

Refugees of xenophobic attacks are housed in an inner city shelter in Durban, 7 July 2008.

Intolerable cruelty: anti-immigrant sentiment in KwaZulu-Natal

What is the xenophobic sentiment that underlies the recent violent attacks on foreign shop-owners throughout eThekweni, resulting in several deaths and the displacement of thousands? *Steven Gordon, Benjamin Roberts* and *Jarè Struwig* reflect on attitudes towards foreign nationals over the last decade, with a particular focus on KwaZulu-Natal, relative to other provinces.

These incidents by no means represent the first instance that anti-immigrant violence has occurred in KwaZulu-Natal, and have provoked national reflection on, and concern about, the character of our society.

Data used

We used data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), a repeated cross-sectional survey series conducted annually by the HSRC since 2003. Each annual SASAS round consists of a nationally representative sample of the adult population (16 years and older) living in private households.

The number of respondents in each survey round ranges between 2 500 and 3 500 people. Since its inception, the survey has employed a range of questions designed to capture perceptions about foreigners, thereby providing a

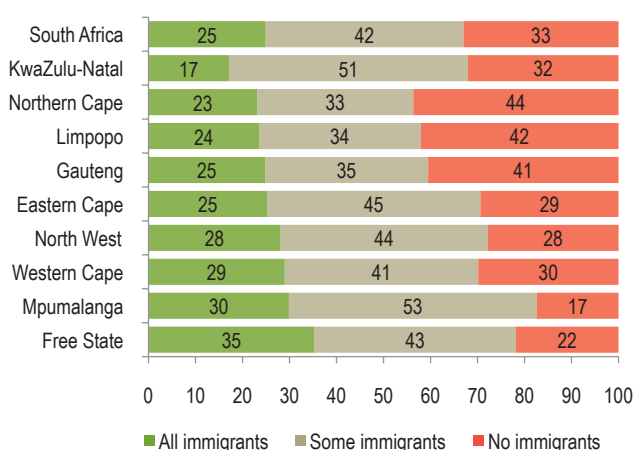
range of indicators with which to understand and monitor public attitudes towards foreign immigrants in the country.

An atypical province?

In all survey rounds, with the exception of 2005, SASAS respondents were asked whether they generally welcomed all, some or no foreign immigrants to the country. The national and provincial responses to this question from the SASAS round conducted in late 2013 are presented in Figure 1.

People in KZN were less welcoming of foreigners than many other provinces.

Figure 1: South Africans' overall perceptions of foreigners in 2013, by province (percent)



Source: HSRC SASAS 2013



Cape Town 23 May 2008. Following xenophobic attacks and violence which started in Johannesburg and spread to Cape Town, thousands of Capetonians staged a protest outside parliament calling for an end to the attacks on foreign African migrants living in the country.

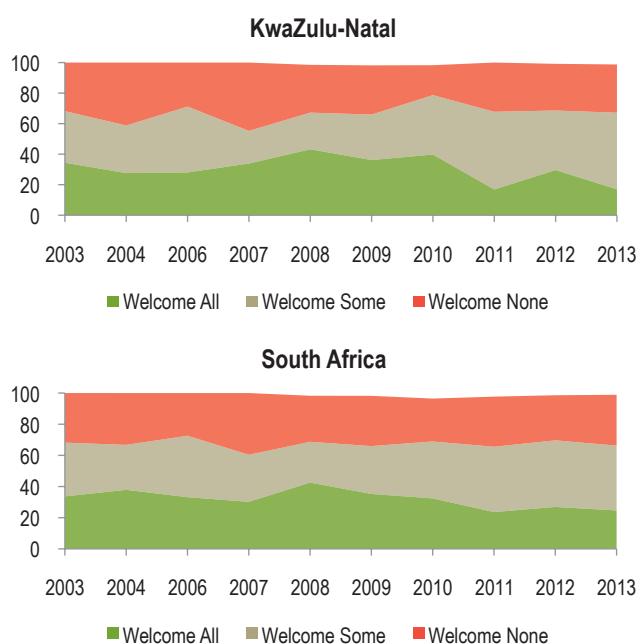
Findings showed people in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) were less welcoming of foreigners than many other provinces. Less than a fifth (17%) indicated they would welcome all immigrants. Some 50% indicated they would only welcome some immigrants and about a third (32%) would not welcome any foreigners to the country.

South Africans residing in Limpopo, Gauteng and the Northern Cape also voiced strong anti-immigrant sentiment. In each of these provinces roughly two-fifths of the population reported they would not welcome foreigners.

There was a notable dip in extreme anti-immigrant attitudes in the province in 2010.

The SASAS data series also allowed for an examination of patterns of change in the attitudes of KZN residents towards immigrants over the decade between 2003 and 2013, and how this differed relative to the national average. Figure 2 shows the share of the adult population in KZN that reported they did not welcome any foreigners to the country. However, this figure has fluctuated over the period. Since 2009, the share of people who indicated they would only welcome 'some' foreigners has risen both in KZN and nationally. There was a notable dip in extreme anti-immigrant attitudes in the province in 2010, which could have been related to the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. More research is required to better understand this finding. Aside from 2010, xenophobic sentiment in the province has tended not to differ significantly from the national average.

Figure 2: Overall perceptions of foreigners in KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa, 2003–2013 (percent)



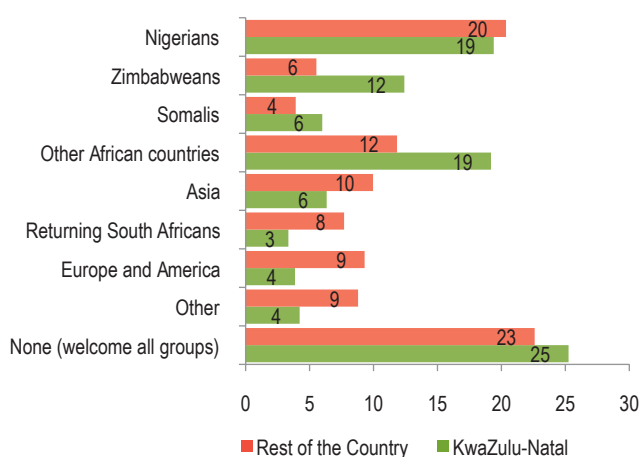
Source: HSRC SASAS 2003–2013

The most mentioned foreign African groups were Nigerians, Zimbabweans and Somalians.

'Afrophobia' in the Zulu Kingdom

Addressing journalists in parliament on 14 April 2015, Police Minister Nathi Nhleko suggested that the term xenophobia, which had been used to describe the violence against foreigners in eThekweni, be renamed 'Afrophobia'. Many of the foreigners attacked in the recent anti-immigrant violence in eThekweni were from other sub-Saharan African nations, such as Zimbabwe and Somalia. In order to better understand whether South Africans generally, and residents in KZN specifically, exhibit a particular aversion to certain types of immigrants, respondents to the SASAS 2013 survey were asked, 'Which, if any, group would you least want to come and live in South Africa?' The results for KZN in comparison to the rest of the country are portrayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Most disliked foreign groups in South Africa, 2013 (percent)



Source: HSRC SASAS 2013

People in KwaZulu-Natal were more likely than those in the rest of the country to select groups from sub-Saharan Africa as their least tolerated foreign group. The results

showed that more than half (57%) of all adult respondents in KwaZulu-Natal selected a group from sub-Saharan Africa, compared with approximately two-fifths (42%) in the rest of the country. The most mentioned foreign African groups were Nigerians (20%), Zimbabweans (12%) and Somalians (6%), all of which tended to be associated with entrepreneurship and commerce in the province. Only a minority of those in KZN selected groups from Asia (6%) or from Europe and North America (4%). The findings suggested that foreigners from Africa were not the only foreign group that South Africans were hostile towards. The findings shown here raise questions about the existence of 'Afrophobic' attitudes among people in the province as well as the country as a whole.

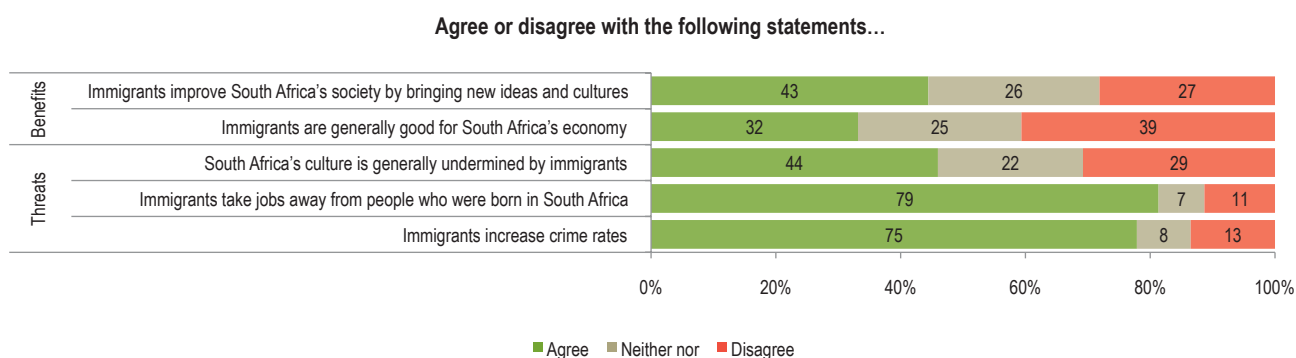
Perpetrators of the violence linked foreign immigrants with crime and unemployment.

Placing blame on the 'threat'

An HSRC investigation into the causes of the xenophobic violence in 2008 highlighted the fact that many of the perpetrators of the violence linked foreign immigrants with crime and unemployment. The belief that foreign immigrants are a threat to the material livelihoods of local communities is particularly widespread in KZN. In 2013, survey respondents were asked to specify the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that immigrants (i) increased crime rates and (ii) took jobs away from people who were born in South Africa. As Figure 4 shows, it is evident that more than three-quarters of the adult population in KwaZulu-Natal agreed with these statements. A far lower share (44%) in the province believed that immigrants undermined their culture, indicating that many did not see foreign nationals as a symbolic threat to their identity.

Immigration can strengthen communities.

Figure 4: Perceptions about the positives and negatives of immigration, 2013 (percent)



Source: HSRC SASAS 2013

Immigration can strengthen communities by bringing new skills and new ideas that could help improve the economic and social livelihoods of a society. The National Development Plan outlines an important role for migration in the country, linking immigration with economic development and with part of the solution to South Africa's human capital deficits. Many people in KZN do not share this viewpoint, and do not believe that foreign immigrants are generally good for South Africa's economy or that foreigners make the country more open to new ideas and cultures. If we compare KwaZulu-Natal with other parts of the country, we do not detect a considerable difference between responses recorded in the province and the national average (Figure 4). Despite government efforts to promote tolerance, most of the adult population could not see the value of immigration.

The 2013 SASAS results for KwaZulu-Natal were broken down by a range of socioeconomic attributes in order to provide more insight into the patterns of xenophobic sentiment within the province. The results (not shown) suggested that people across the province's socioeconomic spectrum tended to hold an anti-immigrant opinion. Low levels of variation were noted between age cohorts, population groups, labour market status or by level of educational attainment. This evidence challenges the popular tendency to identify xenophobia as the 'problem' of one particular group (such as the youth or the unemployed) in the province. In this respect, KwaZulu-Natal was found not to differ from other parts of the country.

Conclusion

The attitudinal analysis presented in this article confirms that the xenophobic sentiment in KwaZulu-Natal is shared by a considerable share of the province's adult population. Despite efforts to encourage and enforce a culture of human rights, people from across the socioeconomic divide in the province continue to express negative attitudes towards foreign nationals. However, it is important to remember that KwaZulu-Natal is not atypical relative to other provinces in the country. Most provinces in South Africa tend to be home to significant shares of people who voice anti-immigrant opinions.

Given government-sponsored initiatives in recent years to build social cohesion and create spaces for positive societal integration, the results of this study are disquieting. The April 2015 attacks call into question the success of current efforts to combat intolerance and xenophobia in our society. Leaders in government and civil society should be applauded for their condemnation of the April attacks. However the results of this study suggest that the underlying problem of widespread xenophobia is not being addressed with the necessary effort required. ■

Authors: Steven Gordon, PhD researcher; Benjamin Roberts and Jarè Struwig, SASAS coordinators; in the HSRC's Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery (DGSD) programme, HSRC.

Who is a foreigner in South Africa?

It is not only people from outside South Africa who are regarded as 'foreigners'.

Hangwelani (Hope) Magidimisha, a Tshivenda-speaker from Limpopo, relates how she was advised to stay in her house in KwaZulu-Natal during the recent xenophobic attacks that gripped that province.



Your accent and the 'shades of black' of your skin are still used as a measure of being a 'foreigner', even for South Africans. It seems tribalism is alive and well in our country. I have personal experience of this.

I grew up in a very poor rural area in Limpopo. We used to fetch water from the river for cooking and drinking, spending hours chasing locusts and termites for relish. My parents' daily refrain was that 'education is the only weapon' that could rescue me from this situation. This made me work hard at school so I could qualify to go to university. I was motivated by dreams of studying in Durban, visiting the beach and enjoying the splendid infrastructure and Durban lifestyle.

Little did I know that by moving out of my home town, an unimaginable challenge awaited me.