



Study highlights public views and primary solutions to anti-immigrant hate crimes

**HATE**

**RACISM**

**PREJUDICE**

# Understanding Xenophobic Hate Crime IN SOUTH AFRICA

**R**ecent developments in South Africa have reignited violent anti-immigrant hate crimes. With hundreds of xenophobic hate crimes recorded in the last 20 years, exploring the influences of public attitudes towards anti-xenophobia strategies on this issue may facilitate understanding to resolve this serious and important issue for the country.

Research, funded by the DSI-NRF Centre of

Excellence in Human Development and conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), investigated mass views on xenophobic violence and anti-xenophobia strategies in South Africa. Using national representative public opinion data from the South African Social Attitudes from the period (2015–2018), the study revealed that:

- A tenth of the South African adult population claimed to have participated in anti-immigrant hate crime in 2018.
- Past hate crime participants were predominately

mid-aged and had an average age of 38. Although a significant number of women also reported that they participated in attacks, more men reported greater participation than women.

- Half of the adult populace stated the main reason for anti-immigrant violence was the activities of foreigners. Only a minority of the population identified psychological factors (such as beliefs about foreigners or emotional dynamics) as the reasons for anti-immigrants hate crimes.

## Anti-Xenophobia Strategies

In assessing what the public proposed as primary solutions for xenophobic violence, the study found that:

- 4% of the participants reported that no action should be taken to stop the hate crimes against immigrants.
- At least 22% of the participants thought that deporting all or most immigrants from South Africa would resolve the problem.
- 11% of the participants believed that more restrictive border management was the solution.
- 13% of the participants reported that a “law and order” response would be the most effective solution.
- Strategies related to social factors were less popular. A small number of participants believed that foreigners should change their behaviour, while some proposed

Public opinion about what causes anti-immigrant violence was found to influence the types of anti-xenophobia strategies supported.

not differentiate between different kinds of foreigners when talking about anti-immigrant hate crime. The majority referred to foreigners in general, and only a small minority identified an explicit type of migration, e.g., undocumented, in their answers. According to the researchers, this suggests that when thinking about immigration, people tend to have implicit images of immigrants in mind. Such mental images may be playing a powerful role in determining attitudes towards the causes of, as well as proposed solutions to, anti-immigrant hate crime.

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that implementing community dialogues and education campaigns about hate crimes would be the solution to solving the problem.

Public opinion about what causes anti-immigrant violence was found to influence the types of anti-xenophobia strategies supported. Thus, the most extreme strategy proposed by the public is motivated by the belief that immigrants’ actions bring about their own victimisation. The study also revealed that survey participants in this study did

In conclusion, the study recommends that any comprehensive strategy to address the serious problem of anti-immigrant violence and promote social cohesion in South Africa must consider public opinion. In addition, different stakeholders - civil society, the private sector, and others - must help the Government to initiate large-scale education and public awareness campaigns as well as immigrant integration policies. <sup>30</sup>