Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: 1994-2018
An Overview

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Introduction

Xenophobic violence has become a perennial feature in post-Apartheid South Africa.[ii] Indeed, since 1994, tens of thousands of people have been harassed, attacked, or killed because of their status as outsiders or foreign nationals.[iii] Xenophobic violence generally refers to any acts of violence targeted at foreign nationals or "outsiders" because of their being foreign or strangers. It is an explicit targeting of outsiders for violent attacks despite other material, political, cultural or social forces that might be at play.[iv] The main characteristics of this violence in South Africa include murder, assaults, looting, robbery, arson attacks, displacement and threats of violence.

This overview report describes trends of xenophobic violence that occurred between 1994 and 2018 across South Africa based on information recorded on Xenowatch. Xenowatch is an open source platform created by the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand to monitor incidents of –and responses to- xenophobic violence in South Africa (for more details visit www.xenowatch.ac.za). In summary, as at 31 December 2018, Xenowatch had recorded 529 xenophobic violence incidents that resulted in 309 deaths; 901 physical assaults, 2193 shops looted and over 100,000 people displaced.[v]

Xenophobic Violence Trends

Xenophobic violence has become a longstanding feature in post-Apartheid South Africa. Indeed, since 1994, tens of thousands of people have been harassed, attacked, or killed because of their status as outsiders or foreign nationals. Despite claims to the contrary, violence against foreign nationals in South Africa did not end in June 2008 when the massive outbreak that started a month earlier subsided. Hostility towards foreign nationals is still pervasive and remains a serious threat to outsiders' and local communities' lives and livelihoods. It indeed continues to result in rising cases of murder, injuries, threats of mob violence, displacement, looting and the destruction of residential property and businesses.[vi] Since May 2008, attacks against outsiders—most notably foreign shopkeepers and workers—have resulted in an ever growing number of murders and injuries at the hands of members of their host communities.

While Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal provinces remain the most affected, xenophobic violence is increasingly spreading across all the country's nine provinces (see Table II). Violence now regularly occurs in major cities, towns, townships, informal settlements and rural areas across the country. As Table I below shows, by the end of 2018, Xenowatch had recorded 529 xenophobic violence incidents. Of these, 42 occurred in 2018 alone. These attacks resulted in 309 deaths, tens of thousands displaced and thousands of businesses looted. Due to the nature of xenophobic violence, which frequently includes multiple incidents, underreporting, and a lack of detailed information, the figures presented in this report are underestimations of the true extent of victimisation.

Table I: Xenophobic violence incidents and types of victimization: 1994-2018

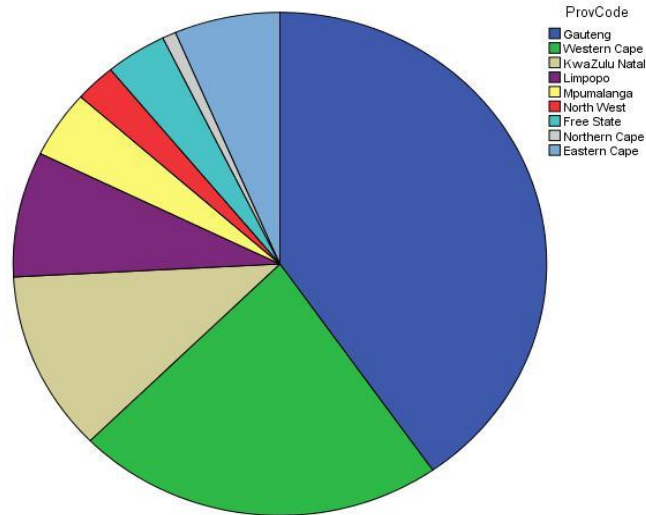| Victimisation	Total (1994-2018)	2018 (Alone)
Total number of incidents	529	42
Deaths	309	12
Physical assaults	901	29
Displaced	100 000+	1 145
Shops looted	2 193	139
Threats to safety or property	257	23

Spatial Trends

While Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal provinces remain the most affected, xenophobic violence is increasingly spreading across all the country's nine provinces. Table II below lists the provinces within which xenophobic violence occurred since 1994. Figure 1 visually displays the percentage of xenophobic incidents that occurred in each province.

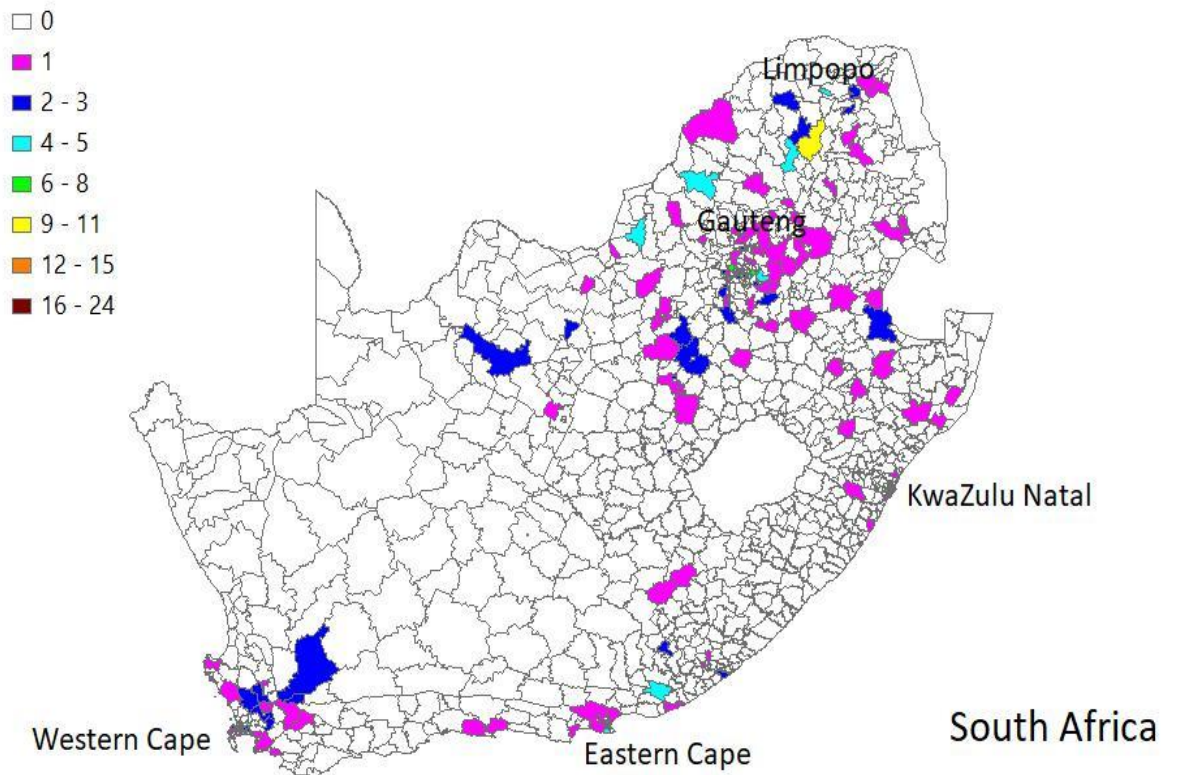Table II: Xenophobic violence incidents by Province, 1994-2018

Province	Number of Incidents	Number of 2018 incidents
Gauteng	212 (40.1%)	17
Western Cape	111 (21.0%)	3
KwaZulu Natal	67 (12.7%)	11
Limpopo	40 (7.6%)	1
Eastern Cape	33 (6.2%)	0
Mpumalanga	22 (4.2%)	1
North West	20 (3.8%)	8
Free State	19 (3.7%)	0
Northern Cape	5 (1.0%)	1
Total	*529 (100%)*	*42*

Figure 1: Xenophobic violence incidents by Province, 1994-2018

As reflected above and illustrated in the map below (Figure 2), Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal have the most reported incidents and have been identified as the hot spot provinces.
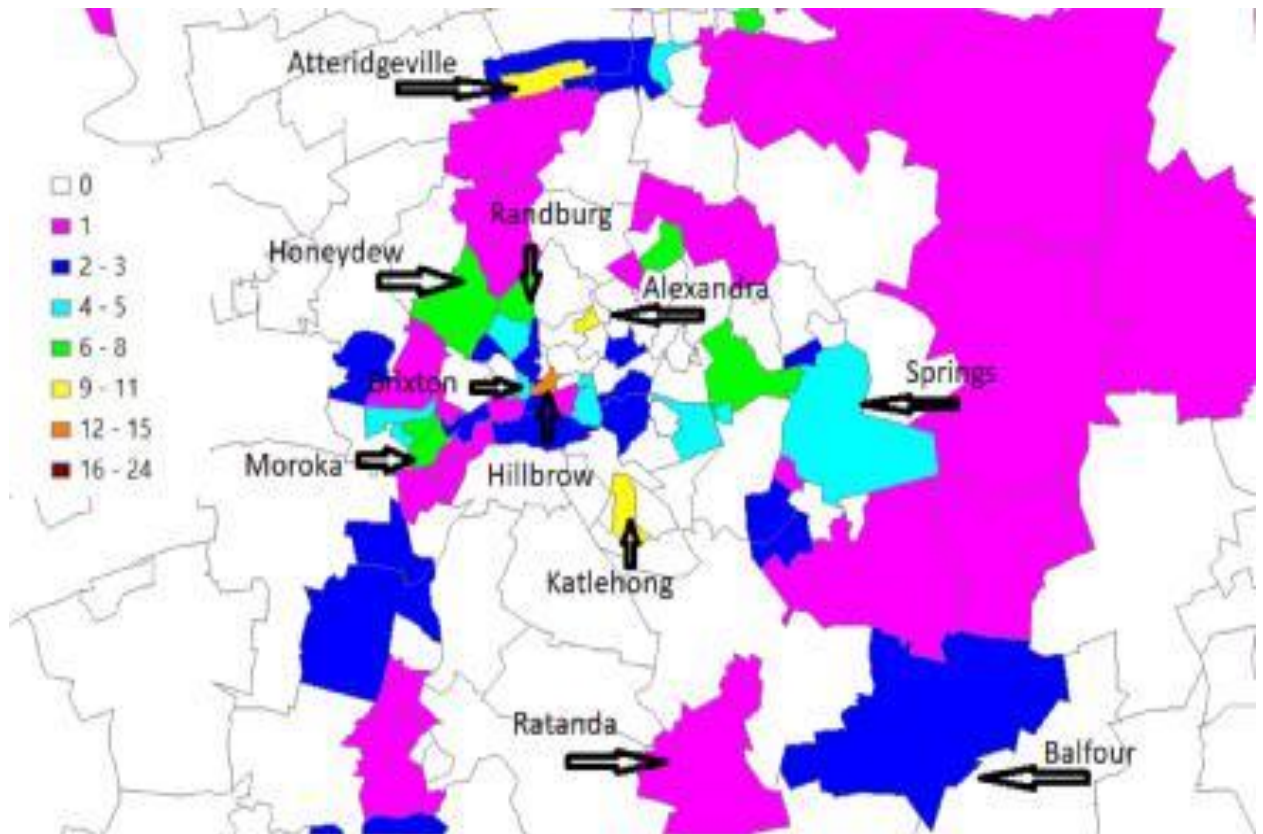
Figure 2. Frequency of xenophobic violence incidents across South Africa, 1994-2018
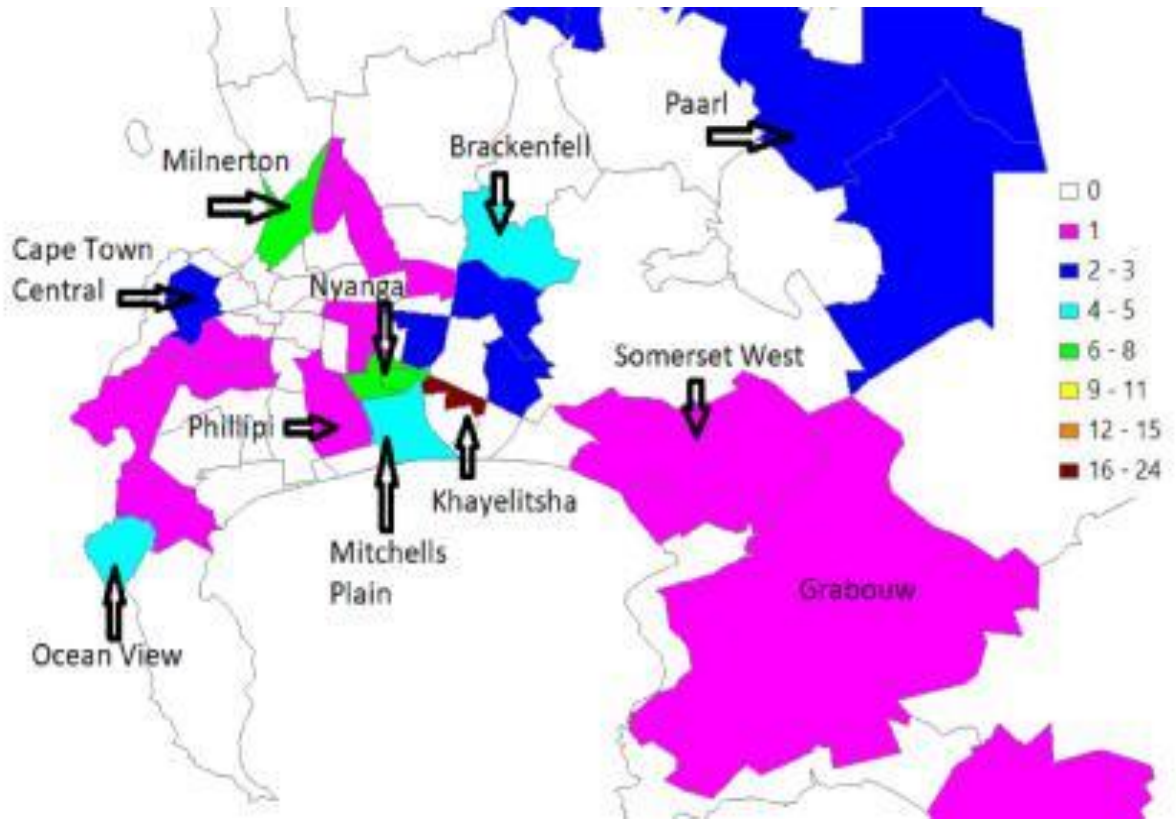
Mapping incidents by Police Precinct

Based on spatial analysis, maps visually describe locations with high frequencies or hot spots of xenophobic violence incidents across the country. The mapping of xenophobic violence incidents within police precincts across South Africa found the following precincts to experience the most reported xenophobic threats and violence in Gauteng: Hillbrow, Katlehong, Alexandra, Diepsloot, Atteridgeville, Mamelodi, Tembisa, Moroka, Jabulani and Benoni.

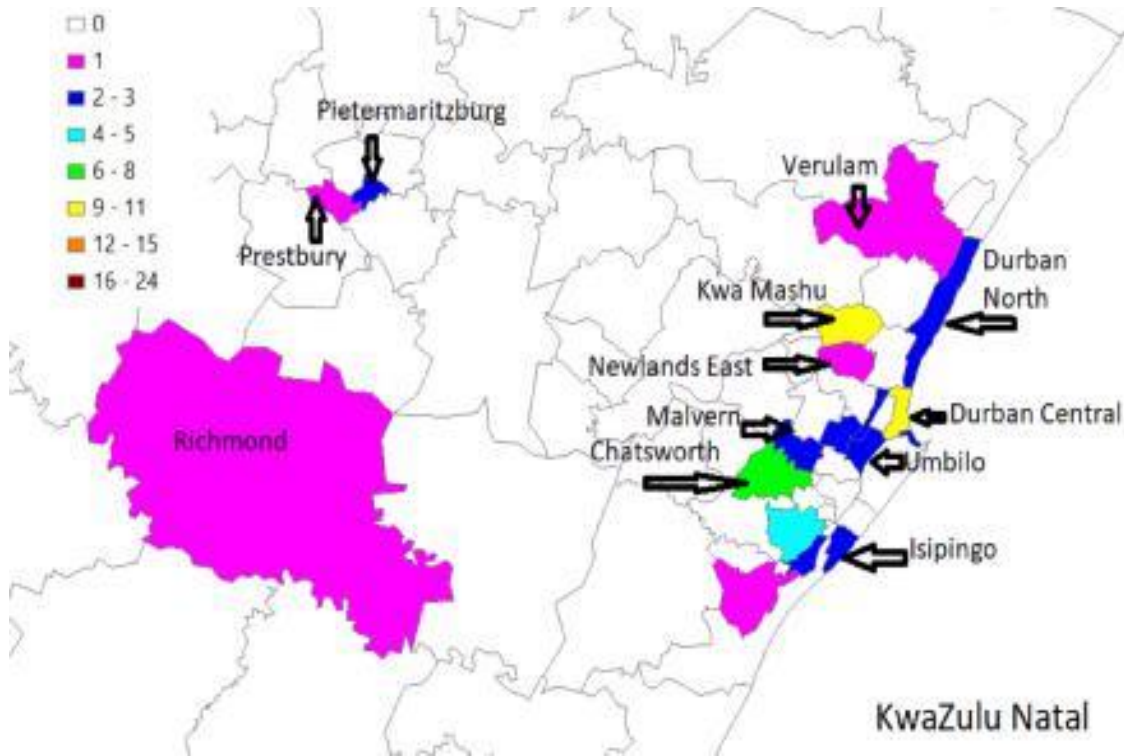Figure 3. Frequency of xenophobic violence incidents in Gauteng, 1994-2018

In the Western Cape, the following precincts were found to experience the most reported xenophobic threats and violence: Khayelitsha, Milnerton, Philippi East, Nyanga, Brackenfell and Mitchells Plain. reported xenophobic incidents.

Figure 4. Frequency of xenophobic violence incidents the Western Cape, 1994-2018

In KwaZulu Natal, the following precincts experienced the most xenophobic violence incidents: Durban Central, Kwa Mashu, Chatsworth, Umlazi and Pietermaritzburg.

Figure 5. Frequency of xenophobic violence incidents in KwaZulu Natal, 1994-2018

Conclusions

This review report provides a trend analysis describing the characteristics and spatial distribution of xenophobic violence in South Africa. It shows that in most of all the country's nine provinces, many areas have become scenes of repeated xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals (i.e. hot spots) since 1994. In the absence of concrete and effective preventive measures, these areas are likely to experience violence again. This assessment should serve as early warning for all stakeholders whose mandate is to ensure safety and rights protection for all (including foreign nationals) in the country.

This information should be combined with local knowledge of risk factors and on-the-ground research to determine specific indicators and causal factors of the violence. Such risk and causal analysis can inform conflict prevention and response mechanisms by civil society, international organisations, the South African Police Service (SAPS), local disaster management, municipal officials responsible for safety and security, and community-based organisations.

It is important to note that the Xenowatch dataset of xenophobic incidents is not exhaustive. While it provides information on 529 incidents, many more are suspected to have occurred since 1994. Such an undercount is not uncommon with crime statistics related to vulnerable populations such as migrants.

[i] This overview is based on a detailed report (*Characteristics and Causal Factors of Xenophobic Violence across South Africa: 1994-2018)* prepared by Alexandra Hiropoulos for ACMS.

[ii] Landau, Loren B. 2011. Introducing the Demons. In *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*, ed. Loren B. Landau, 1–25. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

[iii] Misago, Jean-Pierre. 2016a. Responding to Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: Barking Up the Wrong Tree? *African Human Mobility Review 2 (2): 443–67*.

[iv] Dodson, Belinda. 2010. Locating Xenophobia: Debate, Discourse, and Everyday Experience in Cape Town, South Africa. *Africa Today 56 (3): 2–22*.

[v] These figures may be an underrepresentation of the true extent of the violence in the country since many violence incidents are not reported and therefore not recorded on Xenowatch.

[vi] Misago, J. P., Freemantle, I. & Landau, L. B. (2015). Protection from Xenophobia: An Evaluation of Unhcr's Regional Office for Southern Africa's Xenophobia Related Programmes. ACMS, University of Witwatersrand.