AN EXPLORATION OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: ATTITUDES, INFLUENCES, AND CRIME-IMMIGRATION

Tshimangadzo Oscar MAGADZE[1], Mmbengeni Victor NETSHIDZIVHANI[2]
[1]Department of Criminology & Security Science, School of Criminal Justice, College of Law, University of South Africa, South Africa
[2]Department of Research Administration and Development, University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus, South Africa
Corresponding author: Tshimangadzo Oscar Magadze
Email: magadto@unisa.ac.za

Abstract:
This study explored public perceptions of illegal immigration in South Africa, focusing on attitudes, influencing factors, and the relationship between immigration and crime. To realize this purpose, a quantitative research approach was employed, and a cross-sectional survey was conducted among 490 respondents aged 18 and above. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection, and descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 29.0. Key demographic characteristics such as age, education, and income were assessed, along with respondents' views on the impact of illegal immigration on service delivery, job competition, and cultural integration. Binomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of illegal immigration attitudes. The results reveal that age and education level are the strongest predictors of positive attitudes toward illegal immigration, while South African citizenship is associated with more negative perceptions. The findings highlight the complexity of public attitudes toward immigration, which are shaped by various demographic and socioeconomic factors. Some perceive illegal immigration as a socioeconomic factor contributing to crime and other illegal activities, although a significant portion of the population views it positively.
Keywords: Immigration, Public attitudes, Perceptions, Legal and illegal immigration, Logistic regression.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, South Africa has experienced waves of illegal migration, but post-apartheid immigration policies have struggled to balance economic needs with social tensions. With high unemployment rates and growing inequality, many South Africans perceive immigrants as competing for jobs, housing, and other resources. This has led to growing xenophobic sentiments and violent attacks against foreign nationals, commonly referred to as "Afrophobia" (Crush & Ramachandran, 2014). Conversely, proponents of immigration argue that it fosters cultural diversity, economic growth, and innovation (Collier, 2013). Immigration remains a critical issue in South Africa, a country with a long history of migration due to its economic, political, and geographic position in Africa (Mahuni, Ramessur, & Musamali, 2023). Bohlen & Pries (2024) stated that the country attracts immigrants, both legal and illegal, from neighboring nations and other parts of the world due to its relatively more developed economy and opportunities for employment. However, public perceptions of immigration have become increasingly polarized, as socioeconomic challenges like unemployment, crime, and strained public services are often linked to the presence of immigrants (Bohlen & Pries, 2024; Mahuni et al., 2023). The complex relationship between immigration, socioeconomic conditions, and public attitudes warrants a comprehensive examination to understand these perceptions and how they influence immigration policies. Across

the globe, numerous factors continue to shape conversations around immigration. In recent decades, society has seen an unprecedented ease in the movement of people, goods, and services across international borders (Beck, 2008; Appadurai, 2011). This increased mobility has brought both significant benefits and notable challenges (Williams & Baláž, 2011). One of the most positive outcomes of migration is the widespread exchange of cultural experiences, ideas, and knowledge. On the other hand, rising nationalist sentiments in many regions have fostered homophobic and xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants. This negative aspect of immigration often overshadows discussions about how a well-regulated immigration system could benefit society.

In South Africa, a nation with a competitive global economy, many migrants from across Africa and other regions of the world have sought refuge and economic opportunities (Segatti, 2011). The country's economic appeal is one of the primary drivers for those looking to improve their financial circumstances (Crush, 2011). However, South Africa also hosts a significant number of African migrants who have been displaced by political conflicts and instability in their home countries. In regions such as Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Sudan, political unrest, whether due to disputed elections, coups, or ethnic clashes, has forced people to flee for safety, with many seeking refuge in South Africa.

The mass media also plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and understanding of issues related to nationalism, migration, and citizenship. With the advent of the internet and social media, the media's influence on public discourse surrounding migration and immigration has only grown stronger (Ekman, 2019). Additionally, the rise of new political movements in various parts of the world has placed immigration at the forefront of public debate and scrutiny (Yilmaz, 2012). These political movements, often populist, tend to target immigrants, scapegoating them for broader political failures (Cochrane & Nevitte, 2014). In the United States, for example, populist rhetoric against immigrants during Donald Trump's presidency fuelled anti-immigrant sentiments, including antisemitism (Finley & Esposito, 2020). Another factor contributing to migration challenges is the current global economic downturn (Beets & Willekens, 2009). Economic hardship has prompted many individuals to seek opportunities abroad, exacerbating distributional conflicts between immigrants and local populations (Billiet, Meuleman, & Witte, 2014). The study explores public perceptions of immigration in South Africa, focusing on attitudes, influences, and the crime-immigration relationship. Firstly, the study will outline the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the literature review and results and discussion and conclude by offering practical solutions.

Problem Statement. According to the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services of South Africa, Honourable Ronald Lamola, in 2020, 3257 foreign nationals were incarcerated, and 1550 were sentenced; in 2021, 3523 were incarcerated, and 1743 were sentenced (Njilo, 2022). Furthermore, senior journalist Faizel Patel (2024:np) has outlined that the crime stats also showed that over 9,000 undocumented foreign nationals were arrested in Gauteng during the first quarter of 2023. The continuous debate on immigration in South Africa has also included discussions about crime. In these discussions, some are quick to blame immigrants for engaging in criminal activities. This assumed immigration-crime nexus remains untested in existing scholarship on migration in South Africa. Crush and Williams (2002) concurred with the above statement from the senior journalist and the minister by indicating that crime statistics for police operations regularly report the apprehension of "illegal immigrants" in the same breath as arrests for armed robbery, car-jackings and rape. Susuman and Sithole (2023) are of the view that the increasing levels of immigration necessitate the investigation of the potential implications of immigration on crime rates in the country.

Despite the growing body of research on immigration in South Africa, there is a notable gap in understanding the public perceptions surrounding immigration and how these perceptions shape attitudes toward immigrants (Crush, 2018). Previous studies (Stern & Szalontai, 2006; Finley & Esposito, 2020) concentrated on the socioeconomic impacts of immigration, xenophobia, and policy analysis but have rarely delved deeply into the nuanced attitudes of South African citizens toward immigrants. This oversight limits our understanding of how these attitudes are formed and influenced by various factors, including demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and media representations.

A crucial aspect of this exploration is the so-called "crime-immigration nexus," which is often invoked in discussions about immigration in South Africa. Many citizens associate immigration with increased crime rates, perpetuating a narrative that may not be substantiated by empirical evidence. This research aims to critically analyze the connection between public perceptions of immigration and crime, seeking to understand how media representations, political rhetoric, and personal experiences contribute to the belief that immigrants are linked to criminal activities. While some studies have touched on this nexus, there remains a lack of robust empirical research that fully investigates how these perceptions are constructed and the implications they have for social cohesion and policy-making.

Moreover, the role of intersectionality in shaping public attitudes toward immigration has been largely overlooked in existing literature. Factors such as age, education, and socioeconomic status can significantly influence how individuals perceive immigration and immigrants. By incorporating an intersectional approach, this study seeks to identify how various demographic factors interact to influence attitudes, thereby highlighting the complexities of public perceptions in South Africa. This study addresses critical gaps in the literature by focusing on public perceptions of immigration, examining the influences that shape these attitudes, and exploring the often misunderstood relationship between immigration and crime. By doing so, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the discourse on immigration in South Africa, ultimately fostering a more nuanced understanding of how public attitudes can impact policy decisions and social dynamics.

The following objectives underpin this study.

1. To explore public perceptions of immigration in South Africa, focusing on attitudes, influences, and the crime-immigration relationship.
2. To examine the demographic and socioeconomic factors influencing these perceptions, focusing particularly on the perceived relationship between immigration and crime.
3. The study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform immigration policy and promote better integration and understanding between locals and immigrants by examining the predictors of public attitudes, such as age, education, and citizenship.

Immigration studies in South Africa have examined various aspects, including the socioeconomic impacts of immigration, xenophobia, and the effects of immigration policies on both citizens and immigrants (Hewitt, Masikane & Toendepi, 2020). A study by Mafukata (2020) revealed a complex interaction between economic concerns, public perceptions, and media portrayals, all of which contribute to the broader immigration debate

Socioeconomic Impact of Immigration. A significant body of research has focused on the socioeconomic effects of immigration in South Africa (Stern & Szalontai, 2006). Hewitt, Masikane, and Toendepi (2020) suggest that immigration is often perceived through an economic lens, with immigrants frequently blamed for exacerbating South Africa's socioeconomic challenges. According to Crush and Tevera (2010), immigrants are scapegoated for issues such as unemployment and the

overburdening of public resources like healthcare, housing, and social services. This perception stems from the belief that immigrants increase job competition, drive down wages, and reduce the availability of housing, making them a target of public frustration (Stern & Szalontai, 2006). Charman and Piper (2012) further emphasize that the competition for resources is often linked to a broader narrative that frames immigrants as contributors to South Africa's economic problems.

Xenophobia and Public Perceptions. The dynamics of xenophobia are a recurring theme in immigration studies. Several scholars have investigated the factors that shape public attitudes toward immigrants (Stern & Szalontai, 2006; Muzondidya, 2010; Rasool, 2018). Muzondidya (2010) finds that attitudes toward immigration vary significantly based on age, education, and socioeconomic status. Older South Africans and those with lower levels of education are more likely to hold negative views, associating immigration with job displacement and economic insecurity (Muzondidya, 2010). These individuals often perceive immigrants as direct competitors for already limited employment opportunities, especially in sectors where low-skilled labor is in demand.

In contrast, younger and more educated individuals tend to have more favorable views of immigration, recognizing the economic and cultural benefits brought by immigrants, particularly their entrepreneurial contributions (Rasool, 2018). Rasool (2018) asserts that higher educational attainment fosters a more nuanced understanding of immigration's impact, allowing individuals to appreciate the positive contributions of immigrants. These findings from the literature review suggest that public attitudes toward immigration are not monolithic but are shaped by various demographic and socioeconomic factors.

Media and the Crime-Immigration Nexus. The role of media in shaping public perceptions of immigration cannot be underestimated. Danso and McDonald (2001) argue that media portrayals often emphasize negative stereotypes, particularly framing immigrants as criminals or threats to national security. This portrayal contributes to the fear of immigrants and reinforces xenophobic attitudes, especially among lower-income groups who may already feel economically vulnerable. The crime-immigration nexus—the idea that immigrants are responsible for higher crime rates—has gained traction, even though empirical evidence supporting this connection remains inconclusive.

Landau (2012) suggests that while public perception strongly links immigration to crime, there is little data to substantiate this belief. Oucho (2006) concurs, arguing that no direct correlation between immigration and increased crime rates has been consistently proven. However, Monyai (2013) adds a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that while immigration may not lead to a general rise in crime, it could be linked to specific types of criminal activities, such as human trafficking and drug smuggling, particularly among undocumented immigrants. These activities often arise from the precarious legal status of some immigrants, which may push them into underground economies.

Mixed Results on Immigration and Crime. The crime-immigration nexus remains a contentious issue in immigration literature. While some studies, such as Oucho (2006), argue that immigration does not necessarily lead to increased crime, others highlight the potential for immigration to exacerbate certain types of crimes, often because of the marginalization and vulnerability of undocumented immigrants. Monyai (2013) emphasizes that illegal immigration can lead to exploitation and involvement in illicit activities, but this is not reflective of immigrants. The mixed results on this issue suggest that further research is needed to clarify the relationship between immigration and crime, particularly in the context of public policy debates and media representations.

The literature on immigration in South Africa reveals that public attitudes are shaped by a combination of socioeconomic factors, media portrayals, and personal experiences (Muzondidya,

2010). Immigrants are often blamed for the country's economic problems and viewed as competitors for jobs and resources, particularly by older, less-educated South Africans. In contrast, younger, more educated individuals are more likely to appreciate the economic and cultural benefits of immigration. The media's role in amplifying fears about immigration, particularly through the crime-immigration nexus, further shapes these perceptions despite a lack of concrete evidence linking immigrants to increased crime rates. Future research could explore more nuanced perspectives, particularly in how educational interventions and media reforms might address the misperceptions driving xenophobic attitudes in South Africa.

Theoretical Framework. This study draws from Social Identity Theory and Institutional Theory to explain South African citizens' attitudes toward immigration, incorporating the Crime-Immigration Nexus concept. These theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional understanding of how social, institutional, and media influences shape public perceptions of immigrants.

Social Identity Theory. Ellemers et al. (2012) and Tajfel et al. (1979) explain how individuals categorize themselves and others into in-groups (citizens) and out-groups (immigrants). This classification leads to favoritism towards one's in-group and often negative perceptions of the out-group. Within the South African context, as highlighted by Tsheola (2015), citizens may view immigrants as outsiders who threaten limited resources (e.g., jobs, housing, and services). Such group dynamics can fuel xenophobia and hostile attitudes towards immigrants, as citizens may perceive immigrants as competitors or a source of social and economic problems. SIT helps explain why South Africans might exhibit such attitudes rooted in the psychological need for group identity and differentiation.

Institutional Theory. Scott (2001) examines how societal rules, policies, and institutions influence individual behaviors and attitudes. Immigration policies, media portrayals, and political narratives in South Africa shape public opinion. Institutional failures, such as inadequate service delivery or poor governance, intensify perceptions that immigrants compete with citizens for scarce resources. Political rhetoric emphasizing immigrants as a social problem can further reinforce negative views. The theory highlights the role of state institutions in shaping how citizens interpret immigration and how these interpretations feed into broader social and political discourses.

Integration of Theories in the Study. By combining Social Identity Theory and Institutional Theory, the study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding immigration attitudes in South Africa. SIT addresses the social-psychological dimension, where in-group/out-group dynamics shape individual attitudes. At the same time, Institutional Theory explores the structural dimension, showing how state actions and societal institutions shape public views. The Crime-Immigration Nexus further connects these theories by highlighting the role of misperceptions, often fuelled by media and political narratives, in shaping immigration debates.

Together, these perspectives suggest that demographic and socioeconomic factors, such as age, education, and employment, are influenced by social identity processes and institutional structures, which in turn shape public opinion on immigration. Additionally, the study posits that these attitudes inform and shape immigration policy debates, as public opinion plays a critical role in political decision-making and policy formulation regarding immigration. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding why xenophobic sentiments and fear of immigrants persist, even in the absence of substantial evidence linking immigration to major social problems. It highlights the interplay between individual identity, institutional failures, and media influences, offering a holistic lens through which to analyze public perceptions and policy discussions related to immigration in South Africa.

METHODS

This study followed the quantitative approach using the cross-sectional survey method because it sought to investigate the relationships between different constructs by assessing the views of targeted respondents (Creswell, 2018). Likewise, the survey method enables a more convenient once-off collection of data and an adequate statistical-oriented analysis of gathered information (Netshidzivhani & Molaudzi, 2024). The rationale for this selection stems from the study's predictive and causal nature, as it sought to elucidate the relationships between the research constructs. To optimize the response rate, a hybrid approach was adopted, integrating correlational and survey research designs. A structured questionnaire was utilized as the primary tool for data gathering during the empirical phase of the study. The target population for this study encompasses South African citizens aged 18 and above, representing a wide spectrum of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. A sample size of n = 490 was determined to be sufficient, drawing on the guidance from Hodge (2020), which suggests that sample sizes ranging from 150 to 500 cases are appropriate for multivariate analyses. This range ensures that the statistical significance of the results is not compromised, as might occur with smaller sample sizes. To guarantee that participants from different provinces were adequately represented, non-probability convenience sampling was employed, allowing for the selection of respondents based on accessibility and availability (Epoh, Langton, & Mafini, 2024). In the study, data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS version 29) was employed as a tool to achieve the complete analysis of data. Ethically, the study was conducted after permission to collect data had been obtained from relevant authorities at the University of South Africa (College of Law RERC Ref #: 1251). Respondents were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without reprisals. Respondents remained anonymous, and their confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that their identities were not mentioned anywhere in the study. Respondents were not given any monetary incentives for participating in the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Study Results; Respondents' characteristics. The survey data provides a detailed demographic breakdown and responses to various questions regarding immigration perceptions in South Africa. Of the respondents, 49.4% are male and 49.8% are female, with a small percentage (0.8%) identifying as "Other." In terms of age, the largest group is aged 36-45 years (32.4%), followed closely by those aged 26-35 years (31%), while those aged 18-25 years (15.1%) and 46-55 years (16.3%) form smaller portions, and only 5.1% are 56 years or older. Educationally, a majority hold postgraduate degrees (56.1%), while smaller portions have undergraduate degrees (16.9%), diplomas (15.1%), or matric (11.8%). Employment rates are high, with 70.6% employed, 19% unemployed, and 10.4% still studying. In terms of income, 73.1% rely on income from work, with 11.4% depending on relatives and friends, 9.4% lacking a reliable source of income, and 6.1% relying on social grants. Notably, 62.4% of respondents earn over R10,000 monthly, with smaller groups earning lesser amounts. Geographically, the majority are from Limpopo (55.9%), followed by Gauteng (27.6%) and smaller representations from other provinces. Nearly all respondents (98.4%) are South African citizens. When asked about property ownership, 61% own immovable property. Regarding attitudes toward immigration, 22.7% strongly agree, and 35.7% agree that immigration is a positive development, though 22.9% strongly disagree and 18.8% disagree. A vast majority (92%) believe immigration contributes to some of the challenges South Africa faces. In terms of personal impact, 40.6% cite the strain on service delivery (housing and healthcare), 40.2%

express concern over job competition, 15.1% believe South Africa has its internal challenges, and only 0.8% see intercultural experiences as a benefit. Table 1 presents the summary results.

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics (n=490)

		Frequency	Percent
What is your gender?	Male	242	49,4
	Female	244	49,8
	Other	4	0,8
How old are you?	18-25	74	15,1
	26-35	152	31
	36-45	159	32,4
	46-55	80	16,3
	56+	25	5,1
What is your level of education?	Matric	58	11,8
	Diploma	74	15,1
	Undergraduate Degree	83	16,9
	Postgraduate Degree	275	56,1
Are you employed?	Yes	346	70,6
	No	93	19
	Not yet still studying	51	10,4
What is your main source of monthly income?	Income from work	358	73,1
	Social grant	30	6,1
	I rely on relatives and friends	56	11,4
	I do not have any reliable source of income	46	9,4
Which Province of South Africa are you in?	Gauteng	135	27,6
	KZN	8	1,6
	Mpumalanga	16	3,3
	Limpopo	274	55,9
	Northern Cape	4	0,8
	Eastern Cape	50	10,2
	Western Cape	3	0,6
Are you a South African citizen?	Yes	482	98,4
	No	8	1,6
Do you own any immovable property, such as a house or land in South Africa?	Yes	299	61
	No	191	39
How much income do you receive per month from work, grants or relatives?	R100-R500	42	8,6
	R600-R900	23	4,7
	R1000-R5000	73	14,9
	R6000-R10000	30	6,1
	More than R10000	306	62,4
	None	16	3,3
South Africa is home to people from its neighbors and other parts of the world, which can be considered a positive development.	Strongly Agree	111	22,7
	Agree	175	35,7
	Strongly Disagree	112	22,9
	Disagree	92	18,8
	Yes	451	92

Do you consider immigration as a cause of some of the challenges that people in South Africa experience?	No	39	8
In what way does the coming in of people from other countries (with the intention of living permanently in South Africa) affect you as a citizen?	Competition for jobs and economic opportunities	197	40,2
	South Africa has its challenges	74	15,1
	Intercultural experience	4	0,8
	It impacts the delivery of services such as housing and healthcare	199	40,6
	None of the Above	16	3,3
	Total	490	100

Binomial logistic regression results

Table 2. Model Fit Measures

Model	Deviance	AIC	R^2_{McF}
1	249	275	0.145

The model fit measures for the analysis of Perceptions and Attitudes of South African Citizens towards Legal and Illegal Immigration show that the model has a deviance of 249, indicating a reasonable fit to the data. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) of 275 suggests that the model balances fit and complexity effectively, though comparison with other models would be needed to confirm this. McFadden's pseudo-R^2 of 0.145 indicates that the model explains 14.5% of the variation in public attitudes, which is considered a moderate fit for logistic regression models, highlighting that the independent variables capture some of the influences on immigration perceptions, though other factors remain unexplained.

Table 3. Model Coefficients

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio
Intercept	-0.61134	2.210	-0.2767	0.782	0.5426
Q1	0.11195	0.383	0.2920	0.770	1.1185
Q2	1.04178	0.301	3.4595	< .001	2.8342
Q3	0.65241	0.197	3.3082	< .001	1.9202
Q4	0.26689	0.496	0.5382	0.590	1.3059
Q5	0.05821	0.305	0.1908	0.849	1.0599
Q6	-0.15875	0.110	-1.4465	0.148	0.8532
Q7	-3.48279	0.862	-4.0390	< .001	0.0307
Q8	0.53557	0.507	1.0567	0.291	1.7084
Q9	-0.00776	0.167	-0.0464	0.963	0.9923
Q10	0.01059	0.195	0.0544	0.957	1.0106
Q11	-0.08170	0.570	-0.1433	0.886	0.9215

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio
Q12	-0.10670	0.145	-0.7375	0.461	0.8988

Q1. What is your gender? Q2. How old are you? Q3. What is your level of education? Q4. Are you employed? Q5. What is your main source of monthly income? Q6. Which Province of South Africa are you in? Q7. Are you a South African citizen? Q8. Do you own any immovable property, such as a house or land in South Africa? Q9. How much income do you receive per month from work, grants or relatives? Q10. South Africa is home to people from its neighbors and other parts of the world. This can be considered as a positive development. Q11. Do you consider immigration as a cause of some of the challenges that people in South Africa experience? Q12.In what way does the coming in of people from other countries (with the intention of living permanently in South Africa) affect you as a citizen?

Table 3 presents model coefficients for the analysis of the Perception and Attitudes of South African Citizens towards Legal and Illegal Immigration. The intercept and most predictors (Q1, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12) are not statistically significant, as indicated by their high p-values (greater than 0.05), showing little influence on the outcome. However, Q2 (Odds ratio = 2.8342) and Q3 (Odds ratio = 1.9202) are both highly significant (p < 0.001), suggesting they have strong positive impacts on perceptions of immigration, significantly increasing the odds of a particular attitude or outcome. In contrast, Q7 is also highly significant (p < 0.001) but with a negative estimate and a very low odds ratio (0.0307), indicating it greatly reduces the likelihood of a certain outcome. The remaining variables show small or negligible effects on perceptions, as their odds ratios hover around 1.

The results of this study provide a comprehensive overview of South African citizens' perceptions and attitudes towards immigration, both legal and illegal. Demographically, the survey highlights a balanced gender distribution, with most respondents aged between 26 and 45 years. The respondents are predominantly well-educated, with a majority holding postgraduate degrees, and the employment rate is high, though concerns about job competition due to immigration are evident. Geographically, most respondents reside in Limpopo and Gauteng, regions known for higher immigration rates.

The logistic regression analysis reveals important insights into the predictors influencing public attitudes toward immigration. Age (Q2) and education level (Q3) are significant predictors of positive perceptions, as indicated by their strong odds ratios (2.8342 and 1.9202, respectively), suggesting that older and more educated individuals are more likely to view immigration favorably. However, citizenship (Q7) has a strong negative influence, as evidenced by the very low odds ratio (0.0307), implying that being a South African citizen correlates with a negative perception of immigration. Other factors like gender, employment status, income, and property ownership show little to no impact on attitudes, as reflected by their non-significant p-values.

Interestingly, despite a majority agreeing that immigration has contributed to South Africa's challenges, a notable portion still views it as a positive development. These mixed sentiments reflect the complexity of immigration's impact on various aspects of life, including economic opportunities and service delivery. The model's McFadden R^2 value of 0.145 suggests that while the predictors explain some variance in attitudes, other factors—possibly emotional, political, or cultural also play a role.

CONCLUSION

The study on public perceptions of immigration in South Africa reveals key demographic, attitudinal, and statistical insights. Respondents were evenly split between males and females, with most aged between 26 and 45. A majority held postgraduate qualifications, and most were employed, earning over R10,000 monthly. Geographically, the majority were from Limpopo and Gauteng, regions with higher immigration rates. Attitudinally, over 50% of respondents saw immigration as a positive development, though concerns about service delivery and job competition were prominent.

Logistic regression analysis identified age and education as significant predictors of positive perceptions toward immigration. Older and more educated individuals were more likely to view immigration favorably, while South African citizenship was a strong predictor of negative attitudes. Gender, employment status, income, and property ownership did not significantly influence perceptions.

Implications of Findings; Policy Considerations. The findings suggest that age and education play critical roles in shaping attitudes toward immigration. Policymakers should consider these demographic factors when developing strategies for public communication and integration. Educational campaigns could address misconceptions and highlight the potential benefits of immigration.

Service Delivery Concerns. Given the high level of concern over service delivery and job competition, policies that address infrastructure challenges while creating job opportunities could alleviate negative perceptions. Emphasizing the contribution of immigrants to sectors like healthcare and entrepreneurship could also shift attitudes.

Targeted Integration Efforts. Citizenship emerged as a strong predictor of negative perceptions, indicating a need for more targeted efforts to foster positive intercultural relations between South Africans and immigrants. Community-building initiatives and promoting the benefits of diversity might help reduce xenophobia and improve social cohesion.

Limitation and Future Research. Future studies will focus on longitudinal. The research could explore how public attitudes shift over time, particularly in response to changing economic conditions or immigration policies. Understanding how external factors like unemployment rates or political rhetoric affect perceptions could inform more adaptive policy responses. Secondly, Comparative Regional Studies will be conducted. Given the geographic concentration of respondents in Limpopo and Gauteng, comparative studies across different provinces could offer insights into how regional dynamics, such as economic conditions or local immigration patterns, influence public attitudes. This would help tailor policies to regional needs.

REFERENCES

Appadurai, A. (2011). *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Beets, G & Willekens, F. (2009). The global economic crisis and international migration. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 7: 19-37.

Billiet, J, Meuleman, B & De Wittie, H. (2014). The relationship between ethnic threat and economic insecurity in times of economic crisis: Analysis of European Social Survey data. *Migration Studies*, 2(2): 135-161.

Bohlen, R., & Pries, L. (2024). Labor migration in the Americas. In *Research Handbook on Migration and Employment* (pp. 250-268). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Charman, A. & Piper, L. (2012). Xenophobia, Criminality, and Socioeconomic Conditions in South Africa. *South African Review of Sociology*.
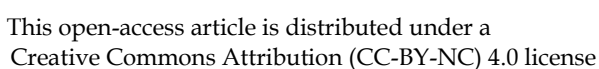
Cochrane, C & Nevitte, N. (2014). Scapegoating: Unemployment, far-right parties and anti-immigrant sentiments. *Comparative European Politics*, 12(1): 1-32.

Collier, P. (2013). *Exodus: Immigration and multiculturalism in the 21st century*. Penguin UK.

Crush, J. (2011). Complex Movements, Confused Responses: Labour Migration in South Africa (rep., pp. 1-27). Waterloo, ON: Southern African Migration Programme. SAMP Migration Policy Brief No. 25.

Crush, J., & Ramachandran, S. (2010). Xenophobia, international migration and development. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, *11*(2), 209-228.

Crush, J., Williams, V., & Peberdy, S. (2005). Migration in Southern Africa. *Policy analysis and research program of the Global Commission on International Migration*.

Danso, R. & McDonald, D. (2001). Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the Print Media in Post-apartheid South Africa. *Africa Today*.

De Haas, H. (2021). A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9 (8): 1-35.

Ekman, M. (2019). Anti-immigration and racist discourse on social media. *European Journal of Communication*,34(6): 606-618.

Ellemers, N., & Haslam, S. A. (2012). Social identity theory. *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, 2, 379-398.

Epoh, R. L., Langton, I., & Mafini, C. (2024). A model for green supply chain management in the South African manufacturing sector. *Cogent Business & Management*, *11*(1), 2390213.

Finley, L & Esposito, L (2020). The Immigrant as Bogeyman: Examining Donald Trump and the Right's Anti-immigrant, Anti-PC Rhetoric. *Humanity and Society*, 44(2): 178-197

Flores, LA. (2003). Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20(4): 362-387.

Glatz, E. (2024). Immigrants and Immigration in the Finnish Election Manifestos 2023: A Critical Discourse Analysis.

Hewitt, M. L., Masikane, C. M., & Toendepi, J. (2020). Dynamics informing xenophobia and leadership response in South Africa. *Acta Commercii*, *20*(1), 1-11.

Hodge, S. R. (2020). Quantitative research. Routledge Handbook of adapted physical education (pp. 147–162). Routledge.

Landau, L. (2012). Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence, and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*.

Mahuni, K., Ramessur, T., & Musamali, R. (2023). Towards a Perspective for Understanding Analysis of Irregular Migration of Female Labour from Zimbabwe to South Africa. *Journal of Smart Economic Growth*, *8*(2), 51-94.

Netshidzivhani, M. V., & Molaudzi, A. M. (2024). Assessing the Correlation Between School Resource Utilization and Learners' Success in South African Public Education: A Case of Limpopo Province. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, *7*(1), 77-90.

Neocosmos, M. (2008). The Politics of Fear and the Fear of Politics: Reflections of Xenophobic Violence in South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 43: 586-591.

Matsinhe, D. (2016). Apartheid Vertigo: *The Rise in Discrimination Against Africans in South Africa*. New York: Routledge.

Murairwa, S. (2015). Voluntary Sampling Design. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, 4(2):185-200.

Njilo, S. (2022). *Implementation of performance management and its effect on employee productivity at South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) in Cape Town* (Doctoral dissertation, Cape Peninsula University of Technology).

Oucho, J. O. (2006). Cross-Border Migration and Regional Initiatives in Managing Migration in Southern Africa. *Migration Research Series*.

Rasool, F. (2018). The Socioeconomic Contributions of Immigrants in South Africa. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*.

Sathiya Susuman, A., & Sithole, K. (2024). Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Crime among International Migrants in South Africa. *African Human Mobility Review*, *10*(1), 12-31.

Segatti, A. (2011). Migration to South Africa: Regional Challenges versus National Instruments and Interests. In A, Segatti and L, Landau, '*Contemporary Migration to South Africa: A Regional Development Issue* Washington: The World Bank, pp. 9-30.

Stern, M., & Szalontai, G. (2006). Immigration policy in South Africa: Does it make economic sense? *Development Southern Africa*, *23*(01), 123-145.

Tsheola, J. (2015). Xenophobic societal attitudes in a" new" South Africanism: Governance of public perceptions, national identities and citizenship. *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, *11*(4), 232-246.

Williams, AM & Baláž,V. (2011). Migration, Risk and Uncertainty: Theoretical Perspectives. *Population, Space and Place*, 18: 167-180.

Yilmaz, F. (2012). Right-wing hegemony and immigration: How the populist far-right achieved hegemony through the immigration debate in Europe. *Current Sociology*, 60(3): 368-381.