Chapter 5 - Did the 'Coronavirus Crisis' Period Fuel Xenophobia in South Africa? Assessing the Early COVID-19 Pandemic Period as an Explanatory Variable

Steven Lawrence Gordon
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6393-2118

Abstract

Has the COVID-19 pandemic fuelled xenophobia in South Africa? Little is known about the effect of mass disease-related threats (such as COVID-19) on human psychology in the country. But the existing research on pathogen stress suggests that a mass disease event (like a pandemic) can increase antipathy toward foreigners. In particular, levels of zero-sum thinking about immigration should be influenced by pathogen threats. The study explores whether the pandemic increased the welfare chauvinism of the adult populace as well as levels of anti-immigrant violence. The South African Social Attitudes Survey (N=2,988) was used to investigate how the pandemic impacted xenophobia. The fieldwork schedule for SASAS 2020 allows researchers to test how the COVID-19 pandemic affected public attitudes. Results show that the pandemic did intensify anti-immigrant sentiment (albeit not substantially). The article concludes with an assessment of this change and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: COVID-19, Xenophobia, Migration, Zero-sum thinking

Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached the shores of South Africa, the government responded quickly. Although proactive state policies saved thousands of lives, the health and economic implications of the pandemic have been (and continue to be) devastating. The first six months of the pandemic saw a deep national economic recession and a psychological landscape characterised by fear and uncertainty (World Bank Group 2021). As the government implements its vaccination programme and begins to rebuild the economy, it is worth asking whether the early pandemic period - which could be called the 'Coronavirus Crisis' –made South Africans more suspicious of others. Pandemics are among the deadliest natural disasters any nation can face, with far-reaching effects on human societies. In addition to the health risk, pandemics can cause significant economic shocks that negatively affect intergroup relations within a country. Past pandemics have coincided with growing antipathy towards, and violence against, international migrants (Cohn 2018). Historical analyses have identified a link between past pandemics and prejudice against non-nationals (also see Clissold *et al.* 2020).

Scholars have become increasingly interested in whether and to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled xenophobia. But current studies (e.g., Drouhot *et al.* 2021; Esses & Hamilton 2021; Gray & Hansen 2021) offer confounding evidence on whether the pandemic caused an upswing in anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviours. Some suggest that the pandemic negatively influenced anti-immigrant attitudes, but others are more positive and show no effect (also see Muis & Reeskens 2022). The shock of the so-called 'Coronavirus Crisis' may have led to a surge in anti-immigrant sentiment in South Africa. This study examined how the COVID-19 pandemic fuelled xenophobia by exploring how attitudes and behaviour changed during the first 'hard' lockdown period (i.e., between March and September 2020).

Three models that predicted how a pandemic might alter public attitudes and behaviours were considered in this study: (i) the Behavioural-Immune-System Model; (ii) the Epidemic Psychology Model; and (iii) the Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience. An innovative split-sample dataset from the South African Social Attitudes Survey series was utilised. Using multivariate regression analysis, this paper assessed each of the three models for validity. This is one of the first studies to assess how the

'Coronavirus Crisis' influenced xenophobia in South Africa and contributes to understanding how a macro-level pathogen event alters public attitudes and behaviours towards outsiders. Little is known, at the time of writing, about the effect that mass disease-related threats have on intergroup relations in the country.

Interpretations of Xenophobia

The work of South African academia on xenophobia is extensive and covers multiple disciplines. Much of it is not only concerned with anti-immigrant sentiments but seeks to explain violent outbreaks of anti-immigrant hate crime. The causes of this kind of crime in this voluminous scholarship are quite diverse, numerous and often complex. Given the space available here, it would not be possible to provide a summary of this body of knowledge in its entirety. But it is important to acknowledge that almost all of this work has dealt with the 'economic competition' thesis. According to this thesis, human nature is motivated by material self-interest, and the scramble for scarce economic resources drives antipathy toward foreigners. The thesis has been quite popular since the 1990s, with various studies providing comprehensive reviews of this argument (e.g., Neocosmos 2010; Matsinhe 2011; Tafira 2018).

Taken as a whole, the 'economic competition' thesis owes much to a utilitarian model of intergroup conflict first posited by Sherif (1966). This model tends to give materialistic motives a superordinate role in the study of intergroup relations. It holds to the assumption that individual behaviour is primarily driven by material self-interest (also see Levine & Campbell 1972). Although it is not often acknowledged, this model builds on the philosophical work of Thomas Hobbes and the rational choice economics of the 1950s (for a discussion of the origins of this approach, see Mansbridge 1990). The 'economic competition' thesis is widely accepted in many parts of South African academia, demonstrating the popularity of this materialistic Western view of human motivation. Of course, the importance of the self-interest motive in South African studies of xenophobia has not gone unchallenged. Critics, such as Neocosmos (2010) and Matsinhe (2011), have argued that the predictive power afforded to self-interest in explaining xenophobia is deceptive and undermines the study of more important drivers of human behaviour.

The 'economic competition' thesis enjoys a degree of support

amongst South African policymakers. This is most evident if we consider the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (hereafter the NAP). Launched on the 25th of March 2019, the NAP was the product of a four-year process that involved multiple stakeholders. The document acknowledges the reality of xenophobia and the problem of anti-immigrant hate crimes in South Africa. In outlining the causes of xenophobia in the country, the NAP references the 2015 Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Probing Violence Against Foreign Nationals (PVAFN) report. The NAP built on the work of the PVAFN and identified economic issues (i.e., poverty, the inequitable distribution of economic resources and wealth inequality) as the main driver of anti-immigrant violence.

The PVAFN considered numerous oral and written submissions from different stakeholders. One of the most important was the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration (ICM). The committee published an investigation into immigration in November 2015 that utilised the 'economic competition' thesis to explain xenophobic violence (PMG 2015a). The ICM report recommended more aggressive regulation of immigration and the economic behaviour of non-nationals[1]. The PVAFN released its final report in November 2015, adopting many of the recommendations of the ICM report (PMG 2015b). The PVAFN report, in particular, accused foreign-owned small businesses of 'unfair' practices that damaged local competitors. It recommended that further violence could be prevented by curbing the ability of migrants to operate in the national economy.

The PVAFN, of course, built on earlier investigations into anti-immigrant violence that also privileged the explanatory power of the 'economic competition' thesis. These included state-funded investigations into large-scale anti-immigrant riots in May 2008[2]. The PVAFN (and later the NAP) appear to understand public antipathy towards foreign nationals regarding a resource allocation debate. These documents assume that many South Africans view international immigration as a zero-sum game. The

[1] The ICM report made a series of recommendations, these included the implementation of a punitive license system for traders in the informal economy, a more restrictive approach to border management and law enforcement campaigns that target foreign nationals involved in criminal activities (especially human trafficking, the illicit drugs trade and prostitution).

[2] One of the most prominent examples was a parliamentary-funded investigation by the Human Sciences Research Council (Pillay *et al.* 2008).

issue of immigration is imagined in zero-sum terms: the more resources one group (i.e., non-nationals) acquires, the less there is available for the other group (i.e., citizens). Viewed in these terms, the interests of the two groups are incompatible and represent opposite poles of a single dimension. This study will examine zero-sum thinking about foreign nationals and how common this type of thinking is in the country.

Zero-Sum Thinking about Foreigners

But what, in the context of this study, is zero-sum thinking? Instead of viewing outsiders as potential collaborators with shared interests, this is a belief that one group's gain is another group's loss. The main inspiration for the study of zero-sum thinking comes from classic game theory (Ross & Ward 1995). It is a general belief system about social relations predicated on negative interdependence between people. Viewed through this system, life has the structure of a zero-sum game where one person's win is another's loss. In such a game, self-interest is incompatible with the interests of others (also see Wright 2001). Public opinion scholars have used the idea of a zero-sum game to understand mass attitudes toward intergroup conflict, with the work of Bar-Tal (1998) being particularly notable. She showed how zero-sum beliefs informed attitudes towards the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and helped participants view it as intractable.

Zero-sum thinking often derives from beliefs about resource scarcity, such as the 'fixed pie bias' (de Dreu *et al*. 2000). Consider the belief, for example, that the number of jobs in a labour market is finite or the belief that the number of 'business opportunities' in an economy are limited. If a person believes that economic opportunities in a country are fixed, then when someone gets an opportunity, this must come at a loss to another person. Imagine viewing the economics of immigration in zero-sum terms, that non-nationals and citizens exist in a state of negative economic interdependence. From this vantage point, an immigrant's entry into the economy is a threat to all others in that economy. International immigration, of course, does not generally have a zero-sum impact on national economies. Existing empirical economic scholarship shows that international immigration often has a positive-sum economic effect in South Africa[3]. Rather than reducing the

[3] A study from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in partnership with the International Labour Organization (2018) found

resources available, the entry of international migrants into the country tends to, on aggregate, grow the 'resource pie'.

Zero-sum thinking is associated with various adverse intergroup behaviours. Research suggests that this kind of thinking makes people less generous and open-minded and more predisposed toward conflict (He *et al.* 2020). If the two groups operate according to the rules of a zero-sum game, then co-existence or collaboration will be detrimental for both. This type of thinking prevents individuals from envisaging and accepting 'win - win' resolutions to problems that would benefit both sides (also see Wright 2001). In addition, zero-sum thinking encourages people to view intergroup cooperation as always unjust (Różycka-Tran *et al.* 2015). Therefore, this form of thinking is a dangerous way of seeing the world as it incentivises distrust of others and disincentivises intergroup collaboration.

Our knowledge of mass opinion on immigration in South Africa has expanded significantly in the last few decades. This emerging research tradition has documented how non-nationals are frequently blamed for economic problems (Gordon 2015). Many, in particular, scapegoat foreigners for unemployment or poverty (also see Gordon 2017). Despite the growing public opinion research on xenophobia in the country, this scholarship has not looked at the level of zero-sum thinking about foreign nationals. No systematic investigation has been made into the causes or triggers of this type of zero-sum thinking. Given how central the 'economic competition' thesis is for South African policymakers and scholars working on xenophobia, this is a disturbing knowledge gap.

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that inflows of foreign nationals had a positive effect on local employment in South Africa. In other words, international immigration seems to have created jobs for locals. The results of this study are consistent with a World Bank investigation into the impact of immigration on the South African labour market during the 1996-2011 period (Hovhannisyan *et al.* 2018). Moreover, it would appear that international migrants pay more in taxes than the average citizen and take less in terms of welfare. International migration has, as a result, a net positive impact on public finances. Even foreigners working in the informal sector are a boon to economic growth in the country. A recent report by the International Organization for Migration (2021), for example, has detailed the economic contributions made by informal foreign-owned businesses in the City of Johannesburg.

The Health and Economic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

South Africa reported its first COVID-19 cases from nine adults who returned from a holiday in Italy, where cases were rampant, on 29th February 2020. Faced with an escalating rate of COVID-19 infections, the authorities implemented strict lockdown measures, issuing stay-at-home orders and requesting businesses to close on 25th March 2020. The borders were also sealed, putting the country in *de facto* isolation. The strict lockdown brought domestic production to a standstill and severely impacted the national economy. This was compounded by a contraction in global demand as governments introduced various lockdown measures worldwide. Faced with state-ordered lockdowns as well as declining consumer domestic and international demand, the country faced a substantial financial recession in 2020.

A report by the World Bank Group (2021) outlines how the 'Coronavirus Crisis' impacted the South African economy. The size of the overall national economy contracted by 7% in 2020, and Gross Domestic Product per capita (constant 2010 US$) fell from $7,346 in 2019 to $6,748 in 2020. This was one of the country's largest financial contractions during the last hundred years. Many firms (especially micro and small enterprises) downsized or failed, negatively affecting local labour markets. Overall employment decreased substantially, and 1.4 million jobs were lost between 2019 and 2020. People of colour in the country were more vulnerable to the socioeconomic and health impacts of the pandemic and were, consequently, more negatively affected. According to a report published by Oxfam, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly exacerbated considerable class and racial inequities throughout the world (Berkhout *et al.* 2021).

President Cyril Ramaphosa promised to deepen government support for poor and working-class households during the 'Coronavirus Crisis'. One of his main tools was the South African welfare system, this is one of the largest in Africa and is the government's most direct means of combating poverty. Billions of additional rands were injected into the welfare system to provide emergency support to the vulnerable. The Ramaphosa Administration launched the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Programme (SRDP) on 21st April 2020. Millions of people had received at least some sort of financial support from the SRDP by the end of 2020. Evaluating the SRDP, Mazenda *et al.* (2022) found that the programme positively assisted households with food insecurity. However, the intervention was affected by

numerous issues, including administrative bottlenecks and irregular costing of food parcels, as well as travel and contact restrictions.

Neocosmos's (2010) noted that denying social rights and entitlements to foreigners was one of the most essential features of Southern African xenophobia. Even under the dictums of law, foreign entry into the welfare state is seen as violating an autochthonic view of South African citizenship. The belief in citizenship as autochthony is informed by what Matsinhe (2011) calls a 'post-colonial colour-code'. This code distinguishes Black African citizens from their counterparts in the rest of the African continent. Indeed, xenophobia in South Africa has traditionally targeted foreigners from elsewhere in Africa (also see Tafira 2018). A powerful anti-immigrant narrative during the COVID-19 pandemic was that international migration depleted SRDP resources, and immigrants were a drain on relief efforts. There was even an attempt to exclude certain non-nationals (i.e., refugees and asylum-seekers) from the SRDP (Mukumbang *et al.* 2020).

Three Models that Predict the Attitudinal Effects of Pathogen Stress

This study considers three theories that may predict how a pandemic could alter public attitudes and behaviours toward non-nationals. Let us start with the hypothesis that disease fuels xenophobia. Douglas (1966) postulated a powerful thesis about how pathogen fears promote intergroup conflict. She contended that fear of disease is a universal concern and that societies actively work to protect the social body from infection, separating outsiders from insiders. Behavioural-Immune-System (BIS) theory views xenophobia as an evolutionary response to disease. Complementing Douglas's approach, BIS theory predicts that attitudes towards immigrants will become more hostile during periods of increased threats from pathogens (Schaller & Duncan 2011). Past research shows a link between pathogen stress and discriminatory attitudes (see Faulkner *et al.* 2004). Consequently, BIS theory would lead us to expect that exposure to a serious macro-level pathogen event (e.g., a pandemic) would result in a robust and immediate increase in prejudice.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have no impact on public attitudes toward foreigners. The Coronavirus does not affect just one group and threatens everyone. According to the Epidemic Psychology Model, a virus may trigger the fear that every person is a potential threat to every other person (Strong 1990). In other words, a pandemic may lead people to see every indi-

vidual in society as a potential disease carrier and a latent social body polluter. Although this may result in greater societal anxiety and distrust levels, it should not elicit group-specific responses. A recent study by Muis and Reeskens (2022), using unique Dutch longitudinal panel data, found some support for the Epidemic Psychology Model. The authors found that anti-immigrant sentiments have not increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Natural disasters may drive anti-immigrant sentiments even if citizens and non-nationals face roughly the same threat level. Andrighetto *et al.* (2016) argue that this is because natural disasters do not, in themselves, drive antipathy. Instead, it is the concern that the disaster has depleted national resources and has exposed groups to a greater level of economic competition. As aforementioned, the 'Coronavirus Crisis' had a particularly dramatic (and negative) effect on the South African economy. Levine and Campbell (1972) famously argued that the likelihood of intergroup conflict would increase during an economic downturn. Negative attitudes toward outsiders can develop when economic situational factors (e.g., a recession) create perceptions of group competition[4]. As resource availability shrinks, we may anticipate an increase in prejudicial attitudes amongst the public.

Could the COVID-19 pandemic have led to greater social solidarity in South Africa? Vollhardt (2009) put forward the theory of 'altruism born of suffering'. This thesis contends that a natural disaster may motivate people to help disadvantaged members of society, including outgroups (e.g., foreigners). The Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience predicts more solidarity and 'togetherness' during a natural disaster (Drury 2012). According to this model, the traumatic experience of a natural disaster could create the perception that both ingroup and outgroup members share the same superordinate group identity (i.e., disaster victims). This is comparable with the predictions of the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio 2000), which contends that experiences that create a sense of common belonging between groups will have positive effects on intergroup relations. Some scholars in South Africa are quite optimistic about the pandemic's

[4] A public opinion study by Kuntz *et al.* (2017) found that the Great Recession of 2008/2009 increased anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe. However, the researchers discovered that it was the *perception* of macro-economic decline that was the main driver of attitudinal change rather than the objective economic conditions (e.g., unemployment rates) during that period of time.

effect on social cohesion. Struwig *et al.* (2021), for example, showed that during the early phases of the pandemic, there was significant optimism amongst the mass populace that the pandemic would make society more compassionate and altruistic.

Data and Method

Sample

Data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2020 was used for this study. A repeated cross-sectional survey series, 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) was drawn. In each SAL, seven dwelling units (i.e., non-vacant residences) were randomly selected. Using a computerized randomization method, a respondent was drawn from all persons 16 years and older in this unit. During the 2020 round, more than a hundred fieldworkers visited 3,500 dwelling units; the realised sample for the round was 3,133. Summary statistics for the 2020 round are provided in Table 1.

The fieldwork schedule for SASAS 2020 allowed for a test of how the 'Coronavirus Crisis' affected public attitudes. Fieldwork for the SASAS 2020 round began in late February 2020 but was halted when President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the national lockdown on 27th March 2020. Approximately 40% of interviews had been completed at this time. After about six months, on 21st September 2020, restrictions were lowered to alert level 1, and it was deemed safe to resume fieldwork. The SASAS fieldwork round was only completed on 15th February 2021. As a result of these delays, the 2020 SASAS fieldwork round constituted a split sample design. This allows the study to test whether being interviewed after the 'hard' lockdown altered how the adult populace viewed outsiders.

Procedure

SASAS questionnaires were translated into all the country's major languages for easy interpretation. All face-to-face interviews were conducted (when appropriate) in the participant's home language. Respondents were asked for written informed consent, and if the fieldworker was interviewing a minor, then a dual consent process was required (both from the minor and their parent/guardian). Every participant signed consent forms; these forms stated

that respondent participation was voluntary. After collection, the data was weighted to be nationally representative of the adult population in the country's nine provinces. All SASAS data displayed in this paper has been weighted unless otherwise specified.

Table 1: Summary statistics for the 2020 round of the South African social attitudes survey

	Obs.	Min	Max
Gender			
Male	1263	0	1
Female	1769	0	1
Age	3021	16	98
Marital Status			
Married	956	0	1
Not married	1999	0	1
Population Group			
Black African	1943	0	1
Coloured	471	0	1
Indian	315	0	1
White	289	0	1
Employment Status			
Employed	983	0	1
Unemployed	927	0	1
Labour Inactive	1122	0	1
Years of Schooling	2996	0	17
Provincial Residence			
Western Cape	411	0	1
Eastern Cape	319	0	1
Northern Cape	240	0	1
Free State	184	0	1
KwaZulu-Natal	579	0	1
North West	222	0	1
Gauteng	501	0	1
Mpumalanga	253	0	1
Limpopo	279	0	1

Note: Unweighted data

Tracking Zero-Sum Thinking about Foreign Nationals

The 'Coronavirus Crisis' may have increased the likelihood that the mass public in South Africa would view immigration in zero-sum terms. Social psychology researchers have established that economic conditions can significantly affect zero-sum beliefs. In a study of almost forty countries, Różycka-Tran *et al.* (2015) investigated whether resource scarcity influenced zero-sum thinking. The authors found that resource-deprived conditions led individuals to see the world as zero-sum (also see He *et al.* 2020). Consequently, a largescale macro-level contraction in the availability of resources (e.g., a national recession) may boost zero-sum thinking. However, we may consider that it is the relative economic position of the individual, rather than their objective material conditions, that determines whether they will adopt zero-sum beliefs. In seven studies, Ongis and Davidai (2021) found that personal relative deprivation cultivates a belief that economic success is zero-sum. This finding held even when a participant's household income or other objective metrics of socioeconomic position were taken into account.

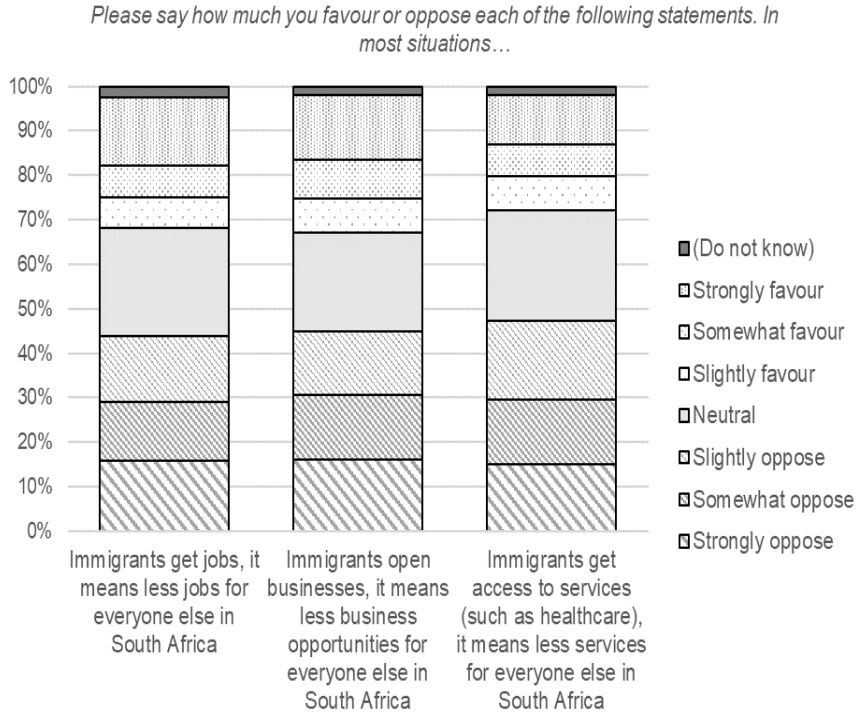
SASAS participants were asked whether they felt that immigrants' success in accessing welfare or employment reduced opportunities for everyone else in the country. In addition, respondents were questioned on whether they thought that when immigrants open businesses, it meant fewer business opportunities for others. Results are depicted in Figure 1, and it is apparent that many oppose the position that a foreigner's gain would be another's loss. To adequately examine zero-sum thinking about foreigners in the adult population, a composite index was created using the three items showcased in the figure[5]. The new metric was labelled the Zero-Sum Beliefs about Immigration (ZSBI) Index. The indicator was arranged on a 0 to 10 scale; the higher the value on the ZSBI Index, the greater the likelihood an individual will view immigration as a zero-sum game. The national mean score on the ZSBI Index was 4.54 (SE=0.083), and 24% of the adult populace scored below 2.5 on this metric.

To assess the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on zero-sum beliefs about immigration in South Africa, a multivariate analysis was performed. This technique allowed us to determine the relationship between the two variables while accounting for the effects of socio-demographic background characteristics. Given the nature of the ZSBI Index, a standard (OLS) linear

[5] Standard reliability and validity testing showed that these items loaded well onto a single index (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.818$).

regression approach was employed. Several standard dummy variables were included in the analysis as background controls to account for socio-demographic characteristics. The background variables constructed for this study captured gender, marital status, age, educational attainment, asset ownership[6] and province of residence.

Figure 1: Public support and opposition against zero-sum statements against the impact of international immigrants 2020



[6] An Asset Ownership Index was created based on twenty-two questions on whether an individual had certain assets (in working order) in their household during the time of the SASAS interview. The number of assets listed is quite diverse and ranged from a microwave oven to a swimming pool. The Asset Ownership Index was transformed onto a 0 to 10 scale, with the higher value representing the greater number of assets.

Model coefficients (as well as standard errors) from the OLS linear regression analysis are portrayed in Table 2. Beta coefficients were also produced (and represented) to compare the independent variables under consideration adequately.

Table 2: Linear regression on the predictors of the zero-sum beliefs about immigration (0-10) Index

	Coef.	Std. Er.		Beta
Female (ref. male)	0.111	0.100		0.033
Age	0.004	0.004		0.037
Marital Status (ref. Married)	-0.057	0.109		-0.015
Population group (ref. Black African)				
Coloured	-0.375	0.137	**	-0.064
Indian	0.156	0.173		0.015
White	0.437	0.166	**	0.075
Employment (ref. employed)				
Unemployed	-0.076	0.143		-0.022
Labour Inactive	0.031	0.132		0.009
Years of Schooling	-0.042	0.016		-0.009
Asset Ownership Index	-0.041	0.027		-0.055
Interview date (ref. pre-pandemic)	0.334	0.111	**	0.096
Provincial residence (ref. Western Cape)				
Eastern Cape	0.044	0.195		0.080
Northern Cape	0.518	0.192	**	0.050
Free State	-0.252	0.192		-0.033
KwaZulu-Natal	0.279	0.176	*	0.065
North West	0.574	0.286	*	0.087
Gauteng	0.059	0.162		0.016
Mpumalanga	-0.397	0.173	*	-0.061
Limpopo	0.985	0.217	***	0.175

*** p<0.001, **p<0.01, * p<0.05
Note: Number of obs. =2,833, F(19, 2814) = 6.57, Prob > F = 0.000, R-squared = 0.068, Root MSE = 1.615.

Interviewing after the 'hard' lockdown period had a positive (and statistically significant) correlation with the dependent in Table 2 (r= 0.334; SE=0.111;

β=0.096). If a person was interviewed after 21st September 2020, in other words, they were more likely to view international migration in zero-sum terms. This is consistent with BIS theory and suggests that attitudes towards immigrants become more hostile during times of increased threat from pathogens. But, of course, this change could also be due to the 2020 financial recession and growing macro-level resource scarcity. It is interesting to note from the table that economic indicators (e.g., employment or asset ownership) were not good predictors of the ZSBI Index. It may be that *relative* economic status is a better predictor of zero-sum thinking. To check this thesis, the model was adjusted to include a measure of relative economic position[7]. This adjusted model showed that personal relative deprivation fostered zero-sum thinking about international immigration[8]. This is consistent with Ongis and Davidai's (2021) work on how relative disadvantage influences attitudes toward economic success.

Entitlement to Welfare

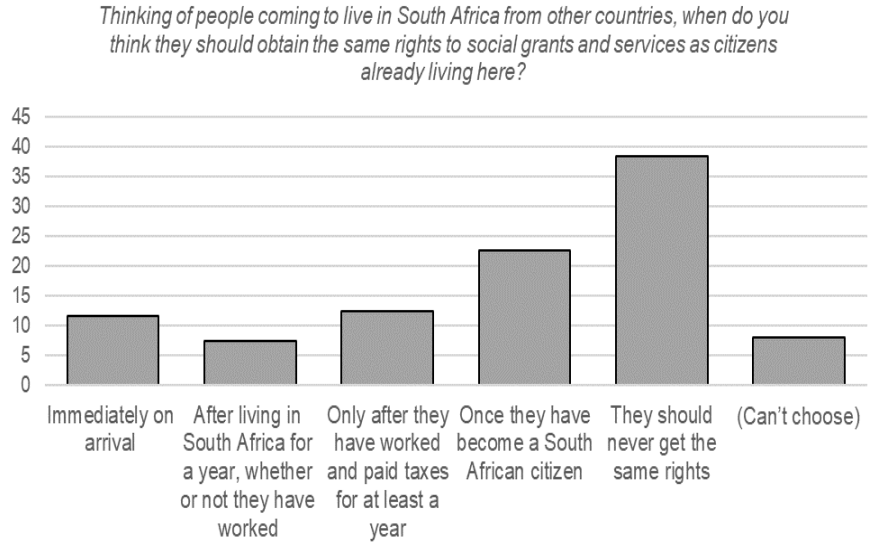
Entitlement is an important component of zero-sum thinking, an attitude that an individual or group is more entitled to resources than others (Różycka-Tran *et al.* 2015). Entitlement beliefs are one of the primary reasons that different groups find it difficult to fairly distribute resources or devise win-win solutions to problems (also see Wright 2001). Social welfare entitlement

[7] SASAS respondents were asked if they "[h]ow does your household income compare with other households in your village or neighbourhood?" About an eighth (12%) of the adult populace said that they earned above average and 37% told fieldworkers that their income was similar to their neighbours. More than two-fifths either said that they earn below average (27%) or much below average (15%). The remainder (9%) said that they were uncertain of how to answer the question. Responses to this income question were used to measure personal relative deprivation.

[8] Above average income was used as the reference group in the modified model. The results of the modified model showed that having an average income or a below average income had a positive (and statistically significant) correlation with the ZSBI Index. Compared with the reference group, the coefficient for average income (*r*= 0.390; SE=0.146; β=0.113) was lower than below average (*r*= 0.467; SE=0.167; β=0.126) and much below average (*r*= 0.670; SE=0.177; β=0.144).

is a prime source of conflict in many high immigration-receiving countries. The preference for restricting (or denying altogether) the access of the foreign-born to state services (such as healthcare, housing or social grants) has been labelled 'welfare chauvinism' (Greve 2019). This form of chauvinism has been a destructive element in the politics of several nations, and many scholars have explored the rise of this kind of right-wing populism (for a review of the scholarship on this issue, see Careja & Harris 2022). As already aforementioned, welfare entitlement is one of the most important and contentious issues surrounding international migration in South Africa.

Figure 2: Public attitudes towards the inclusion and exclusion of international immigrants in the South African social welfare system



Past public opinion research on international immigration in South Africa has tended to ignore welfare chauvinism and the possible drivers of such attitudes in the country. To address this knowledge gap, the study examined support for welfare chauvinism amongst the general population. SASAS respondents were asked the following question: '[t]hinking of people coming to live in South Africa from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social grants and services as citizens already living here?' About two-fifths (38%) of the adult population selected the most

exclusionary option, stating they should never get the same rights (Figure 2). Nearly a quarter (23%) believed such rights could only be accessed when immigrants obtain citizenship. An eighth of the populace said it should be based upon reciprocity, and 8% told fieldworkers that foreigners need to live in the country for a year before these rights can be granted. Only a small minority (12%) took an unrestricted position on welfare access for foreigners.

Table 3: Multinomial probit regression on when individuals think immigrants should obtain the same rights to social grants and services as citizens already living in South Africa

	Model I			Model II		
	Coef.	Std. Er.		Coef.	Std. Er.	
They should never get the same rights	ref.			ref.		
Once they have become a South African citizen	0.053	0.115		0.006	0.135	
Only after they have worked and paid taxes for at least a year	0.402	0.128	**	0.334	0.145	*
After living in South Africa for a year	0.316	0.173		0.300	0.183	
Immediately on arrival	-0.220	0.150		-0.375	0.158	*
(Can't choose)	0.412	0.164	*	0.320	0.180	
Background controls	No			Yes		
Number of obs.	3032			2863		
Wald chi^2	25	(5)		395	(95)	
Prob > chi^2	0.000			0.000		

*** p<0.001, **p<0.01, * p<0.05
Note: Coefficients presented in the table depict the correlation between the interview date (ref. pre-pandemic) and the relevant welfare option.

To explore the impact of the 'hard' lockdown period on support for welfare chauvinism amongst the general public, a multinomial probit model (in which the log odds of the outcomes are modelled as a linear combination of the predictor variables) was selected. Two models were produced to assess the relationship between interview date and welfare chauvinism. The first excluded the study's background variables, and the second included them. The multinomial approach used 'they should never get the same rights' as the base outcome, and coefficients (as well as standard errors) are presented in Table 3. From both models, it was clear that the 'hard' lockdown had some influence on welfare chauvinism. However, the overall effect is less robust

than may have been predicted. In Model II, the pandemic's effect was a statistically significant correlate of the dependent in the second and fourth pairings. Compared with the base outcome, the coefficient was negative for the 'immediately' option (r = −0.375; SE = 0.180) and positive for the 'reciprocity' option (r = 0.334; SE = 0.145). In other words, the 'Coronavirus Crisis' decreased support for unrestricted welfare inclusion but increased support for welfare based on reciprocity.

Anti-Immigrant Violence

In this final section, the study considers whether the 'Coronavirus Crisis' increased the likelihood that the adult populace would partake in anti-immigrant hate crimes. There is some evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic may have fuelled public participation in this kind of crime. Gray and Hansen (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic inspired an upsurge in hate crimes against Chinese people in London. When trying to predict how macro-level events influenced intergroup conflict, scholars have paid attention to the role of economic conditions (Dancygier & Laitin 2014). Poor socioeconomic conditions are thought to undermine the societal norms that would impede extremist anti-minority behaviour. Given the socioeconomic shock of the early pandemic period, we may assume that it boosted levels of anti-immigrant participation and support for this kind of violence.

SASAS participants were asked to report whether they had 'taken part in violent action to prevent immigrants from living or working in your neighbourhood?' About a tenth (12%) of the population claimed they had previously participated in anti-immigrant hate crimes. A similar minority (11%;) reported that they were non-participants but might partake in violence in the future. The majority (74%) said they had not participated and would never do so. The remainder (4%) of the adult populace were uncertain how to respond to the question. Commensurate with the previous section, a multivariate analysis was used to assess the influence of the 'Coronavirus Crisis' on public participation in anti-immigrant violence. A multinomial probit approach was selected, and two models were computed; the first did not include the background variables, while the second did. 'Have not done it and would never do it' was the base outcome in both models, and model outcomes are portrayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Multinomial probit regression on whether an individual had taken part in violent action to prevent immigrants from living or working in their neighbourhood

	Model I			Model II		
	Coef.	Std. Er.		Coef.	Std. Er.	
Have not done it and would never do it	ref.			ref.		
Have not done it but might do it	0.164	0.138)		0.354	0.144	*
Have done it in the past	0.381	0.129)	**	0.320	0.154	*
(Can't choose)	0.716	0.190)	***	0.755	0.224	**
Background controls	No			Yes		
Number of obs.	3032			2863		
Wald chi^2	19	(5)		228	(57)	
Prob > chi^2	0.000			0.000		

*** p<0.001, **p<0.01, * p<0.05

Note: Coefficients presented in the table depict the correlation between the interview date (ref. pre-pandemic) and the relevant anti-immigrant violence option.

A relatively robust relationship between the interview date variable and past participation in both models can be detected. In Model II the size of the interview date coefficient was similar for past participation (r = 0.320; SE = 0.154) and intention to participate amongst non-participants (r = 0.354; SE = 0.144). In summation, the 'Coronavirus Crisis' has increased the likelihood of the reporting past participation in anti-immigrant violence and intention to commit violence among non-participants. Indeed, the effect of the crisis is more robust in Table 4 than in Table 3. Although the positive correlation between the interview date and the dependent variable observed here corresponds with BIS theory, it could be related to the widespread financial recession in South Africa in 2020.

Discussion

The paper investigated whether the early COVID-19 pandemic period increased antagonism towards international immigrants in South Africa. The study focused on three different forms of antipathy: (i) zero-sum beliefs about immigration; (ii) welfare chauvinism; and (iii) anti-immigrant violence. Three theories were considered in predicting how the pandemic

may change public attitudes and behaviours toward foreigners. The data demonstrated that the pandemic increased anti-immigrant behaviour between March and September 2020. Results found that the 'Coronavirus Crisis' increased self-reported participation in hate crime as well as intention to participate among non-participants. The data also found evidence for the hypothesis that the crisis fuelled zero-sum beliefs about international migrants. Both these findings are consistent with BIS theory and was incompatible with both the Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience and the Epidemic Psychology Model. The influence of the early COVID-19 pandemic period on welfare chauvinism in South Africa, on the other hand, was not as substantial as was hypothesised.

The degree of attitudinal and behavioural change observed in this study was not as large as would be predicted by BIS theory. So why did the early COVID-19 pandemic period not have a greater effect on prejudice formation in South Africa? It is possible that progressive efforts by the state and others helped alleviate feelings of stress caused by the 'Coronavirus Crisis'. The SRDP, as Mazenda *et al.* (2022) has argued, did help assuage financial desperation amongst the mass public during the early pandemic period. Similarly, frequent mass appeals to solidarity made by prominent leaders (both political and civic) may have also had a mitigating effect. Research by Struwig *et al.* (2021) seems to suggest that such appeals did have a significant (and positive) effect on the general public during the early phases of the pandemic.

When trying to understand the processes underlying the effect of the 'Coronavirus Crisis' on intergroup attitudes in South Africa, the present study has several limitations. Cross-sectional data was used for the analysis and causal inferences made in a correlational study are always tentatively assumed but not empirically proven. But, given the principal assumptions of this study, it is possible to be reasonably confident about the causal direction of the observed relationships. However, a longitudinal panel design would have been more appropriate for a study of this kind. Longitudinal data would certainly have provided greater insight into the socio-economic effects of the pandemic on individuals over time. Further researchers should try and resolve the data limitations here and use panel studies to investigate why attitudes changed in the way they did.

BIS theory is premised on individual exposure to a pathogen or a set thereof (Faulkner *et al.* 2004). The theory predicts that the greater the level of exposure to a pathogen (e.g., COVID-19), the larger the effect on attitudes

and behaviours (also see Schaller & Duncan 2011). The data available for this study did not include direct measures of individual exposure to pathogens. The paper was, therefore, unable to measure the effect of exposure to COVID-19 on attitudes and behaviour. It may be that greater levels of economic competition (perceived or real) caused by the 'Coronavirus Crisis' is responsible for the results observed in this study rather than pathogens *per se*. This conclusion would be consistent with the work of Andrighetto *et al.* (2016). Future research should seek to redress this limitation, and assess how direct exposure to COVID-19 has influenced anti-immigrant behaviour and attitudes in South Africa.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, millions of South Africans have been infected with the Coronavirus, and more than a hundred thousand have died because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This disease has profoundly impacted all aspects of our nation, and at times like these, foreigners can become a scapegoat for societal ills. Limitations notwithstanding, the findings detailed in this paper shed light on how adult attitudes towards non-nationals have changed in response to large-scale macro-level pathogen stress. The study showed that the early pandemic period worsened anti-immigrant sentiments. But more research is needed. We still do not know enough about how major viral pandemics influence attitudes toward international migrants in South Africa. As the general economy is rebuilt following the pandemic and the vaccination programmes begin to achieve their targets, ongoing monitoring of anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviour is necessary. Currently, we do not understand the long-term effects of the pandemic on public attitudes toward foreign nationals, and we do not know how permanent the observed upswing in anti-immigrant sentiment will be[9].

[9] Public opinion data from the 2021 round of SASAS shows that self-reported levels of public participation in anti-immigrant hate crime remain elevated and consistent with what was seen in SASAS 2020 (Gordon, 2022). Unfortunately, the 2021 round of SASAS did not repeat the questions on welfare chauvinism and zero-sum thinking about foreigners.

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Dr. Steven Gordon
Senior Research Specialist
Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)
Developmental, Capable and Ethical State Division
South Africa

And

Research Associate
University of Johannesburg
Faculty of Humanities
sgordon@hsrc.ac.za