therefore retained strictly as source-reported descriptive composite scores rather than presented as newly calculated estimates.

Calculation and transparency.

A fully reproducible composite index would require the underlying indicator values, a common scoring transformation, and pre-specified weights. The general structure can be represented as: $DIAM_{d,t} = \Sigma(w_i \times S_{i,t})$, where $DIAM_{d,t}$ is the score for dimension d in year or period t; $S_{i,t}$ is the standardised 0–10 score for indicator i; and w_i is the weight assigned to indicator i, with $\Sigma w_i = 1$. This equation is provided to clarify the mathematical requirements of a composite index; it is not asserted that the original source used this exact formula because the source does not disclose sufficient information to verify the calculation. In the absence of that documentation, no new numerical DIAM values are generated in this revision.

Sources of indicators.

The indicators underlying the three DIAM dimensions are taken from the documentary sources identified elsewhere in the manuscript. Political-diplomacy information is drawn principally from bilateral communiqués, government statements, and studies of Nigeria–South Africa diplomatic relations. Economic indicators are drawn from South African Revenue Service data, Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics materials, IMF Direction of Trade Statistics, investment/business reports, and the cited scholarly literature. Socio-cultural and migration-related indicators are drawn from UNHCR and human-rights documentation, migration and administrative records, education/travel records where reported, AU/AfCFTA materials, and the cited literature. Because the underlying source materials differ in definitions, coverage, and reporting periods, the DIAM figures are interpreted as documentary composite assessments rather than precise measures of an unobserved latent construct.

Reliability and validity.

No psychometric reliability coefficient, such as Cronbach's alpha, is reported for DIAM because the available study design does not involve a multi-item respondent questionnaire and the underlying documentary indicators are heterogeneous measures rather than interchangeable survey items. Reliability was addressed through documentary triangulation: major claims and reported indicators were compared across official/intergovernmental records, scholarly literature, institutional/business reports, and credible media documentation. Content validity was addressed conceptually by aligning the three DIAM dimensions with the study's research questions and by ensuring that the selected indicators correspond to the political, economic, and socio-cultural domains examined in the paper. Construct validity is necessarily limited because the source material does not provide a documented validation study, factor structure, benchmark sample, or formal sensitivity analysis for DIAM.

Status of the instrument.

For methodological precision, DIAM should not be described in this article as an established or externally validated instrument. The present study uses DIAM as a documentary composite assessment reported in the cited literature and applies it descriptively. The authors therefore do not claim that DIAM has an established psychometric pedigree. If the authors later obtain the original indicator-level dataset and scoring rules from the source authors, the index should be recalculated transparently and its reproducibility tested. Until then, the DIAM values should be read as source-reported composite scores and not as independently validated measurements.

Appendix A documents the indicator architecture and source base used to interpret DIAM. Because the underlying annual raw data and original scoring weights are not contained in the present manuscript, the appendix does not fabricate missing numerical inputs; instead, it identifies the documented indicator families that must be supplied for a fully reproducible recalculation.

Quantitative variables and statistical procedures. The quantitative component uses variables reported in the documentary record and presented in the study tables. These include the DIAM political, economic, and socio-cultural scores; bilateral trade; Nigerian exports to South Africa; South African exports to Nigeria; trade balance; South African FDI stock in Nigeria; reported tourism/visitor flows; Nigerian student enrolment; work permits; remittance flows; business-entry or business-confidence indicators; and selected counts or percentages relating to migration and AfCFTA implementation. The statistical treatment is descriptive rather than inferential. The study compares annual values and period averages where available and reports absolute changes, percentage changes, directional trends, and pre-/crisis/post-crisis contrasts. Frequencies and percentages are used for categorical documentary indicators. No regression, correlation test,

significance test, causal model, or effect-size estimation is reported because the documentary design and available data do not support causal identification.

Diplomatic and human impact of xenophobic violence

Implications for political diplomacy

The documentary record indicates that major episodes of xenophobic violence were followed by visible Nigerian diplomatic responses. After the 2008 attacks, Nigeria lodged a formal protest and summoned the South African chargé d'affaires. The 2015 attacks were followed by stronger public criticism and temporary suspension of some bilateral consultations. The 2019 attacks generated a more pronounced diplomatic response, including the recall of Nigeria's high commissioner, the withdrawal of Vice President Yemi Osinbajo from the World Economic Forum on Africa in Cape Town, the dispatch of a special envoy, and renewed bilateral consultations (Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). These events show temporal association between episodes of violence and diplomatic responses, but they do not by themselves establish that violence was the sole cause of changes in the bilateral relationship.

The reported DIAM Political Diplomacy Index declined from 7.2/10 in 2007 to 4.1/10 in 2019, followed by a partial recovery to 5.3/10 by 2024 (Ochogwu et al., 2025). The index provides a descriptive measure within the source used by this study; it should not be interpreted as a direct causal estimate. Other bilateral disagreements, leadership changes, domestic political developments, and broader regional dynamics may also have influenced diplomatic engagement. The evidence nevertheless suggests that periods of intensified xenophobic violence coincided with more strained diplomatic interaction and stronger Nigerian concern over the protection of its nationals.

Table 1: Documented Xenophobic Episodes and Selected Nigeria–South Africa Political Diplomacy Indicators (2008–2024)

Year	Documented Xenophobic Event	Nigeria's Diplomatic Response	DIAM Political Diplomacy Index	Documented Human Cost
2008	May attacks: 62 deaths, 30,000 displaced	Formal protest; summoning of chargé d'affaires	7.2 → 6.8	62 deaths; 30,000 displaced; families separated
2015	April–May attacks in Durban and Johannesburg	Temporary suspension of bilateral consultations; presidential statement	6.8 → 5.5	7 deaths; 5,000 displaced; businesses destroyed
2019	March–September attacks including murder of Mrs. Ndubuisi-Chukwu	Recall of high commissioner; withdrawal from WEF; special envoy dispatched	5.5 → 4.1	12+ deaths; Mrs. Ndubuisi-Chukwu murdered; 10,000+ displaced

2020–2023	Intermittent outbreaks; COVID-19 exacerbation	Suspension of bilateral consultations; abstention from AU votes	4.1 → 4.8	Ongoing harassment; consular emergencies; psychological trauma
2024	Reduced but persistent attacks	Resumption of high-level contacts; marginal trust recovery	4.8 → 5.3	Continued vulnerability; families in legal limbo

Note. DIAM = Diplomatic Index Assessment Matrix. Data compiled from Ochogwu et al. (2025), Nesiama et al. (2022), and Ogunnubi and Amusan (2018). Human-cost information is presented as reported in the cited documentary sources and is not independently verified by this study.

Implications for Economic Diplomacy and Foreign Direct Investment

Bilateral trade and investment indicators also changed across the period under review. Bilateral trade is reported to have peaked at approximately $4.5 billion in 2014, declined to about $2.8 billion by 2020, and partially recovered to $3.4 billion by 2023 (Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). These movements coincided with periods of xenophobic violence, but they also occurred alongside global commodity-price changes, the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory developments, exchange-rate movements, and firm-specific decisions. The documentary evidence therefore supports temporal comparison rather than a claim of an independently estimated xenophobic effect.

Table 2: Selected Bilateral Trade, Investment and Business-Confidence Indicators in the Context of Xenophobic Episodes (2014–2023)

Year	Total Bilateral Trade ($bn)	Nigerian Exports ($bn)	South African Exports ($bn)	Trade Balance ($bn)	SA FDI Stock in Nigeria ($bn)	Notable Economic/FDI Events	DIAM Economic Score
2014	4.52	2.89	1.63	+1.26	2.8	MTN expansion; Shoprite growth; Standard Bank operations	7.8
2015	3.98	2.45	1.53	+0.92	2.4	MTN $1.7bn regulatory settlement; rising tensions	6.5
2016	3.21	1.98	1.23	+0.75	2.1	Reduced business confidence; visa restrictions	5.2
2017	3.45	2.12	1.33	+0.79	2.0	Partial recovery; ongoing uncertainty	5.8
2018	3.89	2.34	1.55	+0.79	2.2	Pre-attack business optimism	6.1
2019	2.94	1.78	1.16	+0.62	1.6	340 Nigerian businesses closed; $280m capital flight; Shoprite begins withdrawal	3.9
2020	2.12	1.23	0.89	+0.34	1.3	COVID-19 disruption; Shoprite exits Nigeria; aviation suspension	2.8

2021	2.67	1.56	1.11	+0.45	1.4	Slow recovery; continued investor caution	3.5
2022	3.12	1.89	1.23	+0.66	1.5	Partial trade recovery; MTN regulatory stability	4.2
2023	3.41	2.12	1.29	+0.83	1.6	Modest FDI stabilization; lingering trust deficit	4.8

Note. Sources: South African Revenue Service (SARS), Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, IMF Direction of Trade Statistics, Ochogwu et al. (2025), and Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi (2019). The indicators are presented descriptively; changes cannot be attributed solely to xenophobic violence.

The 2019 attacks were followed by reports of business losses and closures among Nigerian-owned enterprises. Ochogwu et al. (2025) report estimated losses associated with property destruction and business interruption, while Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi (2019) discuss business closures and associated economic consequences. These reports indicate that violence had direct effects on affected businesses and may have influenced business confidence. However, the wider decline in bilateral trade and investment cannot be attributed exclusively to xenophobia because multiple economic and policy factors operated during the same period.

Tourism and aviation indicators also show declines during parts of the period. Reported South African arrivals in Nigeria and Nigerian visits to South Africa fell between 2014 and 2021, while aviation connectivity was disrupted (Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). These changes coincide with xenophobic episodes but also overlap with the COVID-19 pandemic and other travel restrictions. The appropriate interpretation is therefore that xenophobic violence formed part of a wider context affecting cross-border interaction rather than that it independently explains the entire decline.

The economic evidence demonstrates that documented attacks had identifiable consequences for affected businesses and mobility, while aggregate bilateral indicators reflect several simultaneous influences. This distinction is important for avoiding overstatement: the study identifies patterns of coincidence and documented business-level consequences, not an independently estimated macroeconomic effect of xenophobic violence.

Implications for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

The AfCFTA creates a broader institutional context for interpreting migration-related tensions. Cross-border movement of persons, goods, services, and investment is important to continental economic integration, and insecurity or perceptions of insecurity can discourage participation in cross-border markets. The documentary evidence reviewed here indicates that some Nigerian businesses reported postponing or abandoning South African market entry during periods of

heightened concern (Ogunnoiki & Adeyemi, 2019). These reports are relevant to the study's assessment of economic and socio-cultural interaction, but they should not be interpreted as proof that xenophobia alone explains wider AfCFTA implementation outcomes.

Table 3: Documented Trends Relevant to Xenophobic Violence, Migration and AfCFTA-Related Cross-Border Interaction (2019–2024)

Indicator	Pre-Xenophobic Crisis (2014–2018)	Peak Crisis Period (2019–2021)	Post-Crisis Partial Recovery (2022–2024)	Documented/Reported Trend
AfCFTA Protocol on Free Movement of Persons ratifications	2 states ratified	4 states ratified (stagnation)	4 states ratified (no progress)	South Africa refused to sign; Nigeria conditional ratification pending "adequate protection mechanisms" (Ochogwu et al., 2025)
Nigerian businesses entering South African market	45% annual growth in new registrations	67% abandoned or postponed market entry (Ogunnoiki & Adeyemi, 2019)	12% tentative re-engagement	Significant diversion of intra-African trade to Ghanaian and Kenyan markets
Intra-African trade as % of total African trade	15.2% (2018)	14.1% (2020); 14.8% (2021)	15.5% (2023)	Below AfCFTA target of 25% by 2023; xenophobia identified as structural barrier
Cross-border labor mobility between Nigeria and South Africa	12,000 annual work permits issued	3,200 annual work permits (73% decline)	4,800 annual work permits (partial recovery)	Brain drain redirected; skilled Nigerian workers choosing Ghana, Kenya, UAE instead
AfCFTA dispute resolution cases involving migration	0 cases	3 cases (2019–2021)	1 case (2022)	Emerging jurisprudence on migration-related trade barriers
AU Summit adoption of binding migration protection convention	Draft prepared (2018)	Failed adoption (2023 Summit)	Under renegotiation	Institutional paralysis generated by xenophobic crisis (Ochogwu et al., 2025)
Nigerian remittance flows from South Africa	$500 million annually	$320 million annually (36% decline)	$380 million annually (partial recovery)	Direct impact on household welfare in Nigeria; reduced development finance
Pan-African business confidence index (Nigeria–South Africa corridor)	72/100	38/100	51/100	Persistent trust deficit undermining AfCFTA's people-centered vision

Note. Data are reported from the sources identified in the original manuscript, including African Union Commission and AfCFTA materials, business-association surveys, Ochogwu et al. (2025), Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi (2019), and UNCTAD monitoring. The table describes observed trends and reported perceptions; it does not establish causal attribution.

The evidence concerning migration governance and continental integration suggests a tension between regional integration objectives and domestic concerns about migration and security. South Africa's position on migration-related regional commitments and Nigeria's emphasis on protection mechanisms illustrate different policy priorities. These positions should be interpreted within wider domestic and regional political contexts rather than as direct consequences of xenophobic violence alone.

From a constructivist perspective, these tensions matter because regional integration depends not only on formal rules but also on shared expectations of belonging, reciprocity, and trust. The documentary evidence suggests that repeated violence and uncertainty can weaken confidence in cross-border engagement. Ubuntu provides a complementary normative basis for evaluating how these tensions might be addressed through protection, dialogue, and reciprocal recognition.

Socio-Cultural Diplomacy: Depletion of Pan-African Solidarity

The socio-cultural dimension reflects changes in education, cultural exchange, tourism, sport, and people-to-people interaction. Reported academic exchanges declined between 2015 and 2023, and Nigerian student enrolment in South African universities also fell over the period (Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). These changes coincided with repeated xenophobic incidents and concerns about safety, but they also occurred in a wider environment affected by institutional, economic, and travel-related factors. The evidence therefore supports an association rather than a single-cause explanation.

Documented testimonies provide qualitative evidence of how safety concerns and experiences of discrimination may influence students' sense of belonging and willingness to identify publicly with their nationality. Such testimony is used here to illustrate the social meaning of the statistical trends; it is not treated as a representative survey of all Nigerian students in South Africa.

Cultural diplomacy also experienced reported disruption. The annual Nigeria–South Africa Cultural Festival, inaugurated in 2009, was suspended after the 2019 attacks and, according to the cited sources, had not resumed during the period covered by the original study (Nesiama et al., 2022). The timing suggests a documented coincidence between diplomatic tension and reduced cultural exchange, although the available evidence does not establish that xenophobic violence was the sole reason for the suspension.

Sports diplomacy likewise provides examples of heightened sensitivity around Nigerian participation in South Africa. Reports of harassment and increased security during sporting events, together with institutional decisions concerning training locations, indicate that perceptions of safety can affect people-to-people interaction (Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). These examples are treated as indicators of changing social confidence rather than as evidence of a direct causal effect.

The reported DIAM Socio-Cultural Index declined from 6.8/10 in 2014 to 3.2/10 in 2019 and recovered marginally to 4.1/10 by 2024 (Ochogwu et al., 2025). The pattern is consistent with a period of weakened socio-cultural interaction, but the index should be interpreted alongside other social, educational, economic, and travel factors.

Consular Protection and Diaspora Governance

The consular dimension provides a more direct institutional record of Nigeria's response to the protection of its nationals. The Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) has prioritised South Africa in its protection activities, and the sources reviewed report consular emergencies involving Nigerian nationals during the period under study (Nesiama et al., 2022; Ochogwu et al., 2025). These records demonstrate the practical importance of diaspora protection within bilateral relations.

Nigeria's consular posture has included pre-departure information, liaison arrangements, and efforts to strengthen emergency response. These measures can be understood as institutional adaptations to recurring risks, although the available documents do not allow the effectiveness of each measure to be independently evaluated.

Agenda 2063 and the Crisis of Pan-Africanism

The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its citizens. Xenophobic violence against African migrants presents a normative challenge to this vision because it can weaken confidence in intra-African mobility, solidarity, and regional cooperation (Ojukwu et al., 2019). The Nigeria–South Africa case is particularly significant because of the countries' regional political and economic weight. The study therefore considers xenophobia not only as a domestic migration issue but also as a challenge that can enter bilateral and continental policy agendas.

Coding procedures. Documentary materials were organized around a structured coding framework corresponding to the research questions and analytical dimensions. The principal coding categories were: (1) xenophobic episode and date; (2) target group and form of reported hostility; (3) political/diplomatic response; (4) economic and business effects; (5) migration-governance response; (6) socio-cultural and educational effects; (7) public or political narratives; (8) regional-integration implications; and (9) policy responses and recommendations. Relevant passages and numerical indicators were assigned to these categories and then compared across the major study periods. The coding was documentary and manual; no claim of inter-coder reliability is made because the study did not involve multiple independent coders. Where a source reported an interpretation rather than a directly observed measure, that distinction was retained in the analysis.

Triangulation and quality assurance. Triangulation was undertaken by comparing information across different documentary source types rather than relying on a single account. Where possible, claims about major xenophobic episodes, diplomatic responses, and quantitative indicators were checked against more than one source category, including official or intergovernmental records, scholarly literature, institutional reports, and credible media documentation. Apparent discrepancies in dates, counts, or estimates were treated cautiously rather than harmonized without

explanation. The purpose of triangulation was to strengthen documentary credibility and identify inconsistencies, not to create a false impression of precision. Participant information. No primary human participants were recruited for this study. No interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, or direct participant observations were conducted. Consequently, there are no participant numbers, demographic characteristics, recruitment procedures, or informed-consent procedures to report. Published testimonies or accounts of affected persons are treated as secondary documentary material and are not presented as data generated by the researchers.

Ethical considerations. Because the study uses secondary documentary materials and does not involve direct interaction with human participants, it did not collect personal identifiers, obtain participant consent, or conduct field-based human-subject research. Nevertheless, ethical care was applied in representing victims and affected communities. The analysis avoids unnecessary identification of private individuals, distinguishes documented evidence from allegations or commentary, attributes reported claims to their sources, and avoids sensationalizing violence. Where published testimonies are discussed, they are used only for the analytical purpose for which they were documented. The study also acknowledges the limitations and provenance of secondary evidence.

Methodological limitation. The documentary approach permits systematic reconstruction of documented patterns but cannot establish that xenophobic violence independently caused observed changes in diplomacy, trade, investment, travel, education, or migration. Reported statistics may differ across sources because of differences in definitions, coverage, measurement, and reporting periods. The findings should therefore be interpreted as documented temporal patterns, associations, and contextual linkages rather than causal estimates.

Conclusion

This study examined documented episodes of xenophobic violence against Nigerian immigrants in South Africa and their implications for Nigeria–South Africa relations across political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. The review shows that periods of intensified violence frequently coincided with stronger Nigerian diplomatic protests, heightened attention to consular protection, declines in selected indicators of bilateral economic and socio-cultural interaction, and renewed debate over migration governance and Pan-African cooperation. These patterns are important, but the documentary evidence does not establish that xenophobic violence independently caused every observed change. Trade, investment, travel, domestic politics, global economic conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory developments, and other bilateral disagreements also influenced the relationship during the period examined.

The study's main theoretical contribution is to use social constructivism as the primary framework for explaining how identities, norms, narratives, and expectations shape the interpretation of

recurring violence within a bilateral relationship. Relative Deprivation Theory is retained as a secondary lens for understanding socioeconomic conditions associated with xenophobic mobilisation, while Ubuntu functions as a normative framework for assessing dignity, reconciliation, and policy responses. Realism is limited to contextualising the material constraints that shape state choices. This clearer division of theoretical functions avoids treating several frameworks as co-equal explanations.

Policy recommendations

The recommendations section is revised to focus explicitly on realistic, action-oriented policy avenues across governance, diplomacy, and regional integration frameworks.

Bilateral Early-Warning Mechanisms: Establish a joint Nigeria–South Africa early-warning and rapid-response mechanism to track xenophobic rhetoric, monitor community-level tension, exchange real-time intelligence, and enable joint intervention prior to violent outbreaks.

Consular Protection: Strengthen consular infrastructure and emergency support services for Nigerian citizens residing in South Africa, including establishing direct communication channels, legal aid assistance networks, and real-time distress reporting systems.

Diplomatic Dialogue: Upgrade the Nigeria–South Africa Bi-National Commission (BNC) by placing diaspora protection, security, and migration governance as standing agenda items with measurable implementation benchmarks during annual high-level bilateral summits.

Accountability for Xenophobic Violence: Institutionalize clear legal mechanisms to ensure prompt investigation, prosecution, and accountability for perpetrators of xenophobic crimes, alongside establishing transparent frameworks to evaluate business and property loss claims.

Migration Governance: Implement comprehensive migration policy reforms in South Africa, focusing on administrative backlog reduction, clear documentation processes, institutional anti-corruption, and human rights training for border and law enforcement personnel.

Diaspora Protection: Enhance Nigerian diaspora governance through pre-departure orientation protocols, registration drives, structured dialogue with diaspora leadership organizations, and legal framework guidance for foreign enterprise integration.

AU-Level Migration Cooperation: Advance continental migration integration by accelerating negotiations on the African Union Free Movement of Persons Protocol and aligning bilateral arrangements with the broader trade and mobility objectives of the AfCFTA and AU Agenda 2063...

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APPENDIX A

DIAM Indicator Architecture, Sources, and Measurement Notes

The appendix records the indicator architecture used to interpret the DIAM scores reported in the manuscript. It is intentionally transparent about what can and cannot be reproduced from the documentary record currently available. Missing raw values or undisclosed weights are not imputed.

DIAM Dimension	Indicator families	Principal documentary sources	Measurement note
Political Diplomacy	Bilateral consultations; high-level contacts; official protests/recalls;	Bilateral communiqués/government statements; Nesiama et al. (2022); Ogunnubi &	0–10 source-reported DIAM score; raw-to-score rule not disclosed

DIAM Dimension	Indicator families	Principal documentary sources	Measurement note
	diplomatic statements; trust/tension; consular engagement	Amusan (2018); Ochogwu et al. (2025)	
Economic Interaction	Bilateral trade; Nigerian exports; South African exports; trade balance; SA FDI stock; business confidence; market entry/mobility	SARS; Nigerian NBS; IMF DOTS; Ogunnoiki & Adeyemi (2019); Ochogwu et al. (2025)	0–10 source-reported score; exact weights/normalisation not disclosed
Socio-Cultural Interaction	Student/academic exchange; tourism/visitor flows; cultural exchange; sport; people-to-people interaction; social confidence	UNHCR/human-rights reports; migration/admin records; AU/AfCFTA; Nesiama et al. (2022); Ochogwu et al. (2025)	0–10 source-reported score; exact weights/normalisation not disclosed

Index formula for transparent future reconstruction: $DIAM_{d,t} = \Sigma(w_i \times S_{i,t})$, where $S_{i,t}$ is the 0–10 standardised score for indicator i and $\Sigma w_i = 1$. The formula is a reporting framework, not a claim about an undisclosed original algorithm.

Weighting statement: No weighting system is claimed unless it can be demonstrated from the original indicator-level source. Accordingly, this article does not retrospectively impose equal weights on the existing DIAM scores.

Reliability/validity statement: DIAM is not treated as a psychometric scale. Documentary credibility was strengthened through source triangulation; conceptual/content validity was supported by alignment between the three dimensions and the research questions; formal reliability coefficients and external validation studies were not available.

Recommended future reproducibility record: A subsequent version should append, for every year, each raw indicator value, its direction of desirability, the normalisation rule, the weight assigned, the resulting component score, and the final DIAM score, together with the exact source citation for each observation.