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Petty corruption experiences and xenophobic violence in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Past studies have shown that corruption can promote conflict and instability. However, the capacity for corruption to influence anti-immigrant violence has received little academic attention. This article examines the relationship between experiences of petty corruption and public participation in violent xenophobic behaviour. It draws on Moral Foundations Theory to argue that corruption experiences undermine the moral inhibitors that prevent an individual from engaging in violence. The study focused on South Africa (where xenophobic violence seems to have accelerated during the last two decades) and used data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey. It found a robust association between the frequency of petty corruption experience and participation (past and intentional) in xenophobic violence. This finding holds even when controlling for variables that capture anti-immigrant sentiment, material deprivation and socio-political mobilisation. The article concludes by arguing that reducing xenophobic violence in South Africa will require strengthening efforts to decrease petty corruption.

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1. Introduction

Xenophobic violence has become an increasingly commonplace occurrence in democratic South Africa. Collecting data from a variety of sources, Xenowatch identified at least 988 incidents of xenophobic violence between 1994 and 2022, 37% of which occurred in just the last five years.¹ This kind of violence can take many forms including the looting of foreign-owned businesses and homes as well as murder and assault (see Ueda, 2020 for detailed first-hand accounts of these kinds of attacks). The consequences of xenophobic violence are not confined to the victims or even the affected communities. It can have adverse political, social, economic and security repercussions for the entire South African population. Mapping the drivers of xenophobic violence is essential if effective interventions are to be designed and implemented to address this problem.

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¹Xenowatch tracks violence using media reports, research publications, partner organisations, and original research as well as crowdsourcing (Misago et al., 2021). Because of the underreporting of hate crime by victims, relevant organisations and the media, the numbers produced by Xenowatch may dramatically undercount the actual level of xenophobic violence in the country.

The *goal* of this study is to examine the role played by corruption² in promoting anti-immigrant attacks in the country.

The *central thesis* of this paper is that corruption experiences will increase the likelihood that an individual will participate in hate crime against foreign nationals. The study will focus on petty corruption (i.e. bureaucratic or street-level corruption) as this form of exploitation should have the greatest (and most direct) exposure effect. The thesis is based on existing research (e.g. Corbacho et al. 2016; Gächter and Schulz, 2016; Gillanders and van der Werff, 2022) that examines the relationship between exposure to corruption and moral behaviour. This work argues that experiences of corruption can have a meaningful impact on the moral foundations that inform human decision-making (also see Clausen et al. 2011). It is important for the reader to remember that an individual's decision to participate in intergroup violence is informed by moral codes of behaviour (Bandura, 2016). Experiences of corruption may influence these moral codes which, in turn, could affect the psychological incentives that people face in relation to violence.

The article hypothesises that the more frequently an individual is exposed to corruption, the more likely they will be to report involvement in hate crime. To provide an adequate test of this thesis, it is necessary to assess its relative strength against other possible (and more mainstream) drivers for xenophobic violence. After reviewing the relevant literature, a decision was made to focus on the following drivers: anti-immigrant attitudes, material deprivation and socio-political mobilisation. To perform these tests, quantitative data from a nationally representative public opinion survey will be utilised. This study will make a significant contribution to the scholarship on South African xenophobia which has tended to overlook the role of corruption in driving anti-immigrant hate crime.

In the next section, the effects of corruption on conflict will be discussed with an emphasis on past quantitative research on corruption exposure. Then the paper outlines the causal mechanism that would explain why experiencing corruption may influence public participation in violence. The third section reviews research on xenophobia in South Africa, identifying alternative major theories, and considering what variables must be accounted for in the analysis. The data (along with the dependent and independent variables) and methods will then be described. This is followed by a presentation of the results, including a multilevel regression analysis that will be used to test the hypotheses developed for this paper. The final section discusses and offers some concluding comments, focusing on the implications of this paper for scholars studying South African xenophobia.

2. The effects of corruption on conflict

Corruption is thought to undermine political stability and promote conflict. Often this is thought to occur because it can increase grievances and demands for violent political

²There are many different definitions of corruption, but most involve the abuse of power for private gain. Indeed, as Bussell (2015) shows, there are significant (and fraught) definitional debates around how corruption should be conceived. No existing definition of corruption has managed to cover the many dimensions of the concept. Jain (2001) provides clarity to this issue, producing a typology that differentiates between different kinds of corruption. Three categories of corruption are identified: (i) grand; (ii) bureaucratic or petty; and (iii) legislative. Although not perfect, this typology provides necessary clarity for the purposes of this study.

change (Mauro, 1995). But corruption can also have indirect effects, lowering the effectiveness of investments in public-goods (such as education or health) which in turn can lower the opportunity costs of becoming involved in an armed conflict. Reviewing the scholarship on the issue, Le Billon (2003) noted that scholars have tended to use ‘top down’ analyses of the determinants of violence to show how corruption drives conflict. But knowledge of who participates (and the attitudinal and socio-demographic factors that correlate with their participation) is essential to our understanding of *why* a particular kind of violence may occur. This type of knowledge is unavailable in ‘top down’ analyses, making such an approach detrimental for the study of how corruption affects attitudes and behaviour.

Researchers have used micro-level surveys to show that experiences of corruption can have a powerful effect on human psychology. Gillanders (2016), for instance, found that experiences of petty corruption undermined mental health and fostered anxiety in 18 African countries. Quantitative research has also demonstrated that *exposure* to corruption can have an influential effect on decision-making. Scholars have used quantitative survey experiments to demonstrate that exposure to corruption increased the propensity of respondents to engage in deviant behaviour. Gächter and Schulz (2016), for example, found that people tend to commit more rule violations in social environments characterised by political corruption. In another example, Corbacho et al. (2016) utilised an information experiment, embedded in a large-scale Costa Rican household survey, to show that exposure to corruption encouraged deviant behaviour. Changing a respondent’s beliefs about the pervasiveness of corruption was found to increase their willingness to engage in corrupt behaviour. The authors argue that this effect can be explained by the relationship between corruption and morality.

Moral codes often concern those social norms that influence behaviour, with certain actions proscribed and others encouraged. Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) was developed to understand how moral codes intersect with social environments to influence behaviour (Haidt, 2012). MFT proposes that an individual’s behaviour is informed by their moral foundations, and the theorem identified six foundations that drive human behaviour: (i) care, (ii) reciprocity, (iii) loyalty, (iv) authority, (v) liberty and (vi) sanctity. These foundations differ between people and groups because of a range of factors including cultural socialisation and individual experience (for a concise overview of the theory, see Graham et al., 2013). The use of violence against others is heavily discouraged in many codes of morality. As a result, individuals frequently have a learned psychological aversion to participation in violent action (Bandura, 2016). But changing our moral foundations will alter our aversion to participate in violent behaviour. Littman and Paluck (2015) observed this when studying the deliberate strategies used by hate groups to make violent intergroup conflict more acceptable.

There is evidence that petty corruption can undermine the moral inhibitors that prevent an individual from engaging in violence. Using Afrobarometer data, Gillanders and van der Werff (2022) demonstrated that an individual’s experience of paying bribes made them more accepting of interpersonal and domestic violence. The authors utilised MFT to explain this relationship, arguing that bribe solicitation weakened respect for the legitimate use of force (i.e. the *authority* foundation). In addition, such experiences were also hypothesised to negatively affect beliefs about the responsibility to protect others (i.e. the *care* foundation) and the acceptability of oppression (i.e. the *liberty* foundation).

These findings are consistent with prior public opinion research on political violence. Using data from a 2008/2009 Gallup World Poll, Clausen et al. (2011), for instance, found evidence that those individuals who had experienced corruption were more likely to support for violent protest actions than those who had not (also see Lewis, 2021).

3. Central hypothesis

The existing literature on xenophobic violence in South Africa is quite substantial, covers a wide range of disciplines (including political science, history, sociology and anthropology) and is frequently contentious. One of the main emerging research traditions links xenophobia with poor governance and suggests that anti-immigrant hate crime may have been expediated by a common set of grievances about governmental power (Lamb, 2019; Misago et al., 2021; Tewolde, 2023). Although this body of research highlights the role of governance, it often focuses on the inadequate delivery of government services and resources (also see Misago, 2017). The role of petty corruption tends to be ignored. Given that the previous section showed that corruption exposure can have a significant effect on human psychology, this omission is a significant knowledge gap. Indeed, the psychological cost of corruption exposure is understudied in the South African context.

How can the impact of a specific factor (e.g. corruption exposure) on a particular kind of human behaviour be measured? Scholars of xenophobic activity in South Africa have used quantitative data to assess different drivers of anti-immigrant behaviour (for a discussion of this work, see Gordon, 2020). Survey respondents are asked to self-report their participation in, and attitudes towards, violent behaviour. This data is then analysed against a range of other attitudinal and behavioural variables to identify drivers. Following a similar approach, this paper uses quantitative research methods (and data from a large-scale public opinion dataset) to investigate whether exposure to corruption will increase participation in violence. The study builds on the work of quantitative researchers (e.g. Corbacho et al. 2016; Lewis, 2021; Gillanders and van der Werff, 2022) who used survey data to identify the relationship between corruption exposure and specific types of behaviour.

Petty corruption is perhaps the most common, and direct, form of corruption experienced by a general populace. It tends to manifest most often when various types of public officials (including police officers, nurses and municipal administrators) solicit bribes (Jain, 2001). Bribe solicitation of this type frequently occurs at sites of political power and involves the subversion of legitimate governmental systems (also see Bussell, 2015). In Africa the poor are more likely to be victims of petty corrupt behaviour as they often rely heavily on services provided by governments (Justesen & Bjørnskov, 2014). Experiences of petty corruption should impact a person's thinking about the morality of power. According to MFT, these experiences should undermine faith in the moral foundations of *authority* and *liberty*. Because these foundations act as inhibitors to violence (Haidt, 2012), undermining them should make participation in deviant acts (such as hate crime) more acceptable. Following this logic, exposure to petty corruption should make intergroup violence more morally tolerable and, therefore, more likely.

H#1a. Encountering petty corruption will increase the likelihood that an individual would participate in anti-immigrant hate crime.

Even within the same territorial nation state, the development of moral foundations can differ between geographies. Urbanised communities tend to be more diverse than their rural counterparts which may make moral norms about group boundaries and strict social hierarchies within them less viable (Haidt, 2012). This could generate greater adherence to individualising moral foundations and weaken adherence to more communal foundations. Drawing on the language of moral psychology, Adou (2022) argues that urbanised life in the African context is characterised by a more individualistic lifestyle that has fewer social sanctions for corrupt practices. Rural communities, by contrast, had higher sanctions against corrupt behaviour. Employing a time-series cross-sectional analysis (1972–2015) and data for 51 African countries, he found that urbanisation is robustly correlated with corruption prevalence. Building on this work, we could argue that the relationship between corruption exposure and hate crime participation will be mediated by urban status.

H#1b. The relationship between exposure to petty corruption and anti-immigrant hate crime will be more robust in rural areas.

4. Alternative hypotheses

The goal of this paper is to test the corruption thesis described above against a host of competing explanations. As outlined in the prior section, the existing literature on xenophobic violence is quite voluminous. It would, therefore, not be possible to test (or even identify) every driver of violence proposed by this body of work. For the purposes of this article, however, three prominent drivers were identified: (i) anti-immigrant sentiment; (ii) protest participation; and (iii) socio-economic status. The inclusion of a range of alternative determinants provides a safeguard against omitted variable bias. It is important to establish that corruption influences participation in violence and that any observed association is not a simple artifact of socio-economic position or a greater predisposition to political protest.

Most studies of xenophobic violence (e.g. Pillay et al., 2008; Crush & Ramachandran, 2014; Misago et al., 2021) acknowledge the widespread nature of anti-immigrant sentiment in the country. Public opinion research by Gordon (2022) shows that most citizens consider foreign nationals to be the cause of a variety of societal problems (such as crime and unemployment), perceiving this group as a threat. One of the most obvious drivers of discrimination is prejudice. Although there was a period when this assumption was contested, psychologists have traditionally assumed that there is a close and direct relationship between prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour (Duckitt, 1992). Most contemporary research finds evidence to support the supposition that prejudice towards an out-group should predict behaviour towards that group. The strength of this prejudice-behaviour relationship is, however, not always substantial. A meta-analysis of 57 studies of the relationship between racial attitudes and discrimination by Talaska, et al. (2008), for example, discovered only a moderate correlation ($r = 0.26$) between the two.

H#2. Persons with high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment will have a greater propensity to engage in hate crime.

South Africa has, since the mid-2000s, experienced growing levels of protest activity. Quantitative research by Swart et al. (2020) has examined a range of different civic

(e.g. organisational membership) and attitudinal (e.g. evaluations of service delivery) determinants of protest activity in the country. But less is known about the relationship between protest participation and anti-immigrant behaviour. Qualitative researchers, however, have argued that street protests are often triggers of xenophobic violence. Areas with a high incidence of service delivery-related protests tend to be hot spots of anti-immigrant attacks (Misago et al., 2021). It has been contended that xenophobic activities can be a stratagem used by protest leaders, a tactic exercised to attract community support and government attention (also see Lamb, 2019). Xenophobic violence can, in this way, be exploited by local leaders to further their material self-interest and build political power. In light of this prior research work, it seems necessary to control for past participation in protest activity in any model that looks at public participation in xenophobia.

H#3. Recent participation in protests activity will be positively linked to involvement in hate crime.

In any review of different possible drivers of xenophobic violence in South Africa, the role played by socio-economic status frequently emerges as one of the most widespread and contested. Some scholars see anti-immigrant violence as tied to intense competition for scarce resources and, consequently, more likely amongst the poor., Monson (2015), for example, argued that economic exclusion fuelled xenophobic mobilisation in economically disadvantaged communities. He used a qualitative case study approach and drew on theories of ‘insurgent citizenship’. Investigating the causes of the 2008 May riots, Pillay et al. (2008) identified deprived economic livelihoods and the competition for material resources in poor communities as prime drivers of anti-immigrant hate crime (also see Lamb, 2019). Other scholars have opposed this ‘economic competition’ argument. Crush and Ramachandran (2014), for example, reject materialist explanations of xenophobia, claiming it minimises the problem. Indeed, the authors argued that the power of poverty and economic status to predict xenophobic behaviour have been seriously overstated in South Africa.

H#4. Individuals with a stronger socio-economic condition should be less likely to have participated in anti-immigrant hate crime.

The arguments presented above do not seek to dismiss other possible drivers of xenophobic violence. The scope of this study is limited and there are numerous diverse scholarly arguments that could not be presented here. This includes scholarship that focuses on macro-level structural forces like historical legacies, white supremacy, neo-liberal socio-economic policies and the institutionalisation of exclusionary citizenship laws.³ Prior social psychology research has shown that these kinds of macro-level forces can have a significant impact on the moral foundations that individuals use to make decisions (Haidt, 2012). It is important, at this stage, to acknowledge this limitation and to admit that certain drivers of xenophobia were not tested in this paper.

³For a discussion of the literature that looks at the multiple macro-level structural forces that have been put forward to explain xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa, see Tewolde (2023).

5. Data and method

5.1. Sample

Data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) was used for this study. A repeated cross-sectional survey series, SASAS is administered by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (2022). SASAS's sampling frame is based on Statistics South Africa's 2011 Population Census. In the first sampling stage, a set of 500 Small Area Layers (SALs) from the country's nine provinces was drawn. In each SAL, seven dwelling units (i.e. non-vacant residences) were randomly selected. Fieldworkers then visited each selected dwelling unit to select a respondent. Using a computerised randomisation method, a respondent was drawn from all persons 16 years and older at this unit. Selected respondents may refuse the interview, and the realised sample of each SASAS round is usually about 80%.

5.2. Procedure

All respondents were asked for written informed consent and if the respondent was a minor then a dual consent process was required (both from the minor and then their parent/guardian). If respondents gave consent, they were then asked questions by fieldworkers from the SASAS questionnaire. Fieldworkers classified the responses against a set of predefined codes. Questionnaires were translated into the country's major languages for ease of interpretation. Fieldwork and questionnaire design were overseen by the HSRC's Ethics Committee. After collection, the SASAS data was weighted to be nationally representative of the adult population in the country's nine provinces. Except where otherwise specified, all data presented in this paper has been weighted.

5.3. Measures

Background variables. A number of standard dummy variables were constructed to account for respondents' demographic characteristics. Variables were created to capture gender, age, population group, urban status, and province of residence. Standard socio-economic background variables were also generated, these included labour market status and formal educational attainment.⁴ A categorical political affiliation variable was derived from the question: '[t]o which party do you feel most close?'. Unweighted descriptive summary statistics for socio-demographic and political affiliation are provided for the 2021 round in [Table 1](#).

Participation in anti-immigrant hate crime. Starting during the 2016 SASAS round, respondents were asked whether they had taken part in a violent action to prevent immigrants from living or working in their neighbourhood. The wording of the question includes the *motivation* for violence, consequently removing any ambiguity about whether the action could be classified as xenophobic. Responses were coded into the following nominal categories: (i) past participant in the last five years; (ii) past participant more than five years ago; (iii) non-participant with intention to participate in future; and

⁴Formal schooling was assessed using the question: '[w]hat is the highest level of education that you have ever completed?' and was measured in terms of formal years of education completed.

Table 1. Summary statistics of the South African Social Attitudes Survey, 2021.

	Obs.	Min	Max
<i>Gender group</i>			
Male	1318	0	1
Female	1678	0	1
Age	2996	16	97
<i>Population group</i>			
Black African	1807	0	1
Coloured	504	0	1
Indian	356	0	1
White	331	0	1
<i>Geotype group</i>			
Urban	2424	0	1
Rural	572	0	1
Years of Schooling	2974	0	17
<i>Employment group</i>			
Employed	953	0	1
Unemployed	1116	0	1
Labour Inactive	927	0	1
<i>Political Affiliation</i>			
African National Congress	967	0	1
Democratic Alliance	409	0	1
Economic Freedom Front	146	0	1
Other Opposition	188	0	1
No Party	576	0	1
Undeclared	688	0	1
<i>Provincial Residence</i>			
Western Cape	316	0	1
Eastern Cape	310	0	1
Northern Cape	180	0	1
Free State	235	0	1
KwaZulu-Natal	640	0	1
North West	226	0	1
Gauteng	577	0	1
Mpumalanga	264	0	1
Limpopo	248	0	1

Note: Data is unweighted.

(iv) non-participant with no intention to participate in future. When fieldworkers ask respondents about violence, the problem of social desirability bias cannot be ignored. However, it is important to remember the endemic culture of impunity that informs the perpetration of anti-immigrant hate crime in South Africa (Ueda, 2020).

Experiences of corruption: Survey participants in the 2021 SASAS round were required to indicate how often they (or a member of their immediate family) had, in the last five years, come across a government official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favour in return for a service. Responses were captured on a five-point scale which ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Those who answered 'don't know' to this question (N = 120) were treated as missing. Although this item may be affected by social desirability bias, the item asks about solicitation rather than past behaviour or intention. Consequently, we may imagine that respondents would be more likely to give an honest answer to this question.

Anti-Immigrant bias. A categorical prejudice variable was constructed from answers to the following question: '[p]lease indicate which of the following statements applies to you? I generally welcome to South Africa ... (i) All immigrants; (ii) Some immigrants; (iii) No immigrants; and (iv) Don't know'.

Table 2. Percentage of the adult population who reported that they had participated in violent action to prevent immigrants from living or working in their neighbourhood, 2016–21.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Participated in the Last Five Years	6.9 (0.762)	2.6 (0.381)	4.9 (0.697)		5.8 (0.593)	7.4 (0.770)
Participated More than Five Years Ago	1.9 (0.386)	2.6 (0.411)	4.6 (0.699)		6.3 (0.673)	5.3 (0.630)
Never Participated But May Do So	10.3 (0.917)	11.7 (0.919)	11.3 (0.881)		11.3 (0.903)	12.2 (1.035)
Never Participated and Would Not Do So	80.9 (1.170)	83.1 (1.035)	79.2 (1.224)		76.6 (1.188)	75.1 (1.312)

Notes: 1. Data for 2019 is unavailable; and 2. Linearised standard error of column percentage in parenthesis.

Recent Protest Action Participation. Survey participants were queried on whether they had: ‘[d]uring the last 12 months taken part in a protest march or demonstration?’ A dichotomous (1 = participated, 0 = not participated) variable was then created to measure recent protest participation.

Socio-Economic Status (SES) Index: To ascertain a sense of an individual’s socio-economic position, respondents were asked twenty-five questions about the presence of different types of working assets in their home. Assets ranged from an electric stove to a swimming pool and included access to basic services (e.g. piped water, flush toilets and electricity). A standard Cronbach alpha test ($\alpha = 0.83$) showed these items loaded well onto an index. A 0–10 composite index was then created using responses to these twenty-five questions, the lower the value the lower the socio-economic position of the individual.

6. Results

The level of self-reported participation in violent action against international migrants was depicted in Table 2 for the period 2016–21. As can be seen from the table, public willingness to confess to participation in xenophobic violence tends to fluctuate somewhat over the period. Notwithstanding this trend, past participation appears to have increased between 2017 and 2021. It would appear, at the very least, that the moral inhibitors on reporting past involvement in this activity have weakened in the last few years. In addition, a discouragingly significant proportion (11%) of the adult public said that they had not taken part in such an action but would be willing to do so. In each round of surveying, a clear majority of the adult populace claimed that they had never (and would never) take part in anti-immigrant violence. This finding highlights the fact that a significant plurality of the South African population rejects xenophobic violence.

A sizable share of the adult populace reported that they (or someone in their immediate family) had been solicited for a bribe between 2016 and 2021. The frequency of how often this had occurred also varied substantially. About a sixth (16%) of the general public reported that it happened seldom, 22% that it took place occasionally, 11% quite often and 5% very often. There is some evidence that the frequency of petty corruption exposure has increased significantly in the past two decades.⁵ If we consider levels of exposure across xenophobic participation groups in Figure 1 for the 2021 SASAS round, a distinct pattern emerges. Past participants were more than twice as likely to be affected by petty corruption than non-participants. Amongst non-participants those without a

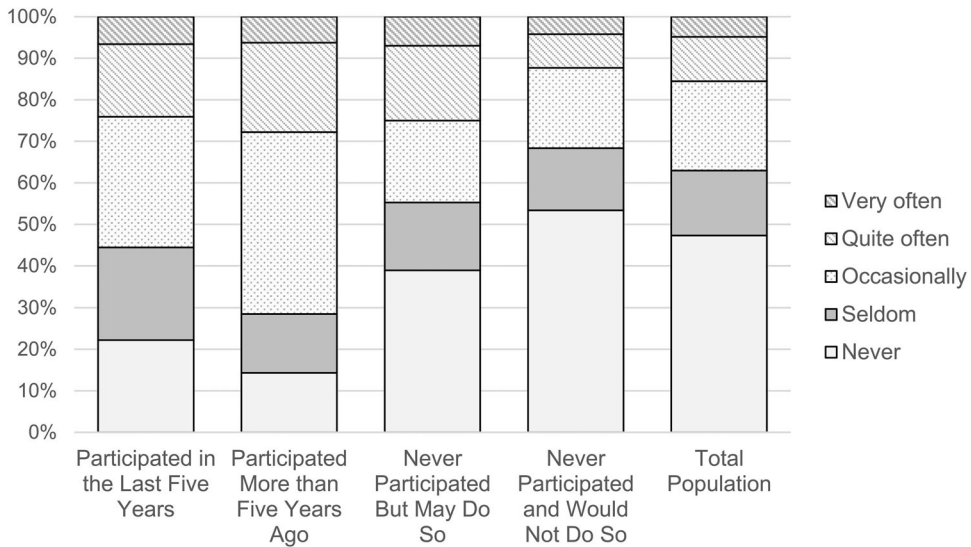


Figure 1. Public responses to the question: ‘[i]n the last five years, how often have you or a member of your immediate family come across a government official who hinted they wanted, or asked for, a bribe or favour in return for a service?’ across different participation in xenophobic violence groups, 2021.

behavioural intention to participate in future were significantly less impacted by bribe solicitation. But the descriptive data presented in the figure provides an inadequate test of the study’s central hypothesis. A multivariate regression analysis was required to adequately assess the relationship between hate crime participation and experiences of corruption.

To investigate the associations that different attitudinal, experiential and socio-demographic variables had with self-reported participation in anti-immigrant violence, a multinomial probit approach was used.⁶ Coefficients from the multinomial regression model are portrayed in Table 3; these coefficients estimate the effects of variables on whether a survey participant gave a response that matched to one of the participation categories. It is essential for the reader to remember that the coefficients depicted here only contain information about relative positions. The model’s base outcome is ‘non-participant with no intention to participate’ and the model compares respondents who gave this answer with the three other categories. The model does not distinguish absolute effects on behaviour (or behavioural intention) only the degree to which variables make an individual more or less likely to give a particular answer when questioned about their past participation in violence.

⁵When this question was asked as part of the SASAS 2006 round, only about a third of the adult population said that they (or their immediate family) had a corruption experience between 2001 and 2006. About a tenth (11%) of the general population told fieldworkers that this happened seldom, 13% occasionally, 6% quite often and 3% very often.

⁶This approach was selected because of the nominal options offered to the respondents. In view of the multiplicity of decisional processes that were available to the respondents, linear or ordered traditional specifications would not be suitable. It was necessary to estimate error correlations across nominal choices and address the potential independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) assumptions. A multinomial probit model specification allows for comparisons between pairs of alternatives while not discounting the possibilities of IIA violations.

Table 3. Multinomial probit regression on past participation in violent aggression against foreign nationals, 2021.

	Participated in the Last Five Years		Participated More than Five Years Ago		Never Participated But May Do So	
Age	-0.001	(0.005)	0.001	(0.006)	-0.010	(0.006)
Female	-0.236	(0.154)	0.018	(0.181)	-0.114	(0.144)
Race Group (ref. Black African)						
Coloured	-0.241	(0.263)	0.196	(0.276)	-0.315	(0.245)
Indian	-0.874	(0.467)	-1.251	(0.388)	**	-0.485 (0.332)
White	0.606	(0.342)	0.584	(0.344)		0.159 (0.314)
Work Status (ref. Employed)						
Unemployed	-0.381	(0.201)	-0.195	(0.224)		-0.251 (0.182)
Labour inactive	-0.229	(0.225)	0.135	(0.227)		-0.079 (0.206)
Years of Formal Education	0.029	(0.026)	-0.056	(0.025)	*	0.026 (0.021)
Urban	-0.068	(0.197)	-0.210	(0.211)		-0.336 (0.196)
Socio-Economic Status Index	-0.122	(0.056)	*	-0.056 (0.054)		-0.097 (0.043)
Party Affiliated (ref. African National Congress)						
Democratic Alliance	-0.716	(0.296)	*	-0.702 (0.328)	*	-0.597 (0.251)
Economic Freedom Front	0.299	(0.277)		-0.092 (0.331)		0.296 (0.280)
Other Opposition	0.275	(0.305)		0.253 (0.340)		0.163 (0.293)
No Party	-0.495	(0.228)	*	-1.007 (0.317)	**	-0.041 (0.209)
Undeclared	-0.309	(0.244)		-0.367 (0.209)		-0.312 (0.219)
Welcome Immigrants (ref. All)						
Some	0.427	(0.209)	*	0.982 (0.209)	***	0.467 (0.182)
None	0.543	(0.216)	*	0.787 (0.232)	**	0.781 (0.184)
Uncertain	0.426	(0.572)		-11.057 (0.462)	***	-1.012 (0.586)
Frequency of Corruption Experience	0.284	(0.063)	***	0.484 (0.075)	***	0.271 (0.060)
Recent Protest Participation	1.042	(0.186)	***	0.811 (0.220)	***	0.521 (0.189)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Note: 1. The weighted data from the 2021 round of SASAS (N = 2,757) was used; 2. Log pseudolikelihood = -26264365 (Wald $\chi^2(84) = 20648$; Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$); 3. The model controls for provincial residence of respondents; and 4. Table entries are coefficients with robust standard errors in parenthesis.

Self-reported frequency of corruption experience was found to be a robust correlate of whether an individual had participated in anti-immigrant hate crime (H#1a). Compared to the base outcome, a one unit increase in the frequency of experience improved the log odds of having been a participant during either the last five years ($r = 0.284$; $SE = 0.063$; $p = 0.000$) or more than five years ago ($r = 0.484$; $SE = 0.075$; $p = 0.000$). In addition, such experiences also made non-participants more likely to report an intention to participate in the future ($r = 0.271$; $SE = 0.060$; $p = 0.000$). To test the second component of the first hypothesis, the model was adjusted to interact urban status with the corruption experience variable. The resultant interaction term was statistically significant for the first ($r = -0.306$; $SE = 0.131$; $p = 0.014$) and second pairings ($r = -0.295$; $SE = 0.1487$ $p = 0.044$) but not the third ($r = -0.119$; $SE = 0.143$; $p = 0.402$). The observed negative interaction terms suggest that corruption experiences have a greater influence on past participation in rural areas (H#1b). Although the results are not definitive for behavioural intention amongst non-participants, it would appear that urbanisation moderates the relationship between corruption exposure and past involvement in violence.

Anti-immigrant bias was, unsurprisingly, a statistically significant predictor of behaviour and behavioural intention in the model (H#2). However, the strength of the effect was somewhat smaller than may have been anticipated. This finding is consistent with past research (e.g. Gordon, 2020) that looks at the relationship between prejudice and anti-immigrant behaviour in South Africa. Recent participation in protest activity was

found to be a statistically significant (and positive) correlate of past involvement in anti-immigrant violence (H#3). As may be expected, when compared to participation in the distant past ($r = 0.811$; $SE = 0.220$; $p = 0.000$), the strength of the effect was somewhat greater for recent participation ($r = 1.042$; $SE = 0.186$; $p = 0.000$). Taking part in a recent protest also had an association with behavioural intention amongst non-participants but the size of the correlation ($r = 0.521$; $SE = 0.189$; $p = 0.008$) was smaller than what was observed for past participation.

Socio-economic status was found to be a negative correlate of past participation in [Table 3](#). But the SES Index was only a statistically significant correlate of recent participation ($r = -0.122$; $SE = 0.056$; $p = 0.038$) and not participation in the distant past ($r = -0.056$; $SE = 0.054$; $p = 0.309$). Socio-economic position was also found to be a statistically significant correlate of intention to participate in anti-immigrant hate crime amongst non-participants. A one-unit increase in the SES Index reduced the log odds of reporting an intention to participate ($r = -0.097$; $SE = 0.043$; $p = 0.025$) amongst those who said they had never participated before. In summation, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that being poor increases the likelihood that an individual will report (both past and intentional) participation in violence (H#4). Other measures of socio-economic position (e.g. employment status or formal education) were not found to be particularly robust predictors of behaviour in the table.

7. Discussion

Using quantitative household survey data, this article examined micro-level determinants of public participation in xenophobic violence. The *central thesis* of this paper was that repeated experiences of petty corruption would be associated with greater levels of participation in anti-immigrant hate crime. Multivariate testing validated this thesis and demonstrated that frequently encountering corruption increased the likelihood of reporting past participation in hate crime. The effect was, however, mitigated by urbanisation, the relationship was found to be stronger in rural communities. Exposure to petty corruption also increased intention to participate in the future amongst non-participants. These findings hold even when controlling for a range of attitudinal and socio-demographic characteristics. In fact, when compared to the strength of other observed correlates, corruption experiences were one of the *most* robust predictors in the multinomial probit model. This outcome is consistent with the hypothesis that petty corruption can undermine the moral foundations that prevent an individual from participating in inter-group violence.

The empirical findings presented here have contributed significantly to the relevant research literature in a number of different ways. It has provided insight for those researchers examining the relationship between political stability and corruption, showcasing the importance of micro-level surveys. By empirically demonstrating the negative effects of corruption exposure on the moral psychology of the general populace, it has helped us better understand the harmful impacts of petty corruption. Moreover, data presented in this paper has meaningfully contributed to research on South African xenophobia. It has, in particular, added to scholarly work (e.g. Crush and Ramachandran, 2014; Monson, 2015; Misago et al., 2021) on how governance (and its deficit) drives public participation in xenophobic violence. Outside of the study's central thesis, it is

worth acknowledging some of the other important findings to have emerged from the data analysis.

Model outcomes demonstrated a strong prejudice-behaviour relationship, anti-immigrant sentiment was a robust determinant of both past participation and intention amongst non-participants. This outcome is interesting as some scholars (e.g. Misago, 2017; Tewolde, 2023) have downplayed the prejudice-behaviour relationship in their studies of xenophobic violence. In addition, the paper confirmed a relationship between recent protest activity and anti-immigrant behaviour. This result validates those qualitative researchers (e.g. Monson; 2015; Misago et al., 2021) who have argued that street protests are triggers of xenophobia and demonstrates the ‘dark side’ of South African associational life. It also complements the work of Gordon (2020) who examined the relationship between participation in voluntary associations and public involvement in a range of different anti-immigrant activities in South Africa. He found that involvement in voluntary activities is correlated with involvement (past and intentional) in anti-immigrant behaviour.

Even though the present study has made significant contributions to the existing body of research on violent xenophobic behaviour in South Africa, it is not without its limitations. The data available did not allow for a comprehensive explicit test of how moral foundations may shape violent behaviour in the country. Nor does it attempt to delineate petty corruption experiences; an issue given that research by Gillanders (2016) shows that different kinds of petty corruption experiences can have differing psychological effects. In addition, this study examined only one form of corruption exposure and it would be beneficial for future work on public participation in anti-immigrant hate crime to look at other types. Past research by Lewis (2021) has shown that different types of corruption had differing effects on behaviour. Dissimilar types of elite corruption (including elite theft and elite patronage) may, for example, have a particularly significant association with xenophobic violence. Future research must address these issues and conclusively map the underlying mechanisms of the observed relationship between corruption and hate crime.

8. Conclusion

Quantitative survey data was utilised in this study to show that exposure to petty corruption is a determinant of violent xenophobic behaviour in South Africa. Given that levels of petty corruption experiences amongst the general public appear to have grown significantly in the last two decades, this outcome is quite concerning. The study has provided insight into the significant psychological harm caused by corruption and contributed to our understanding of the relationship between corruption and conflict. It is, at the time of writing, the first quantitative examination of how exposure to corruption influences xenophobic behaviour. In addition to these academic contributions, the policy implications of this study are significant. If levels of petty corruption were reduced, the models used in this paper imply that there would be a commensurate reduction in xenophobic violence. Such a reduction in corruption would also, of course, have other beneficial effects (especially in terms of life satisfaction).

If an analogous study were conducted elsewhere in Southern Africa, would similar effects between corruption exposure and violence be observed? As Tewolde (2023) has

argued, South Africa has an exceptionally distinctive history, and this should caution us against making claims about the generalisability of the research presented here. Even though hate crime is a problem in many parts of the region, public participation in this kind of crime has not been adequately mapped and studied in Southern Africa. Indeed, outside South Africa, there is limited public opinion research on xenophobia in this part of the world. But then again, there is no reason to think that the assumed relationship between corruption experiences and violence is exclusive to the country. Research by Gillanders and van der Werff (2022), has shown that petty corruption has increased the acceptability of interpersonal violence in a range of African countries.

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