

Human Security and Diaspora Protection: Nigeria-South Africa Relations in the Wake of Xenophobic Violence

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ABSTRACT

This study examines human security and diaspora protection within Nigeria-South Africa relations in the wake of xenophobic violence against Nigerian nationals in South Africa. The study is premised on the problem that recurrent xenophobic attacks, discrimination, harassment, destruction of property and loss of lives have generated serious human security concerns for Nigerians living and conducting business in South Africa, while also creating diplomatic tensions between the two countries. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on the analysis of secondary data obtained from books, scholarly journal articles, official government documents, policy reports, media publications and relevant international and regional instruments. The study is anchored on the Human Security Approach, which shifts attention from the traditional security of states to the protection of individuals and communities from threats to their survival, livelihood and dignity. Findings reveal that xenophobic violence has significantly undermined the human security of Nigerian migrants and affected the diplomatic and socio-economic dimensions of Nigeria-South Africa relations. Although both governments have undertaken diplomatic engagements and security measures to address attacks and protect affected nationals, persistent socio-economic inequalities, negative stereotypes, weak law enforcement and inadequate accountability continue to constrain effective diaspora protection. The study concludes that sustainable Nigeria-South Africa relations require a stronger human-centered approach to migration and diaspora protection. It recommends enhanced bilateral security cooperation, stronger prosecution of perpetrators of xenophobic violence, improved consular protection for Nigerian nationals, public awareness programmes against xenophobia, and strengthened bilateral mechanisms for addressing migration-related disputes and protecting the rights and dignity of migrants.

Key words: Human security, Diaspora, Xenophobia, Nigeria, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The increasing movement of people across borders is a major consequence of globalization, facilitated by advances in communication technology and growing economic interdependence. In Africa, migration is largely driven by the search for better economic opportunities, education, and escape from political instability. The resulting growth of diaspora communities has heightened the responsibility of states to protect their citizens abroad as an important dimension of contemporary foreign policy (International Law Commission, 2006). One key responsibility of the Nigerian state is to safeguard the rights, security, and welfare of its citizens, in spite of the location. This has given rise to the need of diaspora protection through diplomatic, legal and consular measures taken by states to protect and defend its citizens against violence, discrimination, and exploitation. Nigeria has one of the highest immigrant populations in South Africa; those in diaspora play critical roles in national development through remittance, investments and international advocacy (Olanrewaju & Oluseyi, 2022). These financial inflows support household incomes, education, health care, and economic development which are of course components of human security.

Despite the above contributions, Nigerians in South Africa frequently encounter xenophobic attacks, discriminations, labour exploitation & racial profiling. This persistent xenophobic attack has disproportionately affected Nigerians living in South Africa. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, Nigerians in South Africa have experienced physical assaults, looting of businesses, destruction of properties, and displacement as well as loss of life. These incidents have raised concerns about the country's ability to uphold

constitutional guarantees of human dignity, equality, and human rights irrespective of nationality (Crush & Ramachandran, 2017). In South Africa, scholars have argued that xenophobia is rooted in the combination of high unemployment, poverty, economic inequality and frustration after apartheid and the perceptions that foreign nationals contribute to crime and unemployment (Misago, 2019). Nigeria was a strong supporter of South Africa's liberation struggle during the apartheid era. Nigeria Government provided substantial diplomatic, financial, educational and political support to anti-apartheid movement such as the African National Congress (ANC).

It is against this background that this study, seeks to examine human security and diaspora protection with particular reference to Nigeria-South Africa Relations in the wake of xenophobic violence.

Statement of the Problem

The end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 created expectations of a more inclusive and democratic society in which the principles of human rights, equality, Pan-African solidarity and regional cooperation would be strengthened. Nigeria has historically maintained close relations with South Africa and played a significant role in the anti-apartheid struggle. Consequently, Nigeria-South Africa relations in the post-apartheid era have been characterized by extensive political, economic and diplomatic interactions. However, the emergence and recurrence of xenophobic attacks against African migrants, particularly Nigerians, have introduced significant tensions into this relationship.

Xenophobic violence has become a persistent challenge in post-apartheid South Africa. Major outbreaks, including those in 2002, 2008, 2015; 2017; 2019; 2020; 2023 and 2026, have involved attacks on foreign nationals, destruction of businesses and property, displacement, and loss of lives. Scholars such as Misago (2019) identifies weaknesses in the prevention and governmental response to xenophobic violence, including the tendency to treat such violence primarily as ordinary crime rather than as a specific problem requiring targeted intervention. Nigerian nationals have been among those affected, making xenophobia not merely a domestic South African problem but also an important concern for Nigeria's foreign policy and diaspora protection.

Despite Nigeria's foreign policy been traditionally described as Afro-centric, with African affairs occupying a central position in its external relations, Nigeria's response to repeated attacks on its citizens in South Africa has often relied on diplomatic protests, consultations, public statements, negotiations and, in some instances, evacuation rather than sustained and effective mechanisms for preventing attacks and ensuring accountability. Against this background, the central problem of this study is the apparent gap between Nigeria's commitment to protecting its citizens in the diaspora and the effectiveness of its foreign-policy responses to recurring xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa.

Research Questions

This research is guided by the following questions

- How has xenophobic violence in South Africa threatened the human security of Nigerians?
- To what extent has Nigeria's foreign policy prioritized diaspora protection in relations with South Africa?
- How effective were Nigeria's diplomatic responses towards xenophobic violence against Nigerians in South Africa

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- Examine the human security implications of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa
- Analyse Nigeria's foreign policy response tools used for diaspora protections
- Explore the impact of diplomatic response on Nigeria-South Africa relations

Operational Definition of Terms

Human Security: To this study, human security is perceived as a notion that broadens the traditional understanding of security, focusing mainly on military protection and national autonomy, to include a broader spectrum of risks and vulnerabilities that affect the well-being and resources of people. For a more succinct operationalization, human security could be described in the table below:

Table. 1.1: Perspectives of Human security

S/N	Variables of Human Security	Indicators
1	Food security	Food is readily available for all people at all times – i.e. it is regularly produced & available, directly & economically accessible, stable, physically & bio-nutritiously utilized, etc
2	Economic security	Assured basic income, access to employment, economic resources and opportunities, etc
3	Health security	Free from deadly diseases. Availability of good medical facilities, accessible and affordable healthcare for the citizenry
4	Environmental security	Conducive environment which is spared from desertification, indiscriminate deforestation, degradation and other environmental threats that endanger people's lives or means of survival
5	Personal security	Free from all forms of physical violence including human trafficking, child labour, terrorism
6	Community security	Social cohesion and harmony. Free from tension or fear emanating from ethnic, religious and other social groups like family, community, organisation, political party, etc.
7	Political security	Assured human rights protection, justice & freedom of expression, inclusion in governance, etc

Adopted from: Joshua & Ngwu, 2023:157

Xenophobia

To this study, Xenophobia refers to hostility and discriminatory behaviour directed at African migrants, including Nigerians, living or working in South Africa.

Diaspora

To this study, refers to Nigerians living, working, studying, or conducting business in South Africa.

Diaspora Protection

To this study, diaspora protection includes Nigeria's diplomatic interventions, consular assistance, negotiations, evacuation programmes, and other measures aimed at protecting Nigerians in South Africa.

Post-Apartheid Era

To this study, the post-apartheid era refers to the period following the formal end of apartheid rule in South Africa and the establishment of democratic government in 1994.

An Empirical Review of Related Literature

Alaga and Udoh (2023) examined the impact of xenophobia on the human rights of Nigerian migrants in South Africa. Using an observational research method and secondary data, the study investigated how xenophobic violence affects the fundamental rights and welfare of Nigerians living in South Africa. The study found that xenophobic attacks undermine several dimensions of migrants' security, including the right to life, personal security, freedom of association and economic livelihood. The authors argued that the repeated targeting of foreign nationals demonstrates the vulnerability of migrants where host-state institutions fail to provide adequate protection. They recommended stronger accountability mechanisms and institutions specifically designed to protect migrants from discrimination and violence. The relevance of Alaga and Udoh's study lies in its emphasis on the human consequences of xenophobia. However, its major limitation is that it concentrates principally on human rights violations and gives relatively limited attention to how Nigeria's foreign-policy institutions and diplomatic mechanisms respond to these threats. Thus, there remains a need to examine diaspora protection more directly through the broader framework of human security.

Similarly, Ogunnowo and Joshua (2019) examined xenophobic attacks in South Africa and their implications for Nigeria's foreign policy. Using secondary data and political realism as its theoretical framework, the study argued that Nigeria's response to xenophobic violence was largely conservative and declaratory. The authors maintained that Nigeria's traditional Afrocentric foreign-policy orientation had not sufficiently guaranteed the protection of Nigerians abroad. They consequently recommended a reconsideration of Nigeria's foreign-policy priorities to give greater emphasis to the protection of national interests and citizens in the diaspora. The study is important because it draws attention to the tension between Nigeria's commitment to African solidarity and its responsibility to protect Nigerian citizens abroad. Nevertheless, its reliance on secondary sources limits its ability to assess how affected Nigerians themselves perceive the effectiveness of government protection. The study also predates some of the more recent institutional developments in Nigeria's diaspora governance.

A more recent contribution by Yelwa and John (2026) specifically evaluated Nigeria's diaspora diplomacy through the intervention of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM) during xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa between 2015 and 2019. The study employed qualitative data from official reports, government publications and media sources and was guided by human-security and public-diplomacy frameworks. Its findings suggest that NiDCOM played an important advocacy and representational role in responding to the plight of Nigerians abroad, although the effectiveness of its interventions was constrained by institutional and structural limitations.

This study represents an important shift in the literature because it moves beyond general discussions of Nigeria's foreign-policy response to examine a specific diaspora-protection institution. However, because its evidence is largely documentary, there remains room for empirical studies involving Nigerian migrants, diplomats, diaspora organisations and relevant government agencies to assess whether institutional interventions have actually improved the human security of Nigerians in South Africa.

Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi (2019) examined the impact of xenophobic attacks on Nigeria–South Africa relations. Using a historical approach and qualitative secondary data, the study analysed the major waves of anti-foreigner violence and their effects on diplomatic, economic and socio-cultural relations between the two African powers. The authors found that xenophobic attacks generated diplomatic tension and threatened cooperation between Nigeria and South Africa despite the strategic importance of their bilateral relationship to peace, security and development in Africa. The strength of this study lies in its broad historical analysis of bilateral relations. However, it does not sufficiently integrate the experiences of affected migrants into its assessment. Xenophobic violence is therefore largely examined as a diplomatic problem rather than as a human-security threat affecting individuals and communities.

Olanrewaju and Ogunnowo (2022) examined migration and xenophobia in Nigeria–South Africa relations through the framework of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Using secondary data, the study investigated the constraints affecting the capacity of Nigeria and South Africa to protect Nigerians and other migrants during periods of xenophobic violence. The study highlighted the gap between international and regional norms concerning the protection of vulnerable populations and the practical capacity of states to prevent or

respond effectively to violence against migrants. The contribution of this study lies in connecting migrant protection with broader debates about state responsibility. However, R2P is primarily associated with mass atrocity prevention and may not fully capture the everyday economic, social and psychological insecurities experienced by migrants. The human-security framework may therefore provide a broader analytical lens for examining diaspora vulnerability because it incorporates personal, economic and community security.

Ochogwu, Abdul and Luka (2025) conducted an exploratory study of xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa between 2008 and 2024. The study employed primary and secondary data, including interviews with selected personnel from Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NiDCOM and the South African High Commission. Guided principally by constructivism, the researchers found that xenophobic violence has continued to affect diplomatic relations by generating mistrust and placing pressure on both governments to improve migrant protection and diplomatic engagement. The inclusion of officials from relevant institutions is a major strength. However, the study again gives limited representation to Nigerian migrants and diaspora associations, whose experiences are central to evaluating human-security outcomes.

Likewise, Umeh and Onuoha (2026), using documentary and interview methods, investigated the effects of xenophobic violence on Nigeria–South Africa economic relations. The study's focus on the consequences of xenophobia for economic bilateral relations further demonstrates that violence against migrants has consequences beyond the immediate victims, extending to interstate cooperation and economic interdependence.

Many existing studies rely predominantly on historical and documentary evidence, while studies using primary data frequently focus on government and diplomatic officials. There is comparatively limited research integrating the perspectives of Nigerian diaspora communities with those of policymakers and diplomats to assess whether Nigeria's diaspora-protection mechanisms have actually enhanced the human security of Nigerians in South Africa. Therefore, a study on Human Security and Diaspora Protection: Nigeria–South Africa Relations in the Wake of Xenophobic Violence can contribute to existing knowledge by examining the relationship between xenophobic violence, the multidimensional human security of Nigerians in South Africa, Nigeria's diaspora-protection policies and institutions, and the implications of these developments for bilateral relations.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Critical Human Security Theory. This constitutes a significant scholarly paradigm developed by academics in their endeavour to clarify the concept of human security. As a framework it emerged as a response to traditional state-centred conceptions of security, which primarily emphasise the protection of territorial sovereignty, state institutions, and national interests. In contrast, the critical human security perspective shifts the referent object of security from the state to the individual and communities, particularly vulnerable populations whose lives, dignity, livelihoods, and freedoms are threatened by political, economic, social, and cultural structures (Newton, 2010).

The theory is relevant to this study because xenophobic violence against Nigerian migrants and other African nationals in South Africa represents a form of insecurity that cannot be adequately understood through conventional national security approaches. Although Nigeria and South Africa may maintain diplomatic relations and cooperate within regional and continental institutions, the existence of such inter-state relations does not automatically guarantee the security of Nigerian citizens residing in South Africa. Critical Human Security Theory therefore draws attention to the gap between state security and individual security, demonstrating that the protection of national sovereignty may coexist with the insecurity, marginalisation, and vulnerability of migrant and diaspora populations

From a critical human security perspective, xenophobic violence constitutes a multidimensional threat (Dahajar & Alheri, 2018). It threatens the physical security of Nigerian migrants through killings, assaults, intimidation, and destruction of property. It also undermines their economic security through loss of employment, businesses, and sources of livelihood; their community and social security through exclusion and discrimination; and their psychological and personal security through fear, trauma, and persistent

uncertainty (Alberth & Carlsson, 2009). Consequently, the theory enables the study to move beyond the narrow understanding of xenophobic violence as merely a criminal or diplomatic problem and instead conceptualise it as a fundamental challenge to human dignity and the security of individuals.

Furthermore, Critical Human Security Theory emphasises that insecurity is often produced and sustained by broader structural conditions rather than isolated acts of violence. In the context of South Africa, xenophobic violence may be associated with socio-economic inequalities, unemployment, poverty, competition over limited resources, political mobilisation, social exclusion, and negative perceptions of foreign nationals.

The theory is therefore useful in examining how structural and institutional conditions create an environment in which migrant populations become vulnerable to violence and discrimination. It also directs attention towards the role of state institutions, law enforcement agencies, political actors, and community structures in either protecting or failing to protect vulnerable populations.

Applied to Nigeria–South Africa relations, the theory further provides a basis for assessing the responsibility of both states in protecting Nigerian migrants. Nigeria, as the country of origin, has a responsibility to provide diplomatic protection, consular assistance, emergency evacuation where necessary, and effective engagement with South African authorities. South Africa, as the host state, has a corresponding responsibility to guarantee the safety, dignity, and fundamental rights of all persons within its territory, irrespective of nationality. Critical Human Security Theory therefore enables the study to evaluate diaspora protection not merely as a matter of diplomatic intervention but as a broader human-centred obligation requiring institutional accountability and effective protection mechanisms.

In essence, Critical Human Security Theory provides a people-centred and emancipatory framework for understanding the relationship between xenophobic violence and diaspora protection. It enables the study to examine the vulnerabilities of Nigerian migrants not only as consequences of direct violence but also as products of structural inequality, institutional failure, exclusion, and inadequate protection mechanisms.

The theory therefore supports the central argument of the study that effective Nigeria–South Africa relations should be evaluated not only by the stability of diplomatic relations between the two states but also by their capacity to safeguard the lives, dignity, rights, and livelihoods of Nigerian citizens living in South Africa. Consequently, sustainable diaspora protection requires a shift from state-centred security and reactive diplomacy towards a proactive, rights-based, and human-centred approach that places the security and dignity of individuals at the centre of bilateral and regional relations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach/Design

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on an interpretivist and critical research orientation. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand how such violence produces multiple forms of human insecurity and how state institutions in Nigeria and South Africa respond to the protection needs of Nigerian migrants.

The study employs a qualitative case-study and document-analysis design. South Africa constitutes the principal case because of the recurrent nature of xenophobic violence against foreign nationals, including Nigerians, while Nigeria–South Africa relations provide the bilateral diplomatic context within which diaspora protection is examined. This design makes it possible to connect individual and collective experiences of insecurity with broader political, institutional, diplomatic, and structural processes. The approach is consistent with existing qualitative research on xenophobic violence in South Africa, which has demonstrated the value of combining interviews, focus groups, documentary evidence, and comparative case material in analysing the causes, consequences, and responses to anti-migrant violence.

Data Sources

The study relies primarily on qualitative secondary data, generated from peer-reviewed journal articles, books;

official documents and policy statements issued by relevant Nigerian and South African government institutions; diplomatic statements, bilateral communiqués, parliamentary records, and foreign policy documents relating to attacks against foreign nationals and the protection of Nigerian citizens abroad among others

Search Strategy

The secondary data are identified through a systematic and transparent search strategy. Searches may be conducted using academic databases and search platforms such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, African Journals Online (AJOL), and relevant institutional repositories. Official government and organisational websites may also be consulted for policy documents, reports, statements, and communiqués.

The search strategy combines relevant keywords using Boolean operators. Search terms include:

("xenophobia" OR "xenophobic violence" OR "anti-immigrant violence") AND ("South Africa") AND ("Nigerian migrants" OR "Nigerian diaspora" OR "foreign nationals") AND ("human security" OR "diaspora protection" OR "migrant protection") AND ("Nigeria-South Africa relations" OR "bilateral relations" OR "diplomatic protection").

Additional searches may include terms such as migration governance, consular protection, diplomatic response, migrant vulnerability, institutional protection, human rights, and African migration. The search process should also involve backward and forward citation tracking of highly relevant studies in order to identify influential publications and additional sources that may not appear in the initial database search. This approach reflects established qualitative evidence-synthesis practice in migration and violence research.

Inclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and analytical consistency, materials included in the study should meet the following criteria:

- They must address xenophobia, xenophobic violence, migration, human security, diaspora protection, migrant vulnerability, or Nigeria–South Africa relations.
- They must provide substantive information relevant to Nigerian migrants or African foreign nationals in South Africa.
- They must focus on post-apartheid South Africa, with particular attention to periods of significant xenophobic violence.
- They must be scholarly publications, official documents, institutional reports, or credible publications with identifiable authorship and verifiable sources.
- Sources must contain sufficient empirical, historical, policy, or analytical information to address the objectives of the study.
- Publications should preferably be available in English to ensure consistency in interpretation and analysis.
- Where multiple reports describe the same event, priority should be given to the most authoritative, detailed, and methodologically transparent source.

Sources are excluded where they contain unsupported claims, lack identifiable authorship, provide only brief or incidental references to xenophobia, or have no direct relevance to human security and diaspora protection.

Data Management and Coding Process

The collected materials are analysed using thematic analysis, combining both deductive and inductive coding. The deductive dimension is guided by the assumptions of Critical Human Security Theory, particularly its emphasis on the security of individuals, human dignity, structural vulnerability, exclusion, institutional responsibility, and emancipation. The inductive dimension allows additional themes to emerge from the data without being restricted to predetermined theoretical categories.

The coding process proceeds in several stages.

First, all selected documents, interview transcripts, policy statements, and reports are read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Second, relevant passages are identified and assigned initial descriptive codes. These may include codes such as physical insecurity, economic insecurity, fear and psychological trauma, loss of livelihood, social exclusion, discrimination, institutional failure, police protection, diplomatic intervention, consular assistance, evacuation, and bilateral cooperation.

Third, related codes are grouped into broader analytical categories. For example, physical attacks, killings, injuries, and property destruction may be grouped under personal and physical insecurity, while unemployment, business losses, and destruction of migrant-owned enterprises may be categorised under economic insecurity.

Fourth, the categories are developed into major themes that respond directly to the research objectives. Possible themes include:

- Xenophobic violence as a multidimensional human security threat;
- Structural and socio-economic sources of migrant vulnerability;
- The experiences and consequences of insecurity among Nigerian migrants;
- Institutional and governmental responses to xenophobic violence;
- Nigeria's diplomatic and diaspora protection mechanisms;
- South Africa's responsibility as a host state;
- Strengths and limitations of Nigeria–South Africa bilateral relations in protecting migrants; and
- Policy gaps and prospects for strengthening human-centred diaspora protection.

Finally, the themes are interpreted through Critical Human Security Theory. This allows the study to assess not only whether violence occurred, but also how structural inequalities, xenophobic attitudes, political mobilisation, and governance failures create conditions of insecurity for migrants. Recent qualitative scholarship similarly demonstrates that xenophobic violence in South Africa is best understood as a multidimensional phenomenon involving socio-economic deprivation, collective mobilisation, xenophobic beliefs, political economy, and governance dynamics rather than as isolated criminal incidents.

Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. First, reliance on secondary qualitative data may limit direct access to the personal experiences and perceptions of Nigerian migrants affected by xenophobic violence. Published accounts may also reflect differences in the availability and quality of information across different periods and locations.

Second, official documents and diplomatic statements may present state actions in a favourable manner and may therefore understate failures in migrant protection. Similarly, media reports may emphasise highly visible episodes of violence while giving less attention to everyday discrimination, institutional exclusion, and less visible forms of insecurity.

Third, access to Nigerian migrants who have experienced xenophobic violence may be difficult because of fear, trauma, legal vulnerability, geographical distance, and concerns about personal security. Where interviews are conducted, the findings may therefore not be statistically representative of all Nigerians living in South Africa.

Fourth, the study focuses specifically on the Nigeria–South Africa relationship. Consequently, its findings may not fully represent the experiences of all migrant communities affected by xenophobia in South Africa.

However, this limitation is also a deliberate analytical choice, as it enables a focused examination of the relationship between human security, diaspora protection, and bilateral diplomacy.

Finally, the complex and changing nature of xenophobic violence means that new incidents, policies, and political developments may emerge after data collection. The study therefore does not claim to provide a permanent or exhaustive account of xenophobia. Instead, it provides a contextually grounded interpretation of how xenophobic violence affects human security and how Nigeria–South Africa relations shape the protection of Nigerian diaspora populations.

Methodological Justification

Overall, the qualitative methodology is suitable for the study because it enables an in-depth examination of the relationship between individual insecurity and state responsibility. By combining qualitative document analysis with thematic coding, the study can move beyond counting episodes of xenophobic violence to examine the underlying structures, institutional responses, and diplomatic processes that shape the protection of Nigerian migrants. The methodology is particularly compatible with Critical Human Security Theory because both adopt a people-centred orientation that prioritises lived experiences, vulnerability, dignity, and protection over conventional state-centred understandings of security.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Xenophobia and Nigeria-South Africa Relations

The relationship between Nigeria and South Africa occupies a strategic position in African international relations. As two of Africa's most influential states, their cooperation is important for continental peace, regional integration, economic development, diplomacy and the advancement of the African Union's vision of African solidarity. However, recurrent xenophobic and anti-immigrant violence in South Africa has created a major source of tension in bilateral relations, particularly because Nigerians constitute one of the prominent African migrant communities in South Africa.

The issue becomes particularly significant when examined through the framework of human security. Traditional approaches to security focus primarily on the protection of territorial integrity, state sovereignty and military power. Human security, by contrast, shifts attention towards the protection of individuals and communities from threats to their lives, dignity, livelihoods and fundamental rights (Emmanuel et al, 2025). From this perspective, xenophobic violence represents not merely a domestic security challenge for South Africa but also a transnational human-security concern with important consequences for Nigeria's responsibility to protect its citizens abroad. Recent developments demonstrate that the problem remains relevant. In 2026, renewed anti-immigrant tensions in South Africa contributed to the voluntary return and evacuation of hundreds of Nigerians, with many more indicating their intent to leave because of fears for their safety. The situation illustrates that diaspora protection cannot be reduced to emergency evacuation alone; it also involves prevention, consular protection, diplomatic engagement, legal assistance and the sustainable reintegration of returnees.

Nigeria suffers from most of the xenophobic attacks and extra-judicial killings in South Africa. According to the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, no fewer than 117 Nigerians were extra-judicially killed in South Africa between 2016 and 2018 for one insubstantial reason or the other (Abdulrasheed & Rabi, 2024). These egregious killings of Nigerians in South Africa have in several ways had some implications on Nigeria-South Africa relations. The implications could be diplomatic, economic, and socio-psychological.

Diplomatically, Since the 2008 anti-foreigner violence, Nigeria and South Africa have been working towards strengthening their diplomatic relation. In 2013, Nigeria and South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to reinforce diplomatic ties and forestall future xenophobic attacks (Abdulrasheed & Rabi, 2024). Nevertheless, the attacks on Nigerians have continued. In April 2015 during the Jonathan administration, Nigeria's Acting High Commissioner to South Africa, Martin Cobham, and the Consul General, Uche Ajulu-Okeke, were 'invited' for consultation (and not 'recalled' as it was falsely reported by

some media houses) following the xenophobic attacks in Durban and Johannesburg (Channels Television, 2015). Though, Nigeria, by taking such action, did not sever her relations with South Africa, such diplomatic move was seen by South Africa's Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation as an "unfortunate and regrettable step" (Brock and Dlodla, 2015).

Xenophobic attacks in South Africa will have many repercussions on its relationship with Nigeria and other African countries. Xenophobic attacks have already created a diplomatic rift between Nigeria and South Africa after the 2015 attacks. The recent 2019 attacks also led to the dismissal of South Africa's Ambassador to Nigeria and closure of South African businesses for many days in Nigeria. The Xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa will lead to a hostile foreign policy between the two countries and this will heighten their regional rivalry and hegemony in the continent. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa have smeared the reputation and be smacked the image of South Africa globally. It has created a wider chasm and the regional cooperation between Nigeria and South Africa which are considered as the regional powers that should have cooperate in pursuing the African global agenda beyond the continent (Tella (2019). The attacks in September 2019 have already invited for retaliation as observed by this study in which some frustrated and aggressive Nigerians in major cities such as Abuja, Lagos, Kano and Bauchi made attempts at attacking Shoprite and MTN offices which had been prevented by the timely intervention of the Nigerian security.

Furthermore, the attacks had infuriated the Nigerian government to take drastic diplomatic actions against South Africa. Such actions might ginger or motivate other African countries to follow suit which will affect the South African economy and regional hegemony. The wider implication of the xenophobic attacks is that the much after sought African unity which is expected to be advance by Nigeria and South Africa will face a setback. The quest for a permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council which can be realized if the two giants of Nigeria and South Africa decided to present one of them at the continental level can be thwarted if the diplomacy between the two is spoilt by Xenophobic attacks.

Economically, poverty was reported in 2015 to have increased by 57.2%, subsequently declining in 2016 by 45.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Poor people are blamed for orchestrating all acts of xenophobic attacks. It was however, asserted that poverty does not justify violence, pointing to the absence of a rational argument in the xenophobic attacks that gripped South Africa in recent years. Whereas poor South Africans are said to be fighting for the economic space, their acts of violence ironically perpetrate economic stagnation and deterioration. 2017.

Unemployment rate in South Africa averaged 25.27% over the period 2017-2019, reaching high of 31.20% in the first quarter of 2003 and a low of 21.50% in the fourth quarter of 2008 (Tradingeconomics.com, 2020). By comparison, only 14.68% of international migrants are unemployed. Furthermore, Wilkinson (2015) also shows that 32.65% of international migrants are employed in the informal sector in South Africa compared to 16.57% of "non-migrants" and 17.97% of "domestic migrants". These statistical patterns reveal that there may be a connection between being foreign national and performing well in informal business sector, with the result that locals may feel aggrieved that they have not been equally or more successful. Despite the fact that poverty does not justify violence, poor people tend to vent their frustrations through violence. According Statistic South Africa (2020) almost 12 million South African citizens live in poverty. However, Statistics South Africa (2020) reported that the number of people living in poverty in South Africa increased from 12.6 million in 2016 to 15.8 million in 2018, dropping to 10.2 million in 2019.

Furthermore, African economic interest might suffer a global setback because the likes of NEPAD and other continental organizations cannot get the needed support to function. Additionally, the quest for adjustment in trade imbalance under the World Trade Organization (WTO) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) by Africa can be affected because the continent lacks the internal cohesion to drive forward for external interest. Thus, attacks on Nigerians in South Africa have the potential of affecting the political economy of Africa in the globe. This has been postulated theoretically by Waltz that the system can be transferred to the level which can be translated as the domestic components of the African politics can be what is transferable at the international scene and if there is a serious rift between the two major contending powers of Nigeria and South Africa, such domestic elements that can be shifted to international stage can be

nothing more than rivalry, jealousy, conflict and competition which can weaken the entire continent in its quest for growth and development globally.

Socio-psychologically, xenophobic attacks in post-apartheid South Africa have over the years sowed the seed of fear in the minds of Nigerians. A number of them in South Africa no longer socialize freely with the locals as fellow African brothers and sisters with a shared history, values, norms etc., for fear of being attacked if not killed. As for the living Nigerian victims of anti-foreigner violence, it would not come as a surprise to discover that some of them are now suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Back home in Nigeria, many Nigerians are having a rethink of travelling down to South Africa for tourism, shopping, degree/postgraduate studies business, etc. first after listening/reading on print and electronic media the horrendous news on the killings of Nigerians residing in South Africa.

DISCUSSION OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS

One major finding of this study is that there exists a strong diplomatic tie between Nigeria and South Africa dated back to apartheid period when Nigeria played a key role in setting South Africa towards the pathway to liberation. From that period until the recent outbreak of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals living in South Africa, Nigeria and South Africa have over time maintained peaceful diplomatic relations. The study finding also indicates that Nigeria and South Africa diplomatic ties has been severed by the xenophobic attacks Nigerian citizens residing in South Africa. The consequential effect cut across economic, political and socio-cultural diplomatic relations between both countries. From the findings of this study, it was uncovered that the human security of Nigerians living in South Africa has been adversely affected. The finding established that many Nigerian citizens and other foreign nationals with huge capital investments in South Africa were forced to move out their businesses as destructions of properties is on the increase by the native South Africans. The study equally revealed that the massive evacuation of Nigerians and their businesses from South Africa as a move for Diaspora protection have instead of alleviating, increase the level of poverty and unemployment among the Diaspora community

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the issue of human security and diaspora protection has become a critical dimension of Nigeria–South Africa relations in the wake of recurring xenophobic violence. The attacks against Nigerians and other African migrants in South Africa demonstrate that insecurity is not limited to conventional military threats but also includes threats to life, personal safety, dignity, livelihood, property and access to basic social opportunities. From a human security perspective, xenophobic violence represents a serious failure to guarantee the protection of individuals irrespective of their nationality or migration status.

The recurring nature of these attacks has also exposed important weaknesses in existing mechanisms for protecting the Nigerian diaspora. Although the Nigerian government has increasingly adopted citizen-centered diplomacy and strengthened the role of diplomatic missions and diaspora institutions, responses have often been reactive rather than preventive. Recent studies similarly identify institutional limitations and weak coordination as constraints on effective diaspora protection, underscoring the need for a more proactive and integrated approach. The more recent violence and subsequent diplomatic tensions further demonstrate that the protection of citizens abroad remains a major test of the strategic relationship between Africa's two leading powers.

Therefore, sustainable Nigeria–South Africa relations cannot be achieved merely through diplomatic statements, economic cooperation or political agreements. They must be supported by a genuine commitment to human security, tolerance, the rule of law and the effective protection of foreign nationals. South Africa has a responsibility to prevent xenophobic violence, prosecute perpetrators and address the social, economic and political conditions that fuel hostility towards migrants. Nigeria, on the other hand, must strengthen its consular services, improve early-warning and emergency-response mechanisms, enhance cooperation among relevant institutions and make diaspora protection a central component of its foreign policy.

Ultimately, the future of Nigeria–South Africa relations will depend significantly on the ability of both countries to transform xenophobic violence from a recurring source of diplomatic tension into an area of meaningful bilateral and continental cooperation. Protecting the Nigerian diaspora should not be viewed simply as a diplomatic obligation but as an essential requirement of human security and African solidarity. A more proactive, people-centered and cooperative approach to diaspora protection will not only safeguard Nigerians in South Africa but will also contribute to mutual trust, regional stability and the broader vision of African integration and peaceful coexistence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis, this paper recommends the following:

Firstly, Nigeria and South Africa should establish a more effective bilateral framework for addressing xenophobic violence and other threats to the security of their citizens. Regular diplomatic consultations should be institutionalised to facilitate early warning, rapid response, and coordinated intervention during periods of heightened tension.

Secondly, the South African government should strengthen law-enforcement and judicial mechanisms for preventing, investigating, and prosecuting xenophobic attacks. Nigerian diplomatic missions should also improve consular assistance, emergency communication, and support for victims.

Thirdly, both countries should move beyond a narrow state-security perspective and place the safety, dignity, livelihoods, and fundamental rights of migrants at the centre of bilateral relations. This requires addressing not only physical violence but also discrimination, economic exclusion, intimidation, and insecurity.

Fourthly, Nigerian and South African security agencies should share relevant information on emerging xenophobic threats, organised attacks, and inflammatory mobilisation. A joint early-warning mechanism could help identify potential flashpoints and facilitate preventive action before violence escalates.

Fifthly, South Africa should address unemployment, inequality, competition over resources, and inadequate public services that are sometimes manipulated to blame foreign nationals. Tackling these structural conditions would contribute to reducing the social conditions in which xenophobic mobilisation thrives.

Sixthly, victims of xenophobic violence should have access to justice, compensation where appropriate, medical assistance, and psychosocial support. Holding perpetrators accountable would also strengthen public confidence in the state's commitment to protecting human security.

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