

# African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues

Volume 29 Number 3, August, 2026 Edition

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Journal of the African Society for THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
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# WHO FEARS THE “OUTSIDERS”? THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT, ETHNICITY, AND ECONOMIC STRATA ON XENOPHOBIC ATTITUDES AMONG RESIDENTS OF IBADAN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Xenophobia has attracted increasing scholarly attention because of its implications for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in multi-ethnic societies. The present study examined the influence of social support, ethnicity, and socio-economic indicators (academic qualification, employment type, and income level) on xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis. A cross-sectional survey design was used and data were collected through a stratified convenience sample of 387 residents from two Local Government Areas within Ibadan Metropolis. Multiple regression analysis showed that the predictors jointly accounted for 21% of the variance in xenophobic attitudes ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(4,382) = 24.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Social support was significantly associated with xenophobic attitudes ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while higher income ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .036$ ) and formal employment/entrepreneurship ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were associated with lower xenophobic attitudes. Academic qualification was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The three social support domains jointly accounted for 27% of the variance in xenophobic attitudes ( $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(3,383) = 77.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Disaggregating them revealed that friend support positively predicted xenophobic attitudes ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while family support was a significant negative predictor ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p < .005$ ). Support from significant others was not a significant predictor ( $p > .05$ ). One-way ANOVA indicated significant differences across income groups, with the lowest income earners reporting higher xenophobia. Unemployed participants also reported significantly higher xenophobic attitudes than those employed or running businesses. Ethnicity showed only a marginal effect among Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba groups. The findings indicate differential associations for social support (friend support positively associated; family support negatively associated) and underscore the importance of economic factors in relation to xenophobic attitudes in this sample. Interventions should consider economic empowerment and peer network norms while strengthening family-based protective factors.*

**Keywords:** Xenophobia; Social Support; Income Level; Ethnicity; Ibadan Metropolis.

## INTRODUCTION

Xenophobia is derived from the Greek words *xenos* meaning stranger or foreigner and *phobos* meaning fear. It refers to irrational fear, dislike, or hostility toward people perceived as “outsiders”. Xenophobic attitudes often emerge when individuals or communities perceive “outsiders” as threats to their culture, identity, values, socioeconomic security, position, or access to scarce resources (Agaigbe & Akuraga, 2025). It is commonly expressed through prejudice, stereotyping, social distancing, social exclusion, stigmatization, discrimination, and, in severe cases, violence and genocide against the “outsiders” who may be displaced individuals, non-citizens, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other non-indigenes.

In Nigeria, xenophobic attitudes have manifested in different forms, including indigeneity, segregation, bigotry, hostility toward non-indigenes, *Igbophobia* (also known as anti-Igbo sentiment), and the ethnic profiling of Fulani as bandits and kidnappers due to the involvement of some criminal actors within these communities in banditry, kidnapping, and terrorism across the country (Elekwa & Ukwuma, 2025; Igwe, 2024). Historical accounts show that traditional rulers in Northern Nigeria persuaded the colonial officials to ensure that southerners were only allowed to settle in areas known as strangers’ quarters or Sabongari settlements, and not permitted to establish their place of abode near the old cities of Kano and Sokoto (Ogunsanwo, 2015).

Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most salient identity in Nigeria (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). The country has hundreds of ethnic groups identified based on their language and cultural traits.

The Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba are the most numerous and influential in the country. Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, is a predominantly Yoruba city that hosts significant populations of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and other minority ethnic groups. Historically, Hausa-Fulani immigrants within the Ibadan metropolis have predominantly settled in the Sabo, Sasa, and Sango quarters, and dominated the Kara livestock markets in Bodija and Akinyele, kolanut depot in the Oja'ba, and pepper and onion market in Sasa (Albert, 2015). Following the 15 May 2026 abduction of 39 pupils and 7 teachers in the Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State, there is a rising ethnic profiling and stigmatization of Hausa-Fulani based on tribal identity in Ibadan due to the abduction (Daily Times Nigeria, 2026). Members of the Hausa-Fulani community rejected the association of their entire ethnic group with the actions of suspected criminals.

The Igbo community in Ibadan metropolis has established businesses, accommodations and their own kind of restaurants and bars in areas like Mokola, Dugbe, Okoro village and its environs (Onumonu, 2023). Nwokocha (2015) found that most young Igbo in Ibadan are more acquainted with the Yoruba language than the Igbo language. Nwokocha (2015) reported that some Igbo have difficulty renting an apartment from some Yoruba landlords within the metropolis who refused to take the Igbo as tenants. The Igbo population rarely contested elections in Ibadan, participating in the electoral process primarily as voters or indirectly as advisers to office holders, due to some prevailing ethnic sentiments in Nigerian politics (Nwokocha, 2015). These developments highlight the need to examine xenophobic attitudes not only as a political issue, but also as a social and psychological attitude.

Social support from family, friends, and significant others provides emotional, informational, and instrumental resources that help individuals cope with stress and maintain psychological well-being (Thoits, 2011; Zimet et al., 1990). In some cases, strong in-group support may promote security and resilience, in others, it may reinforce social boundaries and exclusion, especially where economic strain is already present (Stevenson et al., 2020). This dual role of social support is consistent with Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), which explains how in-group favouritism can reinforce social hierarchies. Thus, the role of social support in xenophobic attitudes can have different effects depending on the structure of that support (Heller et al., 2024). *Families serve as significant sources of socialization that can influence children's attitude towards racism and xenophobia (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Additionally, family support has been demonstrated to buffer against the negative consequences of discrimination (Zapolski et al., 2016). Peer socialization processes have been shown to significantly influence outgroup attitudes, with ingroup friends' attitudes exerting stronger influence than outgroup friends' attitudes (Bracegirdle et al., 2023). Negative peer group norms may encourage discrimination and inadvertently allow prejudicial attitudes to persist (McGuire et al., 2015; Mulvey et al., 2016).*

Economic indicators, as determined by one's income level, employment type, and educational attainment, may further influence this relationship. Young et al. (2018) showed that xenophobic attitudes to immigration are not linear across income levels, with middle-income countries often displaying stronger restrictionist preferences than low-income countries. Empirical evidence in Europe shows that perceived or actual economic well-being is negatively related to racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobic attitudes (Mocan & Raschke, 2016). Steenkamp (2009) revealed that vulnerability to competition with immigrants over limited resources like jobs can translate into xenophobia, particularly when people lack a social support. Similarly, Mayda (2006) provided descriptive evidence that prejudice against low-skill migrants attenuates in countries with a large

share of high-skill workers, suggesting that private threats of job competition are an important determinant of prejudice against migrants.

Conversely, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) argue that anti-migrant attitudes often manifest among low-skilled and high-skilled hosts. A study in Sub-Saharan Africa found that individuals in economically vulnerable or middle-strata positions may display stronger restrictionist or xenophobic attitudes when they perceive “outsiders” as competitors for their jobs, opportunities, status, or resources (Becker et al., 2022). Unemployed persons and individuals who perceived employment opportunities as scarce tend to scapegoat outgroup members and see them as direct economic competitors (Becker et al., 2022; Heller et al., 2024). Those with unstable employment status tend to compete for the few job positions and they may be more likely to view “outsiders” as threats. Such persons are more likely to agree with protectionist sentiments, such as *“When jobs are scarce, foreigners should be sent home”* (Heller et al., 2024).

Education tends to provide opportunities for intergroup contacts which are likely to impact on hostility toward “outsiders”. Mocan and Raschke (2016) reported that academic qualification and contact with foreigners mitigate anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and racist attitudes in Germany. Daşlı and Şimşek (2025) found that health workers with higher academic training reported lower xenophobic attitudes, whereas Haerpfer and Wallace (1998) found that Europeans with lower educational attainment were significantly more likely to express xenophobic attitudes toward migrants and ethnic minorities than the highly educated. Similarly, Campbell et al. (2018) reported that education has moderating influence on discriminatory attitudes and that people with lower levels of education were more likely to be xenophobic than those with higher education.

This study therefore examines the influence of academic qualification, employment type, income level, and social support on xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis. It also investigates whether xenophobic attitudes differ across domains of social support, levels of monthly income, employment status and ethnic groups. By focusing on these variables, the study addresses an important gap in Nigerian research on how economic position and social relationships combine to influence xenophobic attitudes.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Do academic qualification, employment type, income level, and social support jointly and independently predict xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis?

RQ2: Do residents with dominant source of support from Friends, Family, and Significant Others significantly predict their level of xenophobic attitudes?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on the levels of monthly income among residents of Ibadan metropolis?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes between unemployed individuals and employees/entrepreneurs residing in Ibadan metropolis?

RQ5: Are there significant differences in xenophobic attitudes across the three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) within the Ibadan metropolis?

## **Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: Academic qualification, employment type, income level, and social support would significantly predict xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis.

Hypothesis 2: There would be a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on dimension of social support among residents of Ibadan metropolis.

Hypothesis 3: There would be a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on levels of monthly income among residents of Ibadan metropolis.

Hypothesis 4: There would be a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on employment status.

Hypothesis 5: There would be significant difference in xenophobic attitudes across the three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) within the Ibadan metropolis.

## METHODS

**Design:** A cross-sectional design was adopted to examine the influence of academic qualification, employment type, income level, and social support on xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis in Oyo State, Nigeria.

**Setting and Sampling Technique:** The study was conducted among adult indigene and non-indigene residents of Ibadan metropolis. Ibadan is the largest Yoruba settlement and it has a large population of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and other non-indigene residents. Participants were recruited through a non-probability stratified convenience sampling approach. Ibadan metropolis was stratified into Ibadan North and Oluyole Local Government Areas to reflect urban and suburban settings respectively. Respondents were conveniently recruited from public spaces (markets, parks, shopping malls, religious centres, and residential neighbourhoods) within the two local government areas.

**Sample Size:** The target population for this study comprised 440,400 residents of Ibadan North and 290,800 residents of Oluyole Local Government Areas (citypopulation.de, 2022), yielding a combined target population of 731,200 residents. The sample size was determined using the Slovin's formula ( $n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$ ), with a margin of error set at 5%). This calculation yielded a minimum required sample of 400 participants. A total of 410 questionnaires were distributed, of which 387 were valid and complete (response rate = 94.4%).

**Instruments:** Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic items, the Xenophobic Attitudes Scale, and the Perceived Social Support Scale.

**Demographic Characteristics.** Five items assessed age, gender, highest academic qualification, employment types, and average monthly income. Socioeconomic position was operationalized as educational attainment, employment status, and income level. These indicators were entered separately into the analyses to examine their independent and joint associations with xenophobic attitudes. For analytical purposes, employees and entrepreneurs were combined into a single employee/entrepreneur category, as preliminary analyses revealed no significant difference between these two groups ( $p > .05$ ), and both represent forms of economic participation distinct from unemployment. Employment status was coded 0 = unemployed, 1 = employed/entrepreneurs while average monthly income was coded such that higher values represent higher income categories: 1 = less than ₦250,000, 2 = ₦250,000–₦450,000, 3 = more than ₦450,000. For the ethnicity analysis, only participants who identified as Hausa-Fulani, Igbo,

or Yoruba were included (n = 373), as these represent the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and provided sufficient sample sizes for meaningful comparison. Participants identifying as 'Other' (n = 37, 9.0%) were excluded from the ethnicity-specific analyses.

Xenophobic attitude was measured using the 24-item Xenophobia Scale developed by Olonisakin & Adebayo (2021), validated with a Nigerian sample. It comprises two subscales: *ingroup centredness* (e.g., “I don’t care if protecting my ethnic group’s interests results in discomfort for others”) and *ingroup exclusivity* (e.g., “It is possible to genuinely like people of other ethnic groups” – reverse scored). Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher total scores indicate higher xenophobic attitudes. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .85$  for ingroup centredness,  $\alpha = .83$  for exclusivity) in the original validation. In this study, the overall scale yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .89 among the 24 items within the current sample.

Social support was assessed using the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1990), which measures perceived adequacy of support from family, friends, and significant others. Items are rated on a 7-point scale (1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree). Total scores range from 12 to 84; higher scores reflect greater perceived social support. Subscale scores were used to examine source-specific associations with xenophobic attitudes. In this study,  $\alpha = .79$ , with the internal consistency of the three dimensions ranging from  $\alpha = 0.67$  to 0.79.

**Procedure:** The researchers approached potential participants in public settings. Participants were given a detailed explanation of the research, assured anonymity and confidentiality, and thereafter their consent was obtained. Questionnaires were self-administered and collected immediately. Data collection took place over four months (January to April 2026).

**Data Analysis:** We analysed the data using Jeffreys’ Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) (Version 0.95.4; JASP Team, 2025). Multiple linear regression was used to test the joint and independent effects of social support and economic strata on xenophobic attitudes. Independent samples t-test and One-way ANOVA with Tukey’s Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc tests were used to examine differences in xenophobic attitudes across ethnic, employment status, and income groups. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

## RESULTS

A total of 387 residents of Ibadan metropolis participated in the study. The mean age of respondents was 32.36 years (SD = 9.56), with ages ranging from 19 to 50 years. The sample had a slight female majority (53.2%) and the most common educational qualification was Secondary School Certificate (58.1%). Majority of respondents were unemployed (58.9%), earning less than ₦250,000 (70.0%) and of Yoruba ethnicity (44.1%). A summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Participants’ Demographic Characteristics

| Variable  | Category                     | n   | Percent | Mean  | SD   |
|-----------|------------------------------|-----|---------|-------|------|
| Age       |                              | 387 |         | 32.36 | 9.56 |
| Gender    | Male                         | 181 | 46.8    |       |      |
|           | Female                       | 206 | 53.2    |       |      |
| Education | Secondary School Certificate | 225 | 58.1    |       |      |

|                   |                       |     |      |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----|------|
| Employment Status | HND/Bachelor          | 134 | 34.6 |
|                   | PGD/Masters/PhD       | 28  | 7.2  |
|                   | Unemployed            | 228 | 58.9 |
|                   | Employee/Entrepreneur | 159 | 41.1 |
| Monthly Income    | Less than ₦250,000    | 271 | 70.0 |
|                   | ₦250,000 – ₦450,000   | 89  | 23.0 |
|                   | More than ₦450,000    | 27  | 7.0  |
| Ethnicity         | Hausa-Fulani          | 81  | 19.8 |
|                   | Igbo                  | 111 | 27.1 |
|                   | Yoruba                | 181 | 44.1 |
|                   | Others                | 37  | 9.0  |

**Hypothesis 1:** Academic qualification, employment type, income level, and social support would significantly predict xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis. Table 2 presents the results of multiple regression coefficients.

**Table 2.** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Xenophobic Attitudes

| Predictor              | B     | SE   | $\beta$ | t     | p    | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | F     | Sig.  |
|------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------|------|------|----------------|-------|-------|
| Social Support         | .46   | .05  | .40     | 8.55  | .000 | 0.45 | 0.21           | 24.66 | <.001 |
| Level of Income        | -1.24 | .59  | -.10    | -2.11 | .036 |      |                |       |       |
| Employment Status      | -6.19 | 1.49 | -.19    | -4.15 | .000 |      |                |       |       |
| Academic Qualification | -.12  | .59  | -.01    | -.20  | .838 |      |                |       |       |

Dependent Variable: Xenophobic Attitude

The regression model was statistically significant ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(4,382) = 24.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and accounted for 21% of variance in xenophobic attitudes, leaving substantial unexplained variance. Social support positively predicted xenophobic attitudes ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while higher income level ( $\beta = -0.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and being employed/entrepreneur ( $\beta = -0.19$ ,  $p < .010$ ) were associated with lower xenophobic attitudes. Academic qualification was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported

**Hypothesis 2:** There would be a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on dimension of social support among residents of Ibadan metropolis. The hypothesis was tested using multiple linear regression and summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Xenophobic Attitudes

| Predictor          | B    | SE  | $\beta$ | t     | p      | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | F     | Sig.  |
|--------------------|------|-----|---------|-------|--------|------|----------------|-------|-------|
| Family Support     | -.53 | .19 | -.19    | -2.82 | < .005 | 0.52 | 0.27           | 77.63 | <.001 |
| Friends Support    | 1.35 | .15 | .44     | 9.05  | < .001 |      |                |       |       |
| Significant Others | .11  | .22 | .03     | .48   | > .05  |      |                |       |       |

Dependent Variable: Xenophobic Attitude

The regression model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 383) = 77.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , and accounted for 27% of the variance in xenophobic attitudes ( $R^2 = .27$ ). Family Support was a significant negative predictor ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p < .005$ ) and Friends Support was a positive predictor ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Support from Significant Others did not significantly predict xenophobic attitudes ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

**Hypothesis 3:** There would be a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on levels of monthly income among residents of Ibadan metropolis. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with income level as the independent variable (three levels: less than ₦250,000; ₦250,000–₦450,000; and more than ₦450,000) and

xenophobic attitude scores as the dependent variable. The results were summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4.** One-Way ANOVA Summary for Xenophobic Attitude by Levels of Income

| Source         | SS       | df  | MS     | F    | p    | $\eta^2$ |
|----------------|----------|-----|--------|------|------|----------|
| Between groups | 1313.84  | 2   | 656.92 | 3.61 | .028 | 0.018    |
| Within groups  | 69856.13 | 384 | 181.92 |      |      |          |
| Total          | 71169.97 | 386 |        |      |      |          |

Dependent Variable: Xenophobic Attitude

The ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference in xenophobic attitudes across income groups,  $F(2, 384) = 3.61, p = .028, \eta^2 = .018$ , indicating a small-to-moderate effect. Results of Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc tests were presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Post-hoc Comparisons (Tukey's HSD) for Xenophobic Attitude by Income Level

| Comparison by levels of income   | Mean difference | p     | 95% CI         |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------|----------------|
| < ₦250,000 vs. ₦250,000–₦450,000 | 6.27            | .021  | [3.37, 11.61]  |
| ₦250,000–₦450,000 vs. > ₦450,000 | .01             | 1.000 | [-5.96, 5.98]  |
| < ₦250,000 vs. > ₦450,000        | 5.62            | .137  | [-1.45, 14.00] |

Note: Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test was employed.

Post-hoc results showed that respondents earning less than ₦250,000 reported significantly higher xenophobic attitudes than those earning ₦250,000–₦450,000, while differences involving the highest income group were non-significant. Hypothesis 3 was supported.

**Hypothesis 4:** There would be a significant difference in xenophobic attitudes based on employment status. The hypothesis was tested using Independent Samples t-Test and summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Xenophobic Attitudes by Employment Status

| Group                  | n   | M     | SD    | t    | df     | p      | 95% CI (MD)  |
|------------------------|-----|-------|-------|------|--------|--------|--------------|
| Unemployed             | 228 | 72.14 | 12.73 | 3.58 | 160.85 | < .001 | [2.48, 8.58] |
| Employed/Entrepreneurs | 159 | 66.61 | 13.59 |      |        |        |              |

Levene's test:  $F = 7.47, p = .007$

The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between unemployed and employed/entrepreneurial participants ( $t(160.85) = 3.58, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.48, 8.58]$ ). Unemployed respondents reported significantly higher xenophobic attitudes ( $M = 72.14, SD = 12.73$ ) than those who were employed or entrepreneurs ( $M = 66.61, SD = 13.59$ ). Hypothesis 4 was supported.

**Hypothesis 5:** There would be significant difference in xenophobic attitudes across the three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) within Ibadan metropolis. To test this hypothesis, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted and the results were presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** One-way ANOVA Summary for Xenophobic Attitude by Ethnicity

| Source         | SS       | df  | MS     | F    | p     | $\eta^2$ |
|----------------|----------|-----|--------|------|-------|----------|
| Between Groups | 1116.75  | 2   | 558.37 | 3.05 | 0.049 | 0.016    |
| Within Groups  | 67767.08 | 370 | 183.15 |      |       |          |
| Total          | 68883.83 | 372 |        |      |       |          |

Dependent Variable: Xenophobic Attitude

The ANOVA revealed a marginally significant overall difference across ethnic groups ( $F(2, 370) = 3.05, p = .049, \eta^2 = .016$ ). The effect size indicated a small effect, with approximately 1.6% of the variance in xenophobic attitudes attributable to ethnicity.

**Table 8.** Post-hoc Comparisons (Tukey's HSD) for Xenophobic Attitude by Ethnic Differences

| Comparison              | Mean difference | <i>p</i> | 95% CI        |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------|
| Igbo vs. Hausa-Fulani   | 1.34            | 0.78     | [-3.31, 6.00] |
| Igbo vs. Yoruba         | 4.11            | 0.06     | [-0.15, 8.36] |
| Yoruba vs. Hausa-Fulani | 2.76            | 0.21     | [-1.08, 6.60] |

Note. MD = Mean Difference; CI = Confidence Interval.

Although the overall ANOVA was marginally significant ( $p = .049$ ), the minimal effect size ( $\eta^2 = .016$ ) and the absence of significant pairwise differences (all  $p > .05$ ) detected no robust ethnic differences. Hypothesis 5 was therefore not supported.

## DISCUSSION

Findings from the present study suggest that social support was associated with higher xenophobic attitudes, possibly reflecting ingroup attachment and boundary maintenance rather than openness to “outsiders” (Stevenson et al., 2020). In this sense, social support may be associated with the maintenance of group boundaries and in-group favouritism when it is embedded in exclusionary social norms (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The negative association between **family support** and xenophobic attitudes is consistent with evidence that families serve as primary agents of socialization around race, ethnicity, and moral norms, and can buffer against the psychological impact of discrimination (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020; Zapolski et al., 2016). In many Nigerian households, family narratives about hardship and intergroup relations may emphasize broad moral obligations or religious values that promote tolerance. In this context, stronger family support is associated with a more secure sense of belonging and reduces the need to scapegoat “outsiders” for one’s difficulties. By contrast, the positive association between friends’ support and xenophobic attitudes aligns with research on peer socialization and group norms, which shows that in-group friends’ attitudes have a powerful influence on outgroup attitudes (Bracegirdle et al., 2023). Peer groups may serve as sites where grievances, rumours, and stereotypes about migrants or non-indigenes are circulated and normalized (McGuire et al., 2015; Mulvey et al., 2016). The overall social support predicts higher xenophobia in the regression model which likely reflects the dominance of the peer-based mechanism over the protective effects of family support.

Regarding economic factors, both low income and unemployment were linked to higher xenophobic attitudes. Respondents earning less than ₦250,000 per month exhibited significantly higher xenophobia than those in higher income brackets, and unemployed residents reported more xenophobic attitudes than employees or entrepreneurs. The negative coefficient suggests that certain employment categories (likely those with greater job security or business owners) are associated with lower xenophobia compared to unemployed residents. Empirical work from Europe suggests that economic well-being is negatively related to racism and xenophobia (Mocan & Raschke, 2016). When individuals perceive jobs, housing, or business opportunities as limited, “outsiders” are more easily framed as direct competitors or threats, reinforcing support for protectionist sentiments such as sending foreigners home when jobs are scarce (Heller et al., 2024). In sub-Saharan Africa, those in economically vulnerable or lower-strata positions often show stronger restrictionist attitudes when they perceive outsiders as competing for their status and resources (Becker et al., 2022). This is consistent with the argument that

unstable employment status can heighten scapegoating of outgroup members as “stealing our jobs” (Becker et al., 2022; Heller et al., 2024). These align with the findings of Agaigbe and Akuraga (2025) that identified economic insecurity and social separation as drivers for xenophobic attitudes and hostility toward “outsiders”. Within Ibadan metropolis, low-income and unemployed residents appear more susceptible to xenophobic narratives and more likely to be receptive to blaming non-indigenes, migrants, or specific ethnic groups for their precarious situation.

The study detected no significant association of academic qualification with xenophobic attitudes. This contrasts with findings that academic qualification mitigates prejudice, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and racist attitudes (Daşlı & Şimşek, 2025; Mocan & Raschke, 2016). Campbell et al. (2018) posited that higher education can mitigate prejudice and discriminatory attitudes by increasing intergroup contact and critical reflection. Similarly, the non-significant relationship between academic qualification and xenophobic attitudes in our sample diverges from the findings of Haerpfer and Wallace (1998), who observed a negative association between education and xenophobia in Europe. The limited representation of postgraduate degree holders in our sample (7.2%) may have attenuated the ability to detect a significant education effect.

Although ethnicity is widely regarded as a foundational identity axis in Nigeria (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005), xenophobic attitudes were largely uniform across the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba ethnic groups in this sample. The study found only a small overall effect of ethnicity on xenophobic attitudes and no significant pairwise differences among the ethnic groups in Ibadan. The near-significant comparison between Igbo and Yoruba ( $p = .061$ ) could be due to the historic marginalisation and discrimination of the Igbo in parts of Nigeria. However, the small sub-sample sizes and the resultant low statistical power of the post-hoc pairwise comparisons may have weakened the model's capacity to detect significant differences. It should be noted that many members of the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba communities have lived side by side for generations, engaging in trade, intermarriage, and social interaction (Albert, 2015; Nwokocha, 2015). This extended contact may have reduced ethnic salience and moderated the relationship between ethnicity and xenophobic attitudes (Allport, 1954).

Taken together, these findings suggest that xenophobic attitudes in Ibadan are best understood at the intersection of economic vulnerability and the structure of social support networks. Under conditions of low income and unemployment, residents appear more receptive to narratives that frame non-indigenes or particular ethnic groups as economic competitors and threats to scarce resources (Agaigbe & Akuraga, 2025; Becker et al., 2022). Within this context, peer-based support networks may resemble social echo chambers, where shared grievances and stereotypes about ‘outsiders’ are exchanged and validated (Bracegirdle et al., 2023; McGuire et al., 2015; Mulvey et al., 2016). In contrast, family support seems to play a modest protective role, consistent with evidence that families socialize broader moral and ethnic-racial norms and buffer the impacts of discrimination (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020; Zapolski et al., 2016). Thus, who fears the ‘outsiders’ in Ibadan appears to depend less on ethnic group membership per se and more on economic strain and the norms circulating within their social support networks.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study examined the influence of social support, ethnicity, and economic strata on xenophobic attitudes among residents of Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that social support from friends is positively associated with xenophobic

attitudes, while family support serves as a protective factor. Unemployment and low income are associated with higher xenophobic attitudes, while ethnic effects appear small and require further study with larger, representative samples. No significant association of academic qualification with xenophobic attitudes was detected in this sample. These findings underscore the importance of economic empowerment and job creation as a strategy for promoting social cohesion and reducing xenophobic attitudes in Ibadan metropolis. Interventions should explicitly challenge ingroup exclusivity and xenophobic narratives within peer networks, while strengthening institutions such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), schools, peer-led initiatives, and community organisations that facilitate positive intergroup contact and inclusive national identity.

### **Limitations**

It is important to emphasise that the findings should be interpreted cautiously and not generalized to the entire population of Ibadan Metropolis due to the sampling strategy employed. First, participants were recruited from only two of the eleven Local Government Areas in Ibadan Metropolis through non-probability stratified convenience sampling. Second, the sample was predominantly low-income (70.0% earning < ₦250,000), which may not represent the full socioeconomic spectrum of Ibadan. Third, the limited representation of individuals with postgraduate degrees may have reduced the ability to detect education effects. The near-significant comparison between Igbo and Yoruba (MD = 4.11,  $p = .061$ , 95% CI [-0.15, 8.36]) may warrant further investigation with larger samples.

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