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Xenophobic rhetoric framed through political narratives

2024 South African National Elections



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Abstract

Despite xenophobia in South Africa being a highly researched topic due to its persistent presence in the country, and significant evidence showing how politicians exploit it for electoral gain, there is limited research on how this played out in the 2024 national elections. Immigration became a central issue for political parties in the lead-up to the election, with some parties emphasizing it more than others. This research focuses on three smaller parties, namely, The Patriotic Alliance, ActionSA, and the vigilante group-turned-political party, Operation Dudula, to examine how xenophobia was used as a political tool. Through a qualitative desk study, this paper employs the ethnic outbidding theory alongside thematic analysis to identify three key themes that guided the analysis. The findings reveal that these parties harnessed xenophobia to varying degrees and in different ways to mobilize voter support during the elections. This study contributes to the broader discussion on xenophobia as a political tool, a highly relevant issue today given the rising anti-immigrant rhetoric observed in both Europe and the United States. By specifically examining smaller parties, this research highlights their significant role in shaping political discourse around immigration, emphasizing the need for further studies on their influence and impact on democratic societies.

Keywords: *Xenophobia, South African elections 2024, Election strategy, Political rhetoric*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and research problem:

It is of great importance to study the implications of rhetoric used by politicians in democratic societies. In certain cases when powerful political figures have the aim to gain and/or maintain power, they deploy certain strategies that in turn attempt to foster a false sense of unity with groups that have grievances (Pierce et al., 2022). This is done by putting another group down, to divert people from real issues (ibid). With this approach it allows these political figures more freedom to spread polarizing narratives in order to shift blame onto others, essentially creating a scapegoat (ibid). Looking more specifically into the use of anti-immigrant or xenophobic rhetoric as a tool, leveraged by politicians, this is a very timely topic to investigate as it is an international problem. This is seen today in countries across Europe as well as the United States of America. Understanding how xenophobic rhetoric is used in politics is essential as it reveals how these strategies shape opinions, create divisions, and influence policies.

Building on this broader topic, this study will investigate the certain ways in which South African politicians addressed the topic of illegal immigration as a means to maximize votes for the 2024 national elections. By framing undocumented, and in some cases even documented, foreign nationals in a negative context as a strategy to gain votes, this in turn can exacerbate already existing xenophobic attitudes in the country.

Xenophobia can be described as discriminatory attitudes and action towards foreigners stemming from a hatred or fear of them (Ottuh, 2020). This concept is no new phenomenon in South Africa. Since the democratization of the country in 1994, a number of refugees and migrants have come predominantly from other African countries (Tewolde, 2023). South Africa's colonial history, marked by centuries of systemic racism and the exclusion of non-white communities under European rule, culminated in the oppressive apartheid regime, which ended in 1994. Despite achieving democracy, the country continues to grapple with high unemployment and unfulfilled governmental promises. Many citizens attribute these challenges to the presence of foreign nationals (Ottuh, 2020). Since 1994, there have been reports of over 5000 immigrant-owned shops looted, over 100,000 displacements, 680 deaths, and a further

1125 total incidents of discrimination (that have been reported), since 1994 (Xenowatch, 2024).

The role of politicians accused of exacerbating xenophobia is not a new concern either. During the early post-apartheid period in 1994, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was accused of inciting violence toward foreign nationals, publicly commenting on the issue of illegal immigration and proposing to deal with it through violent means (Tewolde, 2023). This incident marked a significant milestone in post-apartheid xenophobic violence in South Africa.

The South African government has implemented various measures to address xenophobia, such as the 2019 National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (Government of South Africa, 2019). Despite these efforts, xenophobia has not significantly decreased, in fact, it is on the rise (United Nations Human Rights, 2022). There have been further debates, that while the policies are in place, they are often followed by stricter visa requirements and fewer job opportunities for foreign nationals (Vhumbunu, 2024).

This thesis will therefore explore the use xenophobic rhetoric as a political tool in the lead-up to the 2024 South African National Elections, focusing on if and how certain political parties leverage xenophobia to maximize votes.

1.2 Objective:

The objective of this thesis is to analyze the rhetoric used by South African politicians leading up to the 2024 national election and to understand how this language may sustain and fuel xenophobia in the country. By focusing on the recent 2024 election period, the study will examine how certain politicians use anti-immigrant rhetoric as a political tool to gain support from citizens who perceive immigrants as a threat to resources, such as jobs and social services. Through this analysis, the thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of political discourse in shaping public attitudes toward immigrants and its implications for social cohesion in South Africa.

1.3 Research questions:

These are the research question guiding this thesis:

1. How do South African politicians use xenophobic rhetoric as a political tool during the lead-up to the 2024 national elections?
2. How do different political parties and leaders' strategies vary in their use of xenophobic rhetoric during the 2024 election campaigns?

1.4 Relevance:

Addressing xenophobic rhetoric in South Africa, particularly in the context of the 2024 national elections, is highly relevant to Peace and Development studies. Xenophobia disrupts social cohesion, fuels societal division, and undermines sustainable development efforts. By focusing on South Africa, a country with a history of inequality and conflict, this research contributes to the understanding of how harmful rhetoric can take root in democratic societies and offers valuable lessons for other nations facing similar challenges. While existing research highlights how political narratives often scapegoat foreign nationals for economic challenges, there remains a gap in analysing recent electoral discourse. Through a thematic analysis of campaign messages, interviews, and social media posts from March 2023 to May 2024, this study examines how political leaders frame immigration and foreign nationals. By exploring these contemporary dynamics, the research provides critical insights into the intersection of xenophobic narratives and political strategy, contributing to Peace and Development studies and informing future efforts to reduce divisive political rhetoric in democratic societies.

1.5 Structure of the paper:

The structure of this research paper is as follows: following this, it begins with a literature review, offering an overview of existing work on the topic and case study. Next, the theoretical framework explores social identity theory and ethnic outbidding theory, explaining how these frameworks work together.

The methodology section covers the research design, sources, ethical considerations, and limitations to ensure full transparency. Following this, the findings are presented, including an overview of South Africa's political landscape and detailed presentation of data collected from the political parties under study. Following this, the analysis is presented and divided into three key themes all examined through the lens of ethnic outbidding theory. The paper concludes with final insights and recommendations for future research, tying everything together.

2. Literature review

Regarding the broader topic of the use of anti-immigrant rhetoric as a political tool, this has been explored and researched extensively. For example, in the USA the use of anti-immigrant language is very present in political campaigns (Mettler, 2024). President Donald Trump has been seen employing this strategy in both the 2016 and 2024 lead up to the national elections, referring to Mexican immigrants as 'criminals' and 'rapists' in 2016 and claiming that immigrants were 'eating dogs and cats' in 2024 (ibid). This type of disinformation becomes very dehumanizing towards immigrants (ibid). From an international perspective, this topic has existed for a long time, going back even to the Soviet era, where xenophobia was widely used as part of political campaigns, with the 'image of the enemy' being a central theme (Tagaev, 2018). Anti-immigrant rhetoric is becoming increasingly normalized in today's political landscape. Alongside the United States, this trend is also on the rise across Europe, where anti-immigration sentiment has moved to the mainstream (Roehse and Varma, 2024). Far-right leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Italy's Giorgia Meloni are influencing EU migration policies, emphasizing stricter border controls and external processing of asylum claims (ibid). Recent elections show growing support for far-right parties adopting harsher measures towards immigration (ibid).

Looking more specifically at the case study of South Africa, the persistent issue of xenophobia has been widely debated, with differing perspectives on its causes and effects. Therefore, this literature review aims to showcase the various ways in which the causes and influences of xenophobia have been examined, revealing a critical gap where

an analysis specifically focused on how politicians employ anti-immigrant discourse, particularly during the 2024 election cycle, is needed.

Some scholars examine xenophobia through a socio-economic lens. For instance, Onor (2024) considers xenophobia within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically focusing on SDG eight, which is centred around economic growth. He advocates for mechanisms to address xenophobia and emphasizes that South Africans should avoid blaming immigrants for unemployment and crime (Onor 2024).

Clarence Tshitereke (1999) links xenophobia to relative deprivation, arguing that South African citizens, frustrated by unmet expectations for resources like housing, jobs, and healthcare post-apartheid, view immigrants as competitors (Tshitereke, 1999). While this frustration may not directly cause violence, it fosters a collective resentment toward immigrants that can lead to hostility (ibid). Supporting this perspective, Gordon (2020) found that perceived threats from immigrants increase the likelihood of participation in xenophobic attacks by South Africans (Gordon, 2020 in Nkala and Masuku, 2023).

Tshitereke further suggests that xenophobia, rooted in resource scarcity, will fade as South Africans' resource needs are met (Tshitereke, 1999). Expanding on this view, Yingi, Ncube, and Benyera (2023) argue that the ANC government's failure to address historical inequalities and foster an inclusive economy has intensified xenophobia. They highlight that poverty and inequality are primary contributors and they also emphasize the influence of the media and certain government ministries, which have used negative language around immigrants, reinforcing xenophobic rhetoric (Yingi, Ncube, and Benyera, 2023).

Nkala and Masuku (2023) reinforce this view by analyzing news articles from 2008 to 2020. They conclude that certain media, especially news articles with extensive reach, shape public perception and perpetuate anti-immigrant sentiment through specific language use. This language, in turn, influences the broader public perception of immigrants (Nkala and Masuku, 2023).

Yingi, Ncube, and Benyera (2023) additionally argue that misinformation, such as labelling immigrants as "illegal" without evidence, is often used as a political tool to

sway public opinion and gather political support. Oyelana (2024) takes this further, suggesting that certain political figures in South Africa may undermine the government's efforts to combat xenophobia by framing foreigners as a privileged group and manipulating citizens' frustrations for political gain (Oyelana, 2024).

Tewolde (2023) views xenophobia as stemming from structural issues rather than inherent individual attitudes. Tewolde applies Althusser's notion of interpellation, proposing that ideological frameworks shape individuals' attitudes. This author argues for addressing the structural causes of xenophobia and suggests promoting narratives of "harmony and humanity" to counteract xenophobia's ideological underpinnings (Tewolde, 2023:609).

Tarisayi (2024) points to the potential denialism around xenophobia among South African politicians, some of whom downplay xenophobic attacks as general criminal activity. This denialism, he argues, prevents South Africans from confronting their own biases or recognizing the xenophobic undertones in political rhetoric (Tarisayi, 2024). Through a study analyzing political speeches posted on TikTok, Tarisayi found that the comment sections revealed strong xenophobic attitudes, with users often blaming immigrants, particularly Zimbabweans, for issues like unemployment. This suggests a link between political rhetoric and public attitudes (ibid).

Evidence suggests that xenophobia is sometimes used as a scapegoat by political figures to gain support. In the lead-up to the 2024 South African elections, where the ANC was expected to lose its majority, misinformation and populist rhetoric were widely employed to gain support (de Wet et al., 2024). In addition, there is evidence that South African politicians use anti-immigrant messages to gain support leading up to election periods in general, and that this approach carries a high risk of increasing xenophobia in the country (Vhumbunu, 2024:655).

From this literature review, it is clear that the causes of xenophobia can be looked at from many different angles, with the role of politicians being one of them. Therefore, while research has addressed political influences on xenophobia, there remains limited work specifically focussing on the rhetoric politicians use when discussing foreign nationals leading up to elections. This gap presents an opportunity to examine this

rhetoric from different political leaders within the current South African political landscape. By examining these dynamics, this research aims to deepen the understanding of harmful political rhetoric as a strategic tool in democratic societies, with a particular focus on the anti-immigrant discourse politicians use to secure votes during election periods. It seeks to contribute to the broader discussion on the intersections between political rhetoric and xenophobia, highlighting how such narratives are weaponized to influence public opinion and electoral outcomes.

3. Theoretical framework

This theoretical framework will comprise two theories, namely the Social Identity Theory and the Ethnic Outbidding Theory. The Social Identity Theory will be used as a subsidiary theory, assisting the Ethnic Outbidding Theory which will be considered the core theory of this theoretical framework. Together, these theories will form a useful lens that will be used to analyse the data collected. This section will start with an explanation of each theory, then followed by an explanation of how each theory will be applied in the analysis section.

3.1 Social identity theory:

An individual's identity is an important part of everyday life, more specifically a person's social identity connects to how a person's sense of self is shaped by their awareness of belonging to a social group and the importance they attach to this by being connected to this certain group (Demmers, 2017:22). This connection and membership to a social group can then, in turn, help answer the important question of who a person is (Tajfel, 1981 in Demmers, 2017:22). From this, the social identity theory was derived from Henri Tajfel along with other scholars, which helps to explain the basis of social categorization through the formation of in- and out-groups and how this can potentially lead to group comparison, competition, and hostility between these two sets of groups (Demmers, 2017:43). From an experiment conducted, Tajfel observed that through the formation of the in- and out-group, the in-group would adopt group loyalty quickly and risk economic gain in order to put the in-group above the out-group (Demmers,

2017:44). The idea behind the formation of these groups stems from the individual's need to formulate a secure and stable personal identity by identifying within a social group (Demmers, 2017:43).

The social identity theory provides a framework that comprises four core principles, namely, the social categorization principle, the in-group positivity principle, the intergroup comparison principle, and lastly, the outgroup hostility principle (ibid).

Due to the nature of this thesis, I will place focus on the intergroup comparison and the out-group hostility principle. The former is explained as 'in-group positivity is enhanced by social comparison with out-groups in which in-group attributes and outcomes are evaluated as better than or superior to those of out-groups.' (Demmers, 2017:43). The latter is explained as 'relationships between in-group and out-groups are characterized by antagonism, conflict, and mutual contempt' (ibid). Later, Tajfel and Turner introduced another pillar, namely, competition, to explain the shift from group comparison to group hostility (Demmers, 2017:44) which will be another focus of this theoretical framework.

In regard to the intergroup comparison pillar, Tajfel and Turner explain that in order for Individuals to feel more positively about their own group, they can compare it favourably to other groups. For this to happen, the in-group must see itself as distinct and better in certain ways compared to relevant out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986:284).

Regarding the competition pillar, building on from realistic group conflict theory, according to Tajfel and Turner, when groups are competing for key resources that may be limited such as wealth opportunities, the groups' opposing interests can create tension and rivalry. (Tajfel and Turner, 1986:287). From this perceived competition, there is the possibility for hostility and conflict to emerge, if one group feels that its efforts to improve its position in society are blocked or actively hindered by another group. This frustration can lead to hostility and in turn conflict between the groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986:290).

This sequence from comparison to competition to hostility/conflict is an important phenomenon that can help provide a basic understanding of the xenophobic environment in South Africa. Although this thesis does not focus on the root causes of xenophobia, Social Identity Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the conditions in which xenophobia arises and how politicians exploit an already hostile environment. This foundation seamlessly sets the stage for the Ethnic Outbidding Theory to build upon.

3.2 Ethnic outbidding theory:

The ethnic outbidding theory, outlined by Donald L Horowitz in his book, 'Ethnic Groups in Conflict' (1985) is largely rooted in group identity, like the social identity theory. Collective self-esteem is an important aspect of Horowitz's theory, based on the assumption that it is a vital human need to feel worthy. This sense of worth is partly achieved through being part of a group that is valued and respected by others in society (Horowitz, 1985:185). This phenomenon is especially true in developing countries according to Horowitz, where politics plays a big role in people's identities (ibid). Along with this, the desire for inclusion and exclusion can come from different motivations that in some instances overlap. The first is to prove that the in-group is better and the second is the basic human need to feel 'at home' and to 'belong to territory' (Horowitz, 1985:186). When the comparison with an outgroup (referred to by Horowitz as 'ethnic strangers' in this context) creates a negative image of the ingroup, it gives people another reason to push for the further exclusion of the outgroup and inclusion of the ingroup. In turn, this dynamic is likely to become even more prominent within the political environment of a country (ibid).

The first pillar of this theory that is important for this thesis is the role ethnic parties play regarding the polarization of ethnic identity.

Within multiparty political systems, strong divisions between groups deepen polarization (Horowitz, 1985:291). In societies where ethnic tensions are present, political parties can sometimes ease ethnic divisions but can also make them worse (ibid). When parties appeal to voters based on ethnicity, make ethnic demands, and support extreme ethnic views, they often increase divisions (ibid).

Horowitz distinguishes between two types of political parties: ethnic-based parties and broadly based parties. This study will focus specifically on ethnic-based parties within the context of his theory. Ethnic parties, which are described as mainly relying on the support of a specific ethnic group, are closely tied to that group's interests (Horowitz, 1985:291). These parties form because of both internal needs within the group and external pressures to represent the group in society (Horowitz, 1985:294). Since ethnic identity is not something one can change, voters tend to stick with ethnic parties that represent them best, in turn, securing politicians a dependable support base (Horowitz, 1985:294-295). Broadly based parties may address ethnic issues, but they also balance other concerns and adjust to competing demands (Horowitz, 1985:296). In contrast, ethnic-based parties focus on ethnic demands, even when negatively impacting other groups (ibid).

Horowitz explains that ethnic parties gain support by appealing to specific groups' fears and anxieties, often creating further divisions between communities (ibid). Ethnic parties don't easily fit into the traditional definitions of a political party, although there is still the aim to gain power through the mobilization of support, ethnic-based parties focus on advancing the specific interests of one group, which puts extra pressure on the systems that help resolve conflicts between different groups or social classes (Horowitz, 1985: 298). This makes it harder to mediate between competing interests and is one reason why political systems dominated by ethnic parties are often more prone to conflict (ibid).

According to the theory, when a divided society is already the case, there is more incentive for ethnic parties to organize and influence others to organize along the same lines (Horowitz, 1985:306). Additionally, leaders often use ethnicity as a strategic tool to gain electoral support. Leaders focused on winning elections or, even simply increasing their support compared to previous elections to secure political representation, may compromise their own beliefs or the values of their supporters in order to maximize votes. (Horowitz, 1985:307).

The next pillar of this theoretical framework examines ethnic party competition and its consequences.

Horowitz's work highlights a clear connection between ethnic parties, competition, and conflict where competition is a central feature of the ethnic party environment. Even when an ethnic party dominates, its leaders remain concerned about losing support to rival parties (Horowitz, 1985:343). As discussed earlier, ethnic parties often rely on the assurance that they will secure votes from their ethnic base. However, this loyalty is conditional as voters will remain loyal only if they perceive the party as the best option compared to its alternatives (Horowitz, 1985:342). This dynamic becomes especially critical when multiple parties compete for the same ethnic voter base (ibid).

To maintain their dominance, ethnic party leaders frequently take measures to outbid their political rivals (Horowitz, 1985:343). These actions are aimed at protecting their ethnic support and stopping any challenges to their power (Horowitz, 1985:344). In the process, parties often adopt increasingly ethnically charged rhetoric and demands. This intensifies divisions and makes it more difficult to promote unity across different groups (ibid). Consequently, ethnic party systems tend to exacerbate ethnic conflict, as they prioritize maintaining ethnic loyalty over fostering broader societal cohesion (ibid).

In conclusion, this theoretical framework integrates Social Identity Theory and Ethnic Outbidding Theory, where Social Identity Theory will be used in the introduction of the analysis to understand the background from which xenophobia comes from and how this paper will view the situation of xenophobia in the country by explaining how group membership and identity shape in-group loyalty, intergroup comparisons, and hostility toward out-groups. Ethnic Outbidding Theory will then build from this starting point, and be used to analyse the data, demonstrating how political leaders exploit these group dynamics, using ethnic divisions as a strategy to gain power. This combined framework offers a nuanced lens to explore how xenophobia manifests and is exacerbated within the South African political context.

4. Methodological framework

To address my research questions on this specific case study, a qualitative desk study approach was employed using a thematic analysis to examine how politicians make use of xenophobic rhetoric in the period leading up to the 2024 South African national elections. To ensure full transparency and understanding of the methodology used, the following sections will outline the methodological framework in detail.

4.1 Research design

The research design refers to the ‘structure that guides the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data’ (Bryman, 2012:43). Therefore, the research design of this research paper is a qualitative case study approach. Qualitative research is a type of research that focuses on understanding things through words and descriptions rather than using numbers or measurements to collect and analyse data. (Bryman, 2012:36). Along with this, qualitative research places importance in understanding the social world through interpretation (Bryman, 2012:380). This type of approach fits this research paper best as the relationship between political rhetoric and xenophobia is a complex one, that benefits from an interpretation with the help of theory to help provide answers to the complex issue.

In terms of the case study method, a basic case study design focuses on studying one specific example in great depth and detail. This method aims to understand the unique and complex features of the case being studied (Bryman, 2012:66). In this case, the focus is on xenophobia as a political tool leveraged by politicians, with South Africa serving as the specific context for the case study. This issue is both current and highly relevant within the country, making it a compelling choice for detailed analysis.

To conduct this analysis effectively, appropriate research methods are necessary, and for this case a thematic analysis was chosen which will be outlined below.

4.1.1 Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis is described as a method of data analysis wherein themes are identified within a dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2012:2). These themes are uncovered

through identifying, organizing, and understanding meaningful patterns, through the process of coding, prioritizing what is commonly expressed or discussed about a topic (ibid).

This research paper made use of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's thematic analysis guide in order to provide a helpful framework. The reason for choosing a thematic analysis was due to this type of methodology being known as a flexible and accessible method for qualitative research (ibid). In terms of accessibility, a thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify the most important commonalities within the data set that best works in answering the research questions guiding the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012:2). In terms of flexibility, a thematic analysis allows the researcher to choose the approach that fits the research best (Braun and Clarke, 2012:3). With this in mind, an abductive theory approach was chosen, that allowed me to incorporate my chosen theoretical framework when coming up with codes and themes. The theory driven approach is where the researcher uses a chosen theoretical framework that is used to code and interpret the data (ibid). This type of approach is used because when doing a thematic analysis, you can never take a fully deductive (uses predefined concepts or ideas to guide coding and interpretation.) or inductive approach (driven by what is in the data) (ibid). An abductive approach will be taken, where I will interpret findings with the assistance of theoretical frameworks. Rather than allowing the theories to directly explain the findings, I will use them as lenses to understand and contextualize how political narratives are constructed and sustained.

This paper follows Braun and Clarke's six phase approach to doing a thematic analysis. Phase one included familiarizing myself with the data which consisted of reading and rereading the data in an active, analytical and critical way. This is done to make sense of what the data means and note what might be relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012:5).

Generating initial codes was phase two of the process, which involved labelling sections of the data that were potentially relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012:6). Codes can be used in different ways, they can either be descriptive codes that describe the content of the data, however they can also be used in an interpretive way,

where they interpret meaning beyond the surface level of the content in the data (ibid). For example, within this paper some codes included ‘exclusionary language’ which is a descriptive code. And an example of the more interpretive codes included ‘playing into already existing fears. This process of generating codes was done on google docs, using the comment feature to write down the codes, making it easy to organize and see the codes. The codes were developed both by examining the data itself and by incorporating the ethnic outbidding theory as a guiding framework, using the theory as a lens to ensure the codes aligned with its principles. The data went through several rounds of coding to make sure it was done in a thorough and systematic way as suggested by Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2012:7). Some examples of other codes I used were anti-immigrant- language, blame, unsupported claims, talk of drugs and crime in relation to immigrants and exaggeration.

Phase three consisted of searching for themes which is the active process of identifying an important patterned meaning within the data that relates to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012:7). This process involved reviewing the generated codes, identifying broader themes, and organizing the codes within these themes (ibid). After a set of themes were constructed, it was also important at this stage to see how each theme related to each other and how they all relate to the research questions. They should all be able to stand alone and also work together with the other themes to answer the questions and tell a story in a cohesive way (Braun and Clarke, 2012:8).

Phase four involved reviewing potential themes by analyzing the initial themes to ensure their coherence and quality, confirming that each theme was logical and meaningful. Questions used to quality check the themes were guided by Braun and Clarke's guide, where questions such as ‘What is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the dataset, and my research question)?’ and ‘Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme?’ (Braun and Clarke, 2012:9). Further reviewing took place in order to make sure that the themes captured the whole data set (ibid)

Phase five was defining and naming themes, which consisted of finding suitable names for each theme, which according to Braun and Clarke should be informative and concise

(Braun and Clarke, 2012: 10), For me, this was done by naming each theme in relation to the main points of the ethnic outbidding theory, which provided my analysis with a clear understanding of how the theme related to theory. The three themes constructed were: Theme 1 - The use of ethnicity as a tool: A Sense of Patriotism, Theme 2 - Exclusionary Rhetoric: Creation of an Us vs. Them Narrative Theme 3 - Escalation of Rhetoric and Outbidding Behaviour.

Regarding defining themes, this consisted of answering the following requirements: ‘themes which: (i) don’t try to do too much, as themes should ideally have a singular focus; (ii) are related but don’t overlap, so they aren’t repetitive, although they may build on previous themes; and (iii) directly address your research question. ‘(Braun and Clarke, 2012:9). This phase also involved selecting data extracts that supported and illustrated the analytical points of each theme, ensuring the data was interpreted in alignment with the research questions. (ibid).

And lastly phase six consisted of producing the report, which in qualitative research, is an interwoven experience, that consists of informal notes and formal sections like the actual writing and analysing that in the ends should provide the reader with a clear story about the data from the analysis conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2012:10).

4.2 Data collection:

4.2.1 Source selection and classification:

All sources for this study were obtained from the internet, classified as virtual documents by Bryman (2012). The focus was on exploring politicians' statements regarding immigration and xenophobia.

The sources included:

1. Social Media Accounts: Politicians’ posts on the platforms X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube.
2. Public interviews: Sourced from podcasts or news outlets.
3. Campaign Speeches: Found primarily on YouTube, either via the politicians’ official channels or from news outlets broadcasting their speeches.

Keywords played a critical role in identifying relevant materials. Searches combined politicians' names with terms like "immigration," "xenophobia," or "immigration policies." This approach was applied across social media, YouTube, and search engines to locate posts, interviews, and speeches. An initial search also explored existing links between the politicians and xenophobic rhetoric, providing foundational insights for the research.

4.2.2 Critical discussion on source collection:

The process of gathering sources faced several limitations. For Operation Dudula, much of the content on their YouTube channel was in languages other than English or heavily broken English, which risked misinterpretation.

Using internet research also posed challenges. As Bryman notes, the quality and scope of data depend heavily on the keywords used during the search (Bryman, 2012:655). Different keywords might have yielded different results, potentially broadening the scope of the study. Additionally, social media posts and websites can be deleted or updated at any time (ibid), making some sources inaccessible later and potentially impacting the credibility of the research. This issue arose during the initial stages when news articles cited in related studies were found to be unavailable. Similarly, official party websites might change or remove content (ibid), further complicating source reliability for the future.

4.3 Quality criteria

According to Bryman (2012), social research must be evaluated based on key criteria such as reliability, replication, and validity. However, qualitative research, due to its inherently subjective nature, is often critiqued for the challenges it presents in ensuring replication and maintaining consistency (Bryman, 2012:405). Alternative methods for evaluating research are necessary to assess its trustworthiness (Bryman, 2012:49). This section of the methodology will focus on two such criteria, namely, transferability and confirmability, which will guide the analysis of the research.

Transferability asks whether the findings of the research can be applied to other contexts (ibid). In this study, it's important to acknowledge that the findings cannot be generalized to the rest of the world, as South Africa's political context and history are highly unique. The country's specific historical, cultural, and political factors make this research particularly context dependent. However, it does offer valuable insights into the broader issue of how politicians may leverage xenophobia as a political tool. While the study is deeply rooted in the South African context, it contributes to the wider conversation about political manipulation of social issues and may provide lessons or frameworks that can be applied to similar situations in other countries with comparable challenges.

Confirmability examines whether the researcher has allowed their own biases or values to influence the research (ibid). In qualitative research, this concern is particularly relevant as the research process is often criticized for being highly subjective (Bryman, 2012:405). The researcher plays an active role in selecting what to focus on and what to highlight, meaning that personal values and perspectives inevitably shape the findings. Moreover, the unstructured nature of qualitative research allows for flexibility, but also introduces a higher potential for bias, as decisions about what data to emphasize or what themes to explore are influenced by the researcher's judgment (ibid). In this study, the research is inherently a construction based on what stood out to me as significant throughout the process. Given this subjectivity, it is impossible to completely eliminate bias or values from the research. For example, I have consciously chosen to explore specific parties or interpret data and theory in certain ways, which inevitably reflects my perspective. However, this opens the floor for further reflection on how those choices impact the conclusions drawn and could inform other research to explore alternative approaches.

4.4 Ethical considerations:

With this thesis being a desk study, it focused solely on publicly available information, which helped reduce ethical risks. I ensured that my personal political opinions did not affect how I analysed or interpreted the data. Since my research involved selecting specific data and interpreting theories, I recognized that my interpretations could be

subjective. To address this, I worked to remain as neutral as possible by using established theories, which guided my analysis and ensured fair and balanced evaluations. Additionally, I avoided reinforcing negative stereotypes about xenophobia in South Africa by providing objective context throughout the thesis.

4.5 Limitations and delimitations:

4.5.1 Limitations:

I focused exclusively on political speeches, social media posts, and interviews conducted in English due to this being my mother tongue. Given that many political messages in South Africa are communicated in English, this approach captures a significant portion of the discourse. However, some important content may have been missed, particularly in cases like Operation Dudula's social media content on YouTube, where a large majority of videos were in languages other than English.

4.5.2 Delimitations:

The study focused on sources from March 2023 to May 2024, providing a detailed examination of political language in the lead-up to the 2024 elections while maintaining a manageable scope. It specifically analysed speeches, public interviews, and campaign messages that directly mentioned immigration or foreign nationals, ensuring a targeted approach. To enable a thorough analysis within the word limit, the study concentrated on a select number of political parties rather than attempting to cover the entire political landscape.

5. Presentation of findings

This section presents the data collected for the study, aiming to provide valuable insights into the research questions concerning the intersection of political rhetoric and xenophobia. It highlights the variety of data sources used to analyse each party and their contributions to addressing the research questions.

The section begins with contextual background, offering an overview of South Africa's diverse political landscape by summarizing the top eight political parties. Following this, it focuses on the data for three selected parties, namely, the Patriotic Alliance, ActionSA, and Operation Dudula, organized by party to ensure clarity.

5.1 Background context:

The elections that took place in South Africa on May 24th, 2024, were seen as one of the most important elections the country has had since 1994. This was because, for the first time in South African democracy, the leading ANC party was predicted to lose its majority vote (de Wet et al., 2024). This raised the possibility of a coalition government for the first time in South Africa's history (Carroll, 2024). In the lead-up to these elections, several new political parties emerged, including Operation Dudula and Action SA, both of which are discussed below. Many of these parties focused heavily on immigration issues.

In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of the eight largest political parties in the 2024 elections to offer context on the political environment during this pivotal national election. The top eight parties were chosen due to the fact they are the only ones to receive above one percent of the national vote in the 2024 election. The distinction of the "largest parties" is based on those that secured the most seats in the National Assembly following the 2024 elections. These parties, ranked from the highest to the lowest number of seats, are as follows: the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Patriotic Alliance (PA), the Freedom Front Plus (FF Plus), and ActionSA. Additionally, a vigilante group turned political party will be included in this analysis. Although this group was not permitted to compete on the

national ballot, their influence on shaping discussions around illegal immigration in South Africa has been significant. The information presented for each party will provide insights into their official stance on immigration, primarily as outlined in their manifestos, and highlight their key political leaders. This context is crucial for understanding how these parties contribute to the broader discourse on immigration in South Africa.

5.1.1 Overview of the political parties:

The ANC, South Africa's ruling party since 1994 under Nelson Mandela, experienced a significant decline in support during the 2024 elections, securing only 40.52% of the vote (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024), a drop from 57.5% in 2019 (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2019). The ANC's 2024 manifesto addresses immigration by proposing to consolidate existing immigration laws into a single comprehensive policy, aiming to eliminate contradictions and address new challenges. Additionally, they plan to create refugee and asylum seeker centres near borders, simplify the visa process, modernize immigration systems to prevent fraud, and prioritize South Africans in the job market by regulating immigrant employment and targeting undocumented workers (African National Congress, 2024).

The DA, the largest opposition party, was formed in 2003 from a merger of the Nationalist Party and the Federal Alliance (Mattes, Krönke, and Lockwood, 2024:500). In the 2024 elections, the DA received 22.21% of the vote (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024), a slight increase from 20.77% in 2019 (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2019). The DA's official manifesto only briefly touches on immigration under the education section, where they describe their support for attracting highly skilled immigrants. However, their migration policy, titled "Opportunity Beyond Borders," outlines a more detailed approach to immigration. It shows that the DA advocates for attracting skilled workers, including a scarce skills visa, an e-verification system for employers, and the implementation of an African passport to promote free movement across the continent (Democratic Alliance, 2023). They also emphasize safe border management and better intergovernmental coordination to combat xenophobia (ibid).

The MK Party, founded in 2023 and led by former president Jacob Zuma, has made significant strides despite its controversy. In the 2024 elections, the MK Party garnered 14.58% of the vote, securing 58 seats in the National Assembly (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024). The MK Party's manifesto highlights illegal immigration as a national crisis, calling for stronger border control by deploying the military and using advanced technology to monitor borders (MK Party, 2024). They also advocate for combating corruption, improving immigration infrastructure, and enhancing the Border Management Authority (ibid).

The EFF was founded by Julius Malema in 2013 after breaking away from the ANC. The party positions itself on the far left with a Marxist-Leninist ideology (Mattes, Krönke, and Lockwood, 2024:503). The party received 9.86% of the vote in the 2024 elections (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024), a decrease from 10.8% in 2019 (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2019). The EFF advocates for free movement within Africa, supporting the establishment of an African passport and streamlined visa processes (Economic Freedom Fighters, 2024). Their immigration policy also calls for a continent-wide agreement on free movement and the elimination of restrictions hindering African mobility (ibid).

The IFP which was formed in 1975 and led by Velenkosini Hlabisa since 2019, focuses on Zulu culture and traditional leadership (Mattes, Krönke, and Lockwood, 2024:502-503). In the 2024 elections, the IFP received 4.17% of the vote (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024), a slight increase from 3.38% in 2019 (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2019). The IFP has historically been accused of inciting xenophobia, and their 2024 manifesto describes illegal immigration as a national crisis, calling for stronger border controls, the construction of a border wall, and the deployment of drones for surveillance (Inkatha Freedom Party, 2024).

The PA founded in 2013 and led by Gayton McKenzie, increased its popularity in the 2024 elections, securing 2.16% of the vote and nine seats in the National Assembly (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024). The PA's manifesto calls for a "zero tolerance" policy toward illegal immigration, advocating for mass deportations, stricter

immigration policies, penalties for businesses employing undocumented workers, and the construction of a border wall (Patriotic Alliance , 2024).

The VF Plus, led by Pieter Groenewald, has traditionally advocated for the rights of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans and Christian values (Campbell, 2019). In the 2024 elections, the VF Plus received 1.45% of the vote, securing six seats in the National Assembly (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024). Their manifesto emphasizes stricter border controls to prevent illegal immigration, improve social service allocation for South Africans, and ensure immigrants possess scarce skills to benefit the economy (Freedom Front Plus, 2024). They also call for action against corrupt border officials and the prevention of illegal smuggling (ibid).

ActionSA, founded by Herman Mashaba in 2020 after leaving the DA, secured six seats in the 2024 elections with 1.31% of the vote (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2024). The party advocates for legal immigration, better border management, and the creation of a "scarce skills visa." (ActionSA, 2024). Their manifesto stresses enhancing the Department of Home Affairs to address systemic flaws and improving deportation processes for illegal immigrants (ibid).

Finally, Operation Dudula, initially a vigilante anti-immigrant movement formed in 2021, became a political entity in 2023. The group, now led by Zandile Dabula, was not permitted to contest in the national elections however, they competed in provincial elections and gained support in three key provinces, namely Limpopo, the Western Cape and Gauteng (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2024a; b; and c). Their platform focuses on expelling undocumented immigrants, targeting businesses and residences suspected of housing or employing them (Mawire and Vhumbunu, 2023). Despite their lack of formal policies, Operation Dudula's campaigns are driven by social media and public actions against immigrants (Zakeera Docrat, 2024).

With a clear understanding of the official stances of South Africa's top eight political parties on immigration issues, this research narrows its focus to three key parties, namely, the Patriotic Alliance, ActionSA, and Operation Dudula. This analysis will delve deeper into their political rhetoric, examining how they approached immigration issues and the narratives they employed for political gain.

These three parties were selected for analysis due to their frequent mentions in data collection and their strong association with anti-immigration and xenophobic rhetoric. Although not among South Africa's three largest parties, they gained significant traction and influenced political discourse, especially on social media, shaping public attitudes toward immigration. It is crucial to analyse the influence of these smaller parties because as how this research paper sees it, they are key instigators and amplifiers of xenophobic sentiment in the country. Their rhetoric has the potential to significantly shape public and political discourse that fuels anti-immigration attitudes, making them pivotal to understanding the broader impact of divisive political narratives in South Africa.

5.2 Data findings:

This section presents the data collected from social media, public interviews, and campaign speeches. The data is organized by political party, with each party's material displayed separately. Within each party's section, campaign speeches will be presented first, followed by interviews and then social media posts. This descriptive section aims to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the collected data, ensuring a full understanding of the material before moving into the analysis.

5.2.1 The Patriotic Alliance (PA):

This section focuses on showcasing the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Gayton McKenzie, leader of the Patriotic Alliance, through three speeches, two interviews, and four social media posts.

Political Speeches:

1. BizNews Conference Speech - March 2023

Addressing a room full of business owners, McKenzie accused them of hiring illegal immigrants and exploiting cheap labour, stating: *"You are the business people. And none of you, if you are given the choice here, will ever hire a South African. You've proven it. You hire illegal foreigners"* (McKenzie, 2023b). McKenzie continues in his speech and becomes increasingly more aggressive in his tone, with statements like:

“Can you imagine if the whole country rises up? The country’s angry at illegal foreigners, and we are the ones hiring them” (ibid). He then furthers this with fear inducing comments like: *“You have never vetted illegal foreigners. He alone with your wife. I have white friends of mine on the phone that their daughter has been raped, the man has been killed, the wife has been killed. That is losing their minds. Where will you find him because there’s no fingerprints?”* (ibid).

2. Campaign Speech- November 2023

McKenzie (2023a) made several strong statements targeting illegal foreigners, including: *“We don’t want illegal foreigners here”, “I’m going straight to Rahima Moosa Hospital where we’re going to switch off the oxygen of illegal foreigners”* (McKenzie, 2023a), and *“The devil sent other devils here to this country to come and sell drugs to our children, to sell body parts to our people, to come and take the jobs of South Africans”*(ibid). He incorporated religious language, aligning with the PA manifesto, and concluded by repeatedly shouting *“Abahambe”* (translated from Zulu to “let them go”) and *“Hulle gaan huis toe gaan”* (translated from Afrikaans to “they will go home”).

3. Campaign Speech- May 2024

At Athlone Stadium in the Western Cape, McKenzie again targeted illegal foreigners, making strong use of accusatory and exclusionary language by referring to foreigners as ‘they’, saying: *“They are going home unapologetically. They are selling drugs here, they are working as cheap labour, they are not unioned, they are not paying tax, they are selling old, outdated food, they are making poisonous foods in their tuckshops, they are selling us toilet water, they are making their own medicine”* (McKenzie, 2024c). He included religious language, repeating: *“God said don’t touch the anointed.”* Discussing a building collapse in George, McKenzie accused employers of hiring illegal immigrants, claiming: *“Our children were giving them CVs, they put those CVs in the bin and went to the street to hire illegal foreigners”* (ibid). He concluded his speech with this patriotic comment: *“I came here today to tell you, no matter who says what, you can call me xenophobic, you can call me insensitive, but I am here for South*

Africans first. I stand for South Africans before I stand for any other nation on Earth.”
(ibid).

Interviews:

1. Interview with Ground Up - April 3, 2024

In this interview, McKenzie addressed the status of Zimbabwean nationals after their permits expire, stating: *“They need to be processed to determine if they should stay here or go home. We believe that the majority will not meet the criteria to stay”* (McKenzie, 2024a). He then criticized the government’s approach to permits and opposed extensions, saying: *“Whoever has been given these permits must be processed properly by the system and if that means they need to go home, then so be it”* (ibid).

Regarding undocumented long-term residents, McKenzie called for strict deportation, asserting: *“If they entered the country in a criminal fashion, they will need to leave. If they don’t leave, we will mass deport them. If we arrest them again, they will be criminally charged and jailed”* (ibid). He rejected leniency for long-term offenders, comparing the situation to other crimes: *“Imagine if we treated other crimes the same way. You’d end up not prosecuting people who’ve been defrauding their employer for many years”* (ibid).

2. Interview with Newzroom Afrika - May 11, 2024

Following a campaign rally, McKenzie discussed job creation and illegal immigration in this interview. He claimed: *“We have give or take 11 million illegal foreigners in this country and six million of them, and this is a conservative figure, six million of them are working”*(McKenzie, 2024b).

He argued that mass deportation would address unemployment: *“By mass deporting them, I immediately create six million jobs, just by mass deporting them”* (ibid). Additionally, McKenzie detailed plans to build a border wall as a long-term project, stating: *‘Then we are going to build a wall. It’s going to cost around 1.2 trillion, it’s a ten-year, 12-year, 15-year project but it’s going to give a lot of people work’* (ibid).

Social Media Posts:

The social media data consists of several posts by Gayton McKenzie on X (formerly Twitter), showcasing his strong stance on illegal immigration.

1. Gayton McKenzie on X - August 1, 2023

McKenzie posted about illegal miners in Riverlea, criticizing law enforcement's inaction: *“The illegal miners in Riverlea are preparing for war with our police, police are scared to enter and deal decisively with these disrespectful illegal immigrants who are openly stealing the minerals of SA. This operation can be over in a few hours if we are seriously fighting crime”* (McKenzie, 2023d). This post highlights his focus on crime linked to undocumented immigrants and his frustration with law enforcement's approach.

2. Gayton McKenzie on X - August 13, 2023

This post emphasizes his ongoing efforts to shut down businesses run by undocumented workers. McKenzie shared a photo of people being searched by police, captioned: *“Theewaterskloof last week, 12 illegal immigrants arrested. We have closed many shops in the different municipalities where we govern, it's difficult but we try our level best”* (McKenzie, 2023c).

3. Gayton McKenzie on X - February 20, 2024

McKenzie shared a video of 100 undocumented immigrants arrested in Bloemfontein, captioned: *“Abahambe 🔥🔥🔥 (fire emojis). We are glad that you are waking up to the dangers of illegal immigrants in our country, you called us xenophobic, but you can no longer ignore the threat that these illegal immigrants pose to this beautiful country of ours”* (McKenzie, 2024e). The phrase “Abahambe,” recurs throughout McKenzie’s rhetoric, both in social media posts and political speeches. This can be seen as a sort of catch phrase he uses to emphasis his point that illegal foreigners are not welcome in South Africa. The use of fire emojis are another aspect that is repeated throughout his social media post, as displayed in this post and the one below.

4. Gayton McKenzie on X - May 8, 2024

McKenzie criticized businesses in the Western Cape for hiring illegal immigrants, stating: *“Western Cape businesses hire mostly illegal immigrants, they are replacing all locals in all industries. I was shocked when I saw only them on fishing boats and farms now. We are going enforce the law stringently when we take over next month. Abahambe 🔥🔥🔥”* (McKenzie, 2024d). This post reflects his focus on holding businesses accountable who are found hiring illegal workers.

Throughout speeches, social media, and interviews, McKenzie uses inflammatory language, often invoking religious overtones and emphasizing mass deportation as a solution to unemployment and crime. It is clear that he uses a lot of exaggeration and false claims in order to get his point across.

5.2.2 ActionSA:

The data collected on ActionSA focuses primarily on Herman Mashaba, the party leader, and includes one political speech, two interviews, and six social media posts, five from X (formerly Twitter) and one from YouTube.

Political Speeches:

1. Address at the Opening Ceremony of the ActionSA Policy Conference- September 12, 2023

During his address, Mashaba described ActionSA’s position on illegal immigration as a *“rational, middle-ground”* approach. He positioned the party between two extremes: those who *“ignore our borders or call anyone xenophobic”* for discussing immigration policies and those who *“act like quasi-law enforcement officials by unlawfully raiding businesses and detaining people”* (Mashaba, 2023a).

Key statements from Mashaba include: *“South Africa was built on the back of migrants. We want the people of the world to come to South Africa, but they must do so legally and obey our laws once here”* (ibid). And on government accountability: *“The blame for our immigration crisis belongs at the feet of our government who have failed to*

police our borders, who have failed to document people entering South Africa, and who have failed to deport those who have committed crimes” (ibid).

Interviews:

1. Interview with State of the Nation – March 14, 2024

In this interview, Herman Mashaba discussed the importance of legal immigration and the problems caused by illegal immigration in South Africa. He acknowledged the country's history of being built by migrants but stressed that entry must be legal. He shared a story: *"We can't live in a society like this, allowing people into our country. I'm dealing with a case with a Nigerian in Primrose, been in South Africa for 10 years, involved in hijacking houses of South Africans, involved in drug dealing"* (Mashaba, 2024a). He expressed frustration with the government's failure to act, stating:

"We have to be a mad nation to allow this kind of madness and chaos... There is no way that you can ever build a stable economy in an environment of chaos" (ibid). He concluded that ActionSA would stop the chaos caused by illegal immigration. Regarding the ANC's position in Gauteng, Mashaba stated: *"That's what the people of Soweto are asking, when they are murdered... People have got a lived experience and the brutality of the ANC"* (ibid).

2. Interview with Sunday Times Politics Weekly Podcast - May 10, 2024

In this interview, Mashaba emphasized empowering local informal economies in South Africa's townships and expressed concerns over illegal foreign nationals operating businesses. He stated: *"The country has become a dumping place for counterfeit expired goods"* (Mashaba, 2024b).

And said: *"This country is not looking for drug dealers, it's not looking for people who are going to bring money through mattresses"* (ibid). He then offered a solution for promoting the informal economy: *"It's simple, you can do it overnight. Businesses in our communities cannot be run by people who we don't know how they came into the country and how they brought the money in"* (ibid).

Social Media Posts:

1. Mashaba on X- December 18, 2023

Mashaba (2023c), reposted an article discussing foreign-owned spaza shops and their negative impact. He captioned it: *“These businesses not only do not pay tax, but amongst other problems for South Africa:*

- *Destroyed SMMEs in the townships and villages.*
- *Bring in billions of Rand of counterfeit & expired goods.*
- *Some of them are used as illicit drug channels.*
- *Disrupted our own way of life.*

The failure of @HomeAffairsSA is directly responsible” (Mashaba, 2023c).

2. Mashaba on X- December 15, 2023

Mashaba responded to criticism from a Twitter user who accused ActionSA of protecting the interests of white South Africans. Mashaba reposted the tweet with his own comment: *“I suggest you focus your energies on getting illegal immigrants to find illegal means to get into South Africa than worrying about @Action4SA”* (Mashaba, 2023b).

3. Mashaba on X - January 14, 2024

Mashaba reposted a media release from ActionSA regarding the arrest of a foreign national involved in criminal activities. In his post, he emphasized the party's commitment to following the case's proceedings and criticized the criminal justice system's handling of illegal immigrants. He wrote: *“@Action4SA commits to closely follow the proceedings of this case. @SAPoliceService @NPA_Prosecutes @HomeAfrika. Our criminal justice system has been compromised too long with these illegal immigrants”* (Mashaba, 2024c).

4. ActionSA on YouTube - April 26, 2024

ActionSA's #Spaza4Locals campaign focuses on protecting township economies from unfair competition posed by spaza shops run by illegal foreign nationals. In this video

posted on the party's official YouTube channel, Lerato Ngobeni, a member of the party, stated: *"We aim to protect this sector from unfair competition including spaza shops operated by illegal foreign nationals who trade in large volumes of expired goods, putting our communities in jeopardy. The campaign is designed to support South African-owned and operated shops"* (Ngobeni, 2024).

5. Mashaba on X- May 24, 2024

Mashaba (2024d), posted an image of ActionSA supporters with a billboard in the background reading: "Only ActionSA will secure our borders." This post emphasized border security as a key issue for his party.

Throughout this data set, Herman Mashaba remains aligned with the principles outlined in the ActionSA manifesto, emphasizing the importance of the rule of law and acknowledging the vital contributions migrants have made to South Africa. However, when discussing illegal immigration, Mashaba often highlights negative activities associated with undocumented immigrants, such as drug-related offenses and their role in competition within the informal economy, a sector ActionSA prioritizes heavily in its policies. While Mashaba maintains a firm stance on immigration, his rhetoric is notably less volatile and aggressive compared to that of PA's Gayton McKenzie, however still contains anti-immigrant sentiment in certain cases.

5.2.3 Operation Dudula:

The data collected for Operation Dudula focuses on Zandile Dabula, the party's leader and comprises one political speech, two interviews and six social media posts.

Political Speeches:

1. Political Speech – November 24, 2023

In this address to Operation Dudula supporters, Zandile Dabula passionately discussed the overwhelming dominance of foreign nationals in South Africa's township economy. She claimed: *"Foreigners have taken 90 percent of our South African township*

economy. 90 percent. And the state is doing nothing about it. The state is quiet and is doing nothing about it” (Dabula, 2023c).

She also mentioned the widespread control foreign nationals have over various sectors beyond spaza shops: *“We are going to reclaim it” (ibid).*

Dabula further accused foreign nationals of engaging in illicit activities, including the production of counterfeit goods: *“More than 150 billion of illicit cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, and alcohol products are being manufactured by foreign nationals. 150 billion is a lot of money” (ibid).*

Interviews:

1. Interview with BBC Documentary- December 18, 2023

In her interview with BBC, Zandile Dabula, expressed concerns that foreign nationals were destabilizing South Africa, suggesting a long-term plan to "take over" the country: *“Our country is a mess. Foreign nationals are working on a 20-year plan of taking over South Africa” (Dabula, 2023a).*

She also linked the nation’s drug problems to foreign nationals, implying they were fuelling addiction to make it easier for them to dominate: *“You see drugs everywhere and most of the drug addicts are South African rather than foreign nationals. So, what's happening? Are they feeding our own brothers and sisters so that it can be easy for them to take over?” (ibid).*

Despite denying any violent intentions, Dabula's group's militant rhetoric, such as the chant, suggests otherwise: *“Burn the foreigner. We will go to the garage, buy some petrol and burn the foreigner” (ibid).*

2. Interview with SABC News - October 11, 2023

In an interview with SABC News, Zandile Dabula addressed the tragic deaths of two children, who were allegedly poisoned by biscuits purchased from a local shop. The interview took place following the children's funeral service. While the mortuary report was still pending, there were claims that rat poison was found in the children's stomachs. Though the connection to foreign nationals was not directly mentioned in relation to this incident Dabula linked the crime to foreign nationals by saying: *“That's*

why we are saying the government needs to take accountability. They need to send inspectors to raid these shops, but most importantly, these foreign nationals need to move out of our communities. Let South Africans trade. We are pleading with our government to support South Africans in starting businesses in the spaza shops” (Dabula, 2023b). Along with this, she explained that: *“As Operation Dudula we are going to make them account for all the actions because the deaths of these children are mainly in their hands because they not supposed to be doing what they are supposed to be doing”* (ibid).

Social Media Posts:

1. Operation Dudula on YouTube - October 17, 2023

In this video, Operation Dudula conducts raids on foreign-owned spaza shops in Soweto. Community members are shown in a highly charged and hostile environment, shouting at foreign nationals and ordering them to close their shops: *“This is what is going to happen today, all of you are going to close your shops today!”* (Operation Dudula, 2023b). The video captures the tension and the group’s call for action against foreign-owned businesses.

2. Operation Dudula on YouTube - October 18, 2023

In another video titled *“Operation Dudula Inspect and Shutdown Pimville (Soweto) Foreign-Owned Shops,”* Operation Dudula members are seen inspecting goods in stores suspected to be run by foreign nationals. One speaker highlights the issue of expired or potentially poisoned goods that have led to deaths and hospitalizations of children. The video shows expired products being discarded. It concludes with a statement directed at the government, declaring, *“You must watch this space, we are coming as Operation Dudula, and we will make sure that we are protecting society, our community, our people”* (Operation Dudula, 2023a).

3. Operation Dudula on YouTube - January 25, 2024

A third video titled *“Operation Dudula | Undocumented Immigrants Are a Burden to South Africans”* shows Operation Dudula members going into houses occupied by

foreign nationals, demanding that they leave immediately. One member insists, “*Exit now, not tomorrow, today*” (Operation Dudula, 2024a).

4. Operation Dudula on X - February 5, 2024

In this post, Operation Dudula reposted a tweet listing the achievements of various African countries, highlighting five South African achievements before displaying a controversial image related to Nigeria. The image shows two naked men bending over, which is presented as a derogatory commentary on Nigeria's accomplishments (Operation Dudula, 2024b).

5. Operation Dudula on X - April 21, 2024

In this tweet the official Operation Dudula account shared an incident from Northern Cape, South Africa, where eight Nigerian drug dealers were arrested. The post describes a violent altercation, where a group of Nigerians allegedly assaulted police officers and damaged police vehicles in an attempt to prevent the arrest. The tweet concludes with the statement: “*No other country would allow this*” (Operation Dudula, 2024c), emphasizing Operation Dudula's stance against foreign nationals committing crimes in South Africa.

6. Operation Dudula on X - May 15, 2024

Operation Dudula posted a tweet expressing opposition to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party's position on opening South Africa's borders. The post states, “*EFF wants to open the borders. We share the same continent, but we are not brothers!*” (Operation Dudula, 2024d).

Throughout the data presented on Operation Dudula, it is evident that the group differs significantly from the Patriotic Alliance (PA) and ActionSA in terms of policy focus. Unlike these parties, Operation Dudula does not advocate for specific policies but instead relies heavily on informal and often hostile messaging, particularly on platforms

like Twitter. Their YouTube videos showcase their vigilantism, where they take matters into their own hands, targeting foreign nationals. The group's rhetoric consistently frames foreign nationals as the root of South Africa's problems, particularly with regard to unemployment, and their proposed solution is to expel these individuals from the country.

6. Analysis of data

This analysis will begin with a brief background section on xenophobia in South Africa, examined through the framework of Social Identity Theory. This provides essential context for understanding how this paper approaches xenophobia in the country. Following this, the actual analysis of the data will be presented through themes, which have been analysed through the lens of the Ethnic Outbidding Theory.

But first It is important to lay the groundwork for how and why xenophobia exists in South Africa to understand how politicians take advantage of the already hostile environment in which xenophobia manifests in the country. Social identity theory offers a strong foundational base. The three main pillars I will look at within the theory are intergroup comparison, competition and hostility.

6.1 Social Identity Theory:

According to the theory, the need for individuals to secure their personal identity drives them to form groups where they feel a sense of belonging (Demmers, 2017:43). In this context, South Africans are positioned as the ingroup, while foreign nationals residing in South Africa are seen as the outgroup. This group formation often leads to intergroup comparisons, where the ingroup enhances its sense of positivity by perceiving itself as superior to the outgroup (Demmers, 2017:43). However, when groups compete for essential resources, such comparisons can escalate into competition, often resulting in hostility. This occurs when one group perceives another as obstructing its opportunities to improve its societal position, leading to intergroup conflict (Tajfel and Turner, 1986:290). This framework will be applied to analyse the xenophobic climate in South Africa.

In a country grappling with significant unemployment and strained vital resources, the challenges are undeniable. South Africa's unemployment rate stood at 33.5% in 2024, with 62.6% of the population living in poverty in 2023 (The World Bank, 2024). These socioeconomic pressures disproportionately affect the poor, who also bear the brunt of rising food and fuel prices (ibid).

Using the framework of Social Identity Theory, particularly its key pillars, there is strong evidence supporting its applicability to attitudes toward foreigners in South Africa. A survey by the Foundation of Human Rights and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, which sampled 24,897 participants, revealed that South Africans trust foreign nationals the least. Specifically, two-fifths of respondents reported having no trust at all in individuals from other African countries (Foundation for Human Rights, 2018:24). Furthermore, 44% of participants expressed the belief that foreigners should not be allowed to live in South Africa (Foundation for Human Rights, 2018: 23). Similarly, a 2021 survey by the Human Sciences Research Council found that most South Africans perceive foreign nationals as exacerbating the unemployment crisis and other socioeconomic challenges (Human Sciences Research Council, 2024). Negative attitudes toward foreigners are not new, a 2010 Afrobarometer survey revealed that the majority of South Africans distrusted foreign nationals, with two-thirds advocating for stricter immigration restrictions (Afrobarometer, 2010).

These attitudes align closely with Social Identity Theory. The perception of foreign nationals as a threat to employment and public resources illustrates the competition factor highlighted in the theory, while the widespread distrust reflects the hostility pillar. Together, these factors provide a theoretical lens to understand the xenophobic environment in South Africa. Building on this foundation, this thesis views xenophobia in South Africa as a long-standing hostile environment shaped by negative attitudes from citizens. Many South Africans see foreign nationals as a threat to jobs and a strain on important resources. Within this context, the theory of ethnic outbidding offers a valuable framework to analyze how politicians amplify these deeply rooted xenophobic sentiments, using them to gain political support. This approach highlights the link between public attitudes and political actions in fuelling xenophobia. The ethnic outbidding theory will now be applied below.

6.2 Analysis through themes:

6.2.1 Theme 1 - The use of ethnicity as a tool: A Sense of Patriotism

The political and rhetorical actions these three parties have taken reflect Horowitz's argument that ethnic parties often leverage ethnicity as a political tool to secure their support base (Horowitz, 1985:307). According to Horowitz's theory, ethnic-based parties, which in this context these parties are considered, rely on the ethnic identity of their voter base, which is deeply rooted and unchangeable (Horowitz, 1985:294-295). Voters are likely to align with parties that they feel best represent their ethnic identity (ibid). Furthermore, ethnic-based parties often prioritize ethnic demands, even when these may negatively affect other groups (Horowitz, 1985:296).

In the context of the lead-up to the 2024 elections, these parties' patriotic rhetoric, to different extents, aligns with the theory. By emphasizing the "South African-ness" of the party, the parties appeal to the ethnic identity of South Africans in different ways. The approaches they take strengthen their patriotic message, creating a sense of unity and pride among their supporters, which in turn is the aim and hope this will manifest in more support and votes.

McKenzie's rhetoric, under the PA, strongly positions him as prioritizing South African citizens over others. With statements like *"I came here today to tell you, no matter who says what, you can call me xenophobic, you can call me insensitive, but I am here for South Africans first. I stand for South Africans before I stand for any other nation on Earth."* This shows McKenzie's patriotic level, and commitment to the issue of illegal immigration through his commitment to the country and its people. He emphasizes patriotism by using national pride and religious language, framing undocumented immigrants as a threat and strengthening his appeal to voters by promoting a sense of unity and national identity against the threat. A noteworthy statement McKenzie makes is *"God said, don't touch the anointed,"* which can be understood as portraying South Africans as chosen by God and under divine protection framing the issue of illegal immigration not just as a political problem but as a moral and spiritual one, intensifying feelings of patriotism and the need to defend the nation against perceived dangers, justified by the religious aspect.

ActionSA's rhetoric balances national pride with pragmatism, while Mashaba consistently, as seen through the data, acknowledges the fact that South Africa was built on the back of migrants, he still subtly emphasizes South Africans' as needing economic protection. This is seen particularly in the campaign "#Spaza4Locals" aimed at protecting township economies from competition by undocumented foreign nationals running spaza shops. There is a strong emphasis on protecting South African interests in particular, and this reflects patriotism by emphasizing the importance of supporting South African citizens and their businesses. It highlights local shops as vital to the community's identity and well-being, promoting pride and unity in strengthening the nation's economy while subtly tapping into framing undocumented foreign nationals as the threat to create this sense of patriotism.

Lastly, Operation Dudula's entire image revolves around 'protecting' South Africans from the perceived threat of foreigners, primarily through their focus on combating illegal immigration and the risks it poses to jobs and safety. This emphasis fosters a strong sense of patriotism, linking national pride with anti-immigrant action. The movement portrays foreign nationals as a threat to national identity and economic opportunity, using rhetoric, actions, and symbols like military-style uniforms to unite marginalized communities under a shared sense of patriotic duty. The movement's social media presence, particularly on YouTube, amplifies this sense of patriotism. The videos show groups of South Africans directly confronting immigration issues on the ground, making the struggle feel personal and immediate. This direct involvement presents a tangible reflection of patriotism, reinforcing the message that ordinary citizens must take action to protect their country. They also employ decisive patriotic language when the Dabula, refers to the supporters as brothers and sisters when addressing them, reinforcing a sense of unity and solidarity, as if the country is one big family.

All in all, all three parties, to different extents and through different strategies appeal to the national identity of south Africans, creating a sense of patriotism through their words and actions. This was achieved by casting foreign nationals as a threat. The next theme will look more closely into this specific framing of foreign nationals in a negative way.

6.2.2 Theme 2 - Exclusionary Rhetoric: Creation of an Us vs. Them Narrative

This theme explains how ethnic parties exploit the fears and anxieties of the population to gain political support. As previously discussed, there is a prevailing sense of fear and anxiety regarding foreign nationals in South Africa. Many South Africans, particularly those living in poverty and facing high unemployment, perceive foreign nationals as economic and social threats as shown earlier in regard to attitudes towards foreign nationals analysed through the social identity theory. Political leaders often tap into these existing fears to create an "Us vs. Them" narrative, further deepening societal divisions.

According to Horowitz (1985), political leaders may compromise moral values and beliefs to secure support, especially by making ethnic demands or endorsing extreme ethnic views (Horowitz, 1985:291, 307). When a society is already divided, there is a strong incentive for ethnic parties or organizations to exploit these divisions, using ethnicity as a central element in their political strategy (Horowitz, 1985:306). Along with this, ethnic parties often increase division (Horowitz, 1985:291).

This theme builds on the previous one, which examined the use of ethnicity from a South African perspective. Here, the focus shifts to how ethnicity is weaponized against foreign nationals. The parties under analysis frame undocumented immigrants negatively, although to different extents, still exacerbate South Africans' fears about job security and safety to some degree. This framing perpetuates negative stereotypes and reinforces the notion of foreign nationals as a threat and thus positions them as an outgroup, which connects to the us vs them narrative.

The Patriotic Alliance, ActionSA, and Operation Dudula each employed this strategy to varying degrees, framing foreign nationals as the outgroup. Mashaba as well as Dabula link undocumented foreign nationals to the issue of crime and economic harm. Dabula, for example, claims, *"More than 150 billion of illicit cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, and alcohol products are being manufactured by foreign nationals. 150 billion is a lot of money."* The repeated emphasis on the figure *"150 billion"* exaggerates the economic harm allegedly caused by foreign nationals, linking them to large-scale criminal enterprises and further positioning them as a major threat to the country's economy.

Mashaba made use of personal examples of cases he was overseeing of foreign nationals involved in crime. Along with this, he made sweeping generalizations such as *“This country is not looking for drug dealers, it's not looking for people who are going to bring money through mattresses. This is not the type of foreigners we need”*. This type of statement broadly criminalizes undocumented foreigners, suggesting they are harmful to South African society.

Along with this, Dabula used a lot of exclusionary and dehumanizing rhetoric, such as, when she said, *“We share the same continent, but we are not brothers!”* serves as a prime example of exclusionary rhetoric. By emphasizing that foreign nationals, even as fellow Africans, are not “brothers,” she removes any sense of shared identity or solidarity, reinforcing the “us vs. them” narrative and denying foreign nationals a sense of belonging. Along with this when Dabula claimed that foreign nationals had a strategic plan to take over the country and sell drugs to South Africans to weaken them. This reinforces negative stereotypes while adding to the idea of a calculated effort to destabilize South Africa, feeding directly into exclusionary fears. This echoes McKenzie’s strategy of amplifying fears, framing foreign nationals as an existential threat. He made a lot of stereotypical fear-mongering claims such as *‘they are making poisonous foods in their tuckshops’* which can be both deeply harmful and highly influential among his supporters. On top of this Gayton McKenzie employed a large extent of dehumanizing language as well as the use of us vs them language, constantly referring to foreign nationals as they and them. McKenzie’s body language plays a key role in reinforcing his message. He often uses a lot of hand motions such as finger-pointing, to emphasize his points, making his delivery more forceful. In speeches and interviews, he speaks passionately, using his physical presence to amplify his message. In one campaign speech, he ended by jumping up and down, shouting *“Abahambe”* (let them go home). This kind of display fuels the fears and anxieties of those who could already see immigrants as threats to jobs or safety, and if they don't already believe this, his passionate gestures make the issue seem urgent. This body language aided in appealing to fears and anxieties held by the population, such as crime and rape, which he insinuated foreign nationals were doing in the country.

This theme highlighted the overlap in strategies used by the parties to construct an "us vs. them" narrative. Both Operation Dudula and ActionSA link foreign nationals to crime and drugs, while Dabula and McKenzie capitalize on societal anxieties around safety, employment, and foreign nationals. All the strategies discussed under this theme strongly align with the ethnic outbidding theory, emphasizing the role of exclusionary tactics to gain political support by amplifying divisions within society. In the next theme, the final points of the theory will be explored, examining the escalation of the type of rhetoric already discussed leading to outbidding behaviour from all three parties.

6.2.3 Theme 3 - Escalation of Rhetoric and Outbidding Behaviour

This theme highlights how the dynamics of ethnic party competition in South Africa have intensified harmful rhetoric. Leaders of ethnic parties, even those in a dominant position, often fear losing support to rival parties and take action to maintain their voter base (Horowitz, 1985:343). According to the theory, voters remain loyal only if they perceive their party as the best option available (Horowitz, 1985:342). Ethnic parties focus on advancing the interests of a specific group, which puts additional strain on societal mechanisms for resolving conflicts between groups (Horowitz, 1985:298). When multiple parties compete for the same ethnic voter base, this dynamic intensifies.

In South Africa's context, the competing parties under this analysis are vying for the same voter demographic: South African citizens. As mentioned previously, the stakes were particularly high in this election, as the ANC was predicted to lose its majority vote, opening opportunities for these smaller parties to gain representation in the national assembly. For newer parties like Operation Dudula and ActionSA, which had never competed in elections before, this moment was crucial to establish themselves. Similarly, the PA sought to expand its modest representation. This shared context aligns closely with Horowitz's theory, as these parties are not among South Africa's top political contenders but are trying to leverage this pivotal election to carve out political space and gain representation.

To secure votes, these parties engaged in outbidding behaviour, as described in Horowitz's theory. Ethnic party leaders often adopt increasingly ethnically charged rhetoric and demands to maintain loyalty and outcompete rivals (Horowitz,

1985:343-344). In this case, they used heightened anti-immigrant rhetoric to position themselves as the party most capable of addressing the issue of illegal immigration. This theme also builds on the previous two theories, which highlighted the parties' use of rhetoric, first to bolster patriotism and second to employ exclusionary language that marginalizes foreign nationals. This theme further illustrates the escalation of such rhetoric as a means to outcompete the other parties.

All three parties engaged in this outbidding behaviour, Operation Dudula and the PA are the most similar in the way they go about this. Both use extreme anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric throughout the data. McKenzie employs inflammatory imagery by referring to illegal foreigners as 'devils' and claiming that he will personally switch off the oxygen of illegal foreigners is the most descriptive example of the escalation of rhetoric, where he paints them as undeserving of basic humanity. Operation Dudula exemplifies the most extreme escalation of hostility and xenophobic rhetoric among the three parties examined. In the most severe instance, chants such as "*Burn the foreigner. We will go to the garage, buy some petrol, and burn the foreigner*" showcase the dangerous escalation of hostility. This approach aligns closely with ethnic outbidding theory, as they seek dominance in the anti-immigrant discourse by adopting extreme measures and rhetoric to appeal to their base.

These two parties also escalate rhetoric by exaggerating claims, such as Dubula's assertion that "foreigners have taken 90 percent of our South African township economy." This extreme and inaccurate statement paints foreign nationals as economic aggressors, fostering resentment and amplifying xenophobic sentiments. This is also evident for the PA, where McKenzie exaggerates the number of undocumented foreigners in South Africa, claiming that there are at least 11 million, despite the actual figure foreign nationals being around 4 million (Kaziboni et al., 2022). He suggests that deporting them would instantly create millions of jobs. This inflated rhetoric is part of an outbidding strategy, positioning his party as the most capable of addressing illegal immigration.

On the other hand, ActionSA presents a more measured tone compared to the other two parties. While their rhetoric is less inflammatory, it still contains harmful xenophobic

undertones and fits the pattern of political outbidding by addressing the issue of illegal immigration. Mashaba's statement, "*So the chaos that is here caused by this illegal immigration will stop under Action SA,*" simplifies complex societal issues by attributing them to undocumented immigration. While less inflammatory, this rhetoric reinforces negative stereotypes and creates an exaggerated sense of urgency. By framing his party as uniquely capable of restoring order, Mashaba subtly aligns with political strategies to outbid competitors on the immigration issue. This is also shown in the party's personal overview of specific illegal immigration cases, the party demonstrates its direct involvement in addressing illegal immigration. This creates a perception of competence and commitment, distinguishing ActionSA from other parties. Blame-shifting is another tactic Mashaba uses, as seen in his statement from the opening ceremony of the ActionSA policy conference where Mashaba employs targeted criticism of the ruling ANC to outbid them on the immigration issue.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Answering the research questions:

In presenting these themes, the answers to the two research questions become clear, both how these politicians use xenophobic rhetoric in the lead up to the 2024 elections and how their strategies overlap and differ from one another.

Question 1: How do South African politicians use xenophobic rhetoric as a political tool in the lead-up to the 2024 elections?

The points of ethnic outbidding theory offered an important framework when analysing the data, with the three themes offering the explanation to the first question. All three parties, to different extents, fostered a sense of patriotism by framing foreign nationals in a negative way as a strategy to foster a sense of national unity against the 'threat'. The parties then took part in creating an us vs them narrative through exclusionary language and actions to solidify the image of undocumented foreign nationals as a threat to South African opportunities and safety in the country, by reinforcing negative

stereotypes and appealing to the fears and anxieties held by the population. And lastly, all three parties engaged in outbidding behaviour through an escalation of anti-immigrant rhetoric as a way to position themselves as the party to deal with the issue of illegal foreigners the best.

Question 2 - How do different political parties and leaders' strategies vary in their use of xenophobic rhetoric during the 2024 election campaigns?

Throughout the themes, the parties showcased both unique and overlapping strategies in their rhetoric. Mashaba's approach under ActionSA was notably softer and more measured compared to the aggressive and extreme tones adopted by Gayton McKenzie of the PA and Zandile Dubula of Operation Dudula. While ActionSA framed its stance on immigration within broader policy discussions, the PA and Operation Dudula employed more polarizing rhetoric that leaned heavily on fear and scapegoating. Operation Dudula distinguished itself by its origins as a vigilante movement, targeting illegal immigration as its sole focus. Unlike ActionSA and the PA, which function as formal political parties participating in national elections, Dudula initially operated at the community level, directly engaging with grievances on the ground, which was central to their identity. In contrast, ActionSA and the PA presented their positions through official policies and election manifestos, aiming for broader legitimacy within the political landscape. Despite their structural differences, the PA and Operation Dudula shared a reliance on extreme and threatening rhetoric, underscoring anxieties about safety and jobs. This approach contrasted with ActionSA's comparatively restrained tone, though all three parties reflected elements of ethnic outbidding in their strategies.

7.2 Final insights:

This research provides critical insights into strategies to reduce xenophobic rhetoric among politicians, thereby limiting their role in normalizing and escalating xenophobia, which often leads to social divisions and conflict. By analysing how politicians frame immigrants negatively, this study uncovers the mechanisms through which exclusionary narratives become mainstream, ultimately contributing to societal polarization. The

findings emphasize the importance of fostering inclusivity and resilience in communities.

Focusing on three smaller political parties, the research highlights how even non-dominant actors can significantly influence public discourse and shape broader narratives around migration. These parties' rhetoric not only affects public attitudes but also informs policy debates, demonstrating their ability to impact political outcomes. This focus underscores the importance of examining smaller political groups, as they often play a substantial role in fuelling divisive narratives, which calls for further exploration of their influence.

This study also adds to the literature on political rhetoric in democratic societies, particularly the intersection of such rhetoric with xenophobic attitudes. It encourages future research into how exclusionary discourse impacts voter behaviour, policymaking, and democratic health. By understanding these dynamics, scholars and practitioners can develop strategies to counter xenophobic narratives, promote inclusive dialogue, and mitigate societal divisions.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on how alarmist political language contributes to xenophobia, emphasizing the need for ongoing study and proactive measures to counter divisive tactics. By addressing the harmful role of political rhetoric, future efforts can work toward building unity and fostering progress within democratic societies.

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