The New Babel Order: Governance Crisis and The Politics of Xenophobic Nationalism

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Abstract
The resurgence of xenophobic nationalism has become a defining feature of contemporary global politics, particularly within Africa and other developing regions where socio-economic insecurity and state fragility intersect. Episodes of hostility toward migrants and foreign nationals increasingly reflect deeper structural contradictions within governance systems rather than isolated cultural or ethnic tensions. This article situates governance crisis as a central explanatory variable in understanding the intensification of xenophobic nationalism in the modern political order often conceptualized here as the "New Babel Order," symbolizing fragmented states marked by weakened cohesion and distorted citizenship relations. The study examines how governance failures, manifested in corruption, unemployment, institutional decay, and unequal distribution of development outcomes generate conditions that fuel exclusionary nationalist sentiments. The article is theoretically anchored in Relative Deprivation Theory and Scapegoat Theory, providing a dual framework for understanding how perceived socio-economic injustice and political manipulation converge to produce hostility toward "outsiders." Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on secondary data from scholarly literature, policy reports, and documented cases of xenophobic violence. Findings indicate that xenophobic nationalism is less a spontaneous cultural phenomenon and more a

politically mediated response to governance deficits and developmental inequality. The study concludes that sustainable mitigation requires institutional reform, inclusive development strategies, and depoliticization of identity narratives.

Keywords: Governance crisis; Xenophobic nationalism; Developmental failure; Political exclusion.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed a paradoxical resurgence of xenophobic nationalism at a time when globalization, regional integration, and transnational mobility were expected to deepen social interconnectedness and cosmopolitan citizenship. Across Europe, North America, Asia, and increasingly Africa, anti-immigrant sentiments have become a prominent feature of political discourse. While xenophobia has often been explained through cultural anxieties, ethnic prejudice, or migration pressures, recent developments suggest that these explanations are insufficient. In many contexts, hostility toward foreigners has emerged alongside worsening economic conditions, declining public trust in institutions, and growing dissatisfaction with political leadership. In Africa, recurrent xenophobic attacks in South Africa, anti-migrant rhetoric in several states, and the politicization of citizenship debates reveal a troubling trend in which foreigners are increasingly portrayed as competitors for scarce opportunities and threats to national identity (Crush & Ramachandran, 2023; Landau, 2024). The persistence of this phenomenon raises a critical question: why are societies that are themselves products of migration and diversity becoming increasingly hostile to outsiders?

This paper argues that the answer lies not merely in migration dynamics but in the deeper crisis of governance and development confronting many contemporary states. Economic stagnation, rising unemployment, widening inequality, institutional weakness, and ineffective service delivery have generated widespread frustrations among citizens whose expectations of development remain unmet. Under such conditions, migrants and foreign nationals often become convenient scapegoats for structural failures that originate within the state itself. Rather than addressing governance deficiencies, political actors frequently redirect public grievances toward external populations, transforming socio-economic frustrations into exclusionary nationalist sentiments (Mudde, 2023; Mylonas & Tudor, 2025). Xenophobia, therefore, should not be viewed solely as a social pathology but as a political outcome embedded within broader patterns of governance failure and developmental contradictions.

To conceptualize this crisis, the paper employs the metaphor of **"**The New Babel Order." Drawing inspiration from the biblical narrative of Babel, the concept captures the fragmentation of contemporary political communities characterized by social distrust, weakened solidarity, contested citizenship, and the erosion of collective purpose. Unlike the original Babel, where linguistic division disrupted human cooperation, the modern Babel emerges from governance failures that fracture societies into competing identities and hierarchies of belonging. In this fragmented order, citizens increasingly retreat into exclusionary notions of nationhood, while migrants become symbols of insecurity, economic displacement, and cultural threat. The result is

a political environmentz where the language of development is replaced by the politics of exclusion, and where national cohesion is undermined by fear-driven constructions of the "other" (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the paper argues that governance deficits and developmental failures create fertile conditions for xenophobic politics by intensifying socio-economic insecurity and enabling the manipulation of identity-based grievances. The study is divided into six sections. The first section introduced the topic, followed by an extensive review of extant literatures. The third section provides the theoretical frameworks for the study. The fourth section succinctly presents the methodology followed by the thematic content analyzing of the study. The last section presents the concluding remarks and offers insight for policy action

Governance Crisis, Xenophobic Nationalism and Developmental Failure: The Synergy

Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes xenophobic nationalism as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by political, economic, and developmental forces rather than merely cultural prejudice or ethnic intolerance. Earlier studies largely located xenophobia within the framework of migration pressures, ethnic competition, and identity conflicts (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2020; Crush & Tawodzera, 2017). However, recent literature has shifted attention toward governance failures and developmental contradictions as critical drivers of anti-immigrant sentiments. Scholars such as Landau (2022), Mudde (2023), and Miller-Idriss (2024) argue that rising hostility toward foreigners reflects broader crises of state legitimacy, institutional decline, and socio-economic insecurity. Across both developed and developing societies, xenophobic nationalism has increasingly emerged as a political response to public dissatisfaction with governance structures unable to guarantee employment, security, welfare provision, and social inclusion. While this shift has significantly expanded the explanatory scope of xenophobia studies, the relationship between governance crisis, developmental failure, and nationalist exclusion remains theoretically fragmented and insufficiently integrated.

Within governance literature, a dominant objective has been to explain how institutional weakness and declining state capacity create conditions for social conflict and exclusionary politics. Studies by Fukuyama (2016), Acemoglu and Robinson (2019), Rotberg (2020), and Grindle (2022) emphasize that governance failures manifest through corruption, weak institutions, poor public service delivery, elite capture, and declining public trust. Employing institutionalist and state-capacity approaches, these studies contend that ineffective governance undermines social cohesion and fuels public frustration. In Africa, research by Cheeseman (2021), Ezeibe (2022), and Akinola (2023) similarly links governance deficits to rising social tensions and citizen disillusionment. The methodological orientation of these studies is predominantly qualitative, relying on case studies, governance indicators, policy analyses, and institutional assessments. Although these contributions successfully establish governance crisis as a source of societal instability, they often stop short of examining how governance failures specifically transform into xenophobic political consciousness. Consequently, an important analytical gap remains regarding the mechanisms through which governance breakdown translates into hostility toward foreigners.

A parallel body of literature has concentrated on developmental failure as a catalyst for xenophobic nationalism. The central objective of this scholarship is to understand how poverty, unemployment, inequality, urban precarity, and socio-economic exclusion generate anti-migrant sentiments. Drawing heavily from Relative Deprivation Theory and Political Economy perspectives, scholars such as Gurr (2015), Hickel (2021), Piketty (2022), and Sen (2023) argue that individuals experiencing socio-economic deprivation are more likely to perceive migrants as competitors for limited opportunities. Research conducted in South Africa by Crush, Chikanda and Skinner (2019), Gordon (2021), and Misago (2024) demonstrates how persistent unemployment and uneven development intensify resentment toward foreign nationals, particularly within urban informal economies. Similar patterns have been observed in Nigeria, Kenya, and parts of Europe where economic downturns have strengthened nationalist and anti-immigration movements (Mudde, 2023; Mylonas & Tudor, 2025). While these studies effectively highlight the developmental roots of xenophobia, many tend to privilege economic explanations at the expense of governance structures that shape and mediate public perceptions of deprivation.

Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the political instrumentalization of xenophobia. The objective of these studies is to uncover how political actors manipulate migration narratives to achieve electoral and ideological goals. Using discourse analysis, media analysis, and critical political theory, scholars such as Wodak (2021), Moffitt (2022), Mudde (2023), and Miller-Idriss (2024) demonstrate how populist leaders construct foreigners as threats to national security, economic prosperity, and cultural identity. Within Africa, Landau (2022), Neocosmos (2023), and Adjai and Lazaridis (2024) show how political elites frequently redirect public frustrations toward migrants during periods of economic crisis and political instability. These studies reveal that xenophobia is often politically manufactured rather than naturally occurring. Nevertheless, most existing analyses focus on immediate political strategies without sufficiently interrogating the structural developmental conditions that make such narratives socially effective and politically persuasive.

Another notable trend within recent literature is the growing emphasis on nationalism as a response to the failures of globalization and development. Scholars such as Rodrik (2021), Krastev and Holmes (2022), Castells (2023), and Mylonas and Tudor (2025) argue that contemporary nationalist resurgence reflects public anxieties arising from unequal development outcomes, weakening social contracts, and perceived loss of national control. The methodological strategies employed include comparative political analysis, cross-national surveys, and longitudinal studies. Findings across these studies suggest that where development fails to produce broad-based socio-economic benefits, nationalist movements increasingly frame migrants and foreigners as symbols of societal decline. Yet, despite these advances, much of the literature remains Eurocentric, with limited theoretical adaptation to African governance realities characterized by state fragility, informal economies, and postcolonial developmental challenges.

The foregoing review reveals several important gaps that justify the present study. First, existing literature often examines governance crisis, developmental failure, and xenophobic nationalism as separate analytical categories rather than mutually reinforcing processes. Second, insufficient attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which governance deficits transform socio-economic frustrations into exclusionary nationalist politics. Third, African scholarship remains heavily concentrated on documenting xenophobic incidents rather than theorizing their structural foundations within governance and development frameworks. Fourth, there is limited conceptual innovation in explaining contemporary forms of xenophobic nationalism. This study addresses these gaps by advancing the concept of the "New Babel Order" as a framework for understanding how governance breakdown, developmental contradictions, and political manipulation collectively produce fragmented societies characterized by distrust, exclusion, and contested belonging. In doing so, the study seeks to deepen existing debates by providing a more integrated and governance-centered explanation of xenophobic nationalism in contemporary Africa and beyond.

Theoretical Frameworks

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory is one of the most influential explanations for collective grievances, social unrest, and identity-based conflicts. The theory originated from the works of American social psychologist Samuel A. Stouffer et al. (1949**)** in *The American Soldier*, where it was observed that people's satisfaction or dissatisfaction depended less on their objective conditions and more on comparisons with the conditions of others. The theory was later refined and systematically developed by Ted Robert Gurr (1970) in his seminal work *Why Men Rebel*. Gurr argued that frustration and political violence arise when there is a perceived discrepancy between what people believe they deserve (value expectations) and what they are actually able to obtain (value capabilities). Thus, deprivation is not necessarily a product of absolute poverty but of perceived inequality and unmet expectations.

The central proposition of the theory is that individuals and groups continuously compare their socio-economic and political conditions with those of others or with their own expectations. Where citizens perceive a widening gap between expected benefits and actual outcomes, feelings of frustration, resentment, and injustice emerge (Gurr, 1970; Walker & Smith, 2002). Such frustrations are particularly pronounced in societies characterized by high unemployment, economic stagnation, widening inequality, and poor governance. Under these conditions, public dissatisfaction may transcend individual grievances and evolve into collective hostility against perceived beneficiaries of scarce opportunities. The theory therefore explains why societies experiencing developmental failures often witness increased social tensions and exclusionary politics.

The relevance of Relative Deprivation Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how governance crisis and developmental failure create fertile conditions for xenophobic nationalism. In many African states, citizens are confronted with rising costs of living, youth unemployment, declining public services, and persistent inequality despite repeated governmental promises of

development. As expectations of economic progress collide with lived realities of deprivation, frustrations intensify. Foreign nationals and migrants are frequently perceived as competitors for employment, housing, public services, and economic opportunities (Crush & Ramachandran, 2023; Landau, 2024).

Despite its explanatory strength, Relative Deprivation Theory possesses notable limitations. The theory effectively explains why frustrations emerge but is less capable of explaining why such frustrations are directed specifically toward migrants and foreigners rather than toward governments, political elites, or institutions responsible for developmental failures. In many societies, citizens experiencing similar levels of deprivation do not necessarily become xenophobic. The theory therefore underestimates the role of political actors, ideological narratives, and elite manipulation in shaping public perceptions of who should be blamed for societal problems. While deprivation may generate grievances, it does not automatically determine the target of those grievances. This limitation necessitates the adoption of a complementary framework capable of explaining how political leaders and institutions channel public frustrations toward outsiders. It is within this context that Scapegoat Theory becomes particularly relevant.

Scapegoat Theory

Scapegoat Theory emerged from classical social psychology and psychoanalytic traditions, particularly the works of Sigmund Freud (1921) and later John Dollard, Neal Miller and colleagues (1939) through the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis. The theory was further developed by scholars such as Gordon Allport (1954) and René Girard (1986**)** who argued that societies often transfer frustrations, anxieties, and unresolved tensions onto vulnerable groups that possess limited political power to resist. The term "scapegoat" itself derives from the biblical practice described in Leviticus 16, where a goat symbolically carried the sins of the community into the wilderness. In contemporary political analysis, the theory explains how individuals and groups assign blame for societal problems to convenient targets rather than addressing the actual structural causes of those problems.

The central assumption of Scapegoat Theory is that when people experience economic hardship, insecurity, or social uncertainty, they seek identifiable groups upon whom blame can be placed. Rather than confronting complex structural challenges such as corruption, unemployment, poor governance, or developmental failure, public frustrations become redirected toward marginalized populations perceived as outsiders. Migrants, refugees, and foreign nationals frequently become targets because they are visible, politically vulnerable, and easily portrayed as threats to economic opportunities, cultural identity, and national security (Allport, 1954; Girard, 1986). The theory therefore highlights the social and political processes through which grievances are transformed into hostility against specific groups.

A major contribution of Scapegoat Theory is its emphasis on the role of political elites and institutions in constructing and sustaining narratives of blame. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that xenophobia is rarely a spontaneous reaction to migration alone. Rather, political actors often exploit economic crises and governance failures by framing foreigners as

responsible for unemployment, crime, housing shortages, and declining social welfare. Studies by Wodak (2021), Mudde (2023), and Miller-Idriss (2024) show that populist leaders across different regions strategically deploy anti-immigrant rhetoric to divert public attention from policy failures and governance deficits. In such contexts, migrants become symbolic representations of broader societal anxieties rather than the actual causes of those problems.

Collectively, Relative Deprivation Theory and Scapegoat Theory provide a robust analytical framework for this study. While Relative Deprivation Theory explains the socio-economic frustrations generated by governance crisis and developmental failure, Scapegoat Theory explains how these frustrations are politically redirected toward migrants and foreigners. The former identifies the origins of public grievances, whereas the latter explains the processes through which those grievances are transformed into xenophobic nationalism. Together, the theories offer a comprehensive understanding of the nexus between governance crisis, developmental failure, elite manipulation, and the rise of exclusionary nationalism in contemporary societies.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design to critically investigate the nexus between governance crisis, developmental failure, and xenophobic nationalism within the framework of the "New Babel Order." The choice of an exploratory design is informed by the study's objective of generating a deeper understanding of the underlying political, economic, and social processes through which governance deficits stimulate exclusionary nationalist sentiments. Given the complex, multidimensional, and context-dependent nature of xenophobia, a qualitative approach provides the analytical flexibility required to interrogate meanings, narratives, perceptions, and structural dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurements alone. The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy reports, Afrobarometer datasets, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports, African Union (AU) migration and governance reports, newspaper archives, official government publications, and documented cases of xenophobic incidents. The scope of the study is limited to South Africa and Nigeria, selected purposively because they represent two influential African states with contrasting migration experiences, governance trajectories, and manifestations of nationalist politics. South Africa provides a rich empirical context due to its recurrent episodes of xenophobic violence, while Nigeria offers insights into emerging debates on citizenship, migration governance, regional integration, and identity politics within the ECOWAS framework. Data generated from these sources are analysed through thematic content analysis and discourse analysis. The combination of these analytical techniques is particularly appropriate because xenophobic nationalism is not merely an observable social phenomenon but also a discursive and political construct shaped by language, power relations, and competing narratives of belonging.

Governance Crisis and the Architecture of Xenophobic Nationalism

The architecture of xenophobic nationalism is increasingly being shaped by structural governance deficits that intensify socio-economic anxieties and reconfigure citizenship into a contested political category. Across both the Global South and parts of Europe, rising unemployment and economic stagnation have created fertile ground for exclusionary narratives that position migrants as competitors rather than contributors to national development. Recent comparative governance studies show that where youth unemployment exceeds critical thresholds, public tolerance toward migrants declines sharply (ILO, 2024; World Bank, 2025). In South Africa, for instance, persistent unemployment, especially among urban youth, has been repeatedly linked to spikes in xenophobic violence, most notably during the 2019 and 2022 episodes of attacks in Johannesburg and Durban. These incidents reveal how economic frustration, when unmanaged by responsive governance, is redirected toward visible foreign populations perceived as occupying informal economic spaces.

Corruption and declining trust in government further deepen this crisis by eroding the legitimacy of state institutions and weakening citizens' belief in equitable resource distribution. Contemporary governance literature argues that corruption does not only reduce state capacity but also reshapes public perception of fairness, thereby intensifying social resentment (Transparency International, 2024; Rotberg, 2023). In contexts such as Nigeria and South Africa, repeated revelations of political corruption and elite capture have reinforced the perception that the state is unresponsive to citizen welfare. Consequently, migrants become symbolic substitutes for failed governance systems, as citizens displace anger from institutions onto more visible and vulnerable groups. This dynamic is consistent with empirical findings by Landau (2024), which show that perceptions of state failure significantly predict hostility toward foreign nationals in urban African settings.

Competition over scarce resources such as employment opportunities, housing, healthcare, and social welfare constitutes another critical dimension of xenophobic nationalism. Urban political economy studies highlight that rapid urbanization without corresponding infrastructural expansion generates intense competition between locals and migrants within informal economies (UN-Habitat, 2023; Crush & Ramachandran, 2023). In South Africa's informal settlements, migrants are often accused of depressing wages or monopolizing small-scale trading opportunities, despite evidence showing their contribution to local economies. Similarly, in European contexts such as Germany, France, and Italy, anti-immigrant sentiment has intensified in response to housing shortages and welfare pressures, particularly during post-pandemic economic recovery phases (Mudde, 2023; OECD, 2024). These comparative cases demonstrate that resource scarcity, when unmanaged by effective governance, becomes a catalyst for exclusionary political behaviour.

Urban insecurity further compounds the governance crisis by reinforcing perceptions of social disorder and weakening trust in multicultural coexistence. Rising crime rates in major urban centres are frequently politicized and attributed to migrant populations, even when empirical evidence does not support such generalizations. In South Africa, media and political narratives have repeatedly linked undocumented migration to crime syndicates, thereby legitimizing public

hostility during outbreaks of xenophobic violence (Misago, 2024). Similar patterns are observable in European cities where far-right political parties frame migration as a security crisis, contributing to the normalization of xenophobic rhetoric in electoral politics (Wodak, 2021; Mylonas & Tudor, 2025).

Populist political rhetoric plays a decisive role in institutionalizing xenophobic nationalism by simplifying complex governance failures into emotionally charged narratives of blame and exclusion. Populist leaders often construct a binary distinction between "the people" and "the outsiders," thereby redirecting attention from structural governance deficiencies to identity-based scapegoating. In Nigeria, ECOWAS migration debates have occasionally been framed within nationalist rhetoric that questions regional free movement protocols during periods of economic stress. In Europe, similar populist narratives have gained traction, particularly during electoral cycles, where migrants are portrayed as threats to national identity, welfare systems, and cultural cohesion (Mudde, 2023; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). These rhetorical strategies are not incidental but politically functional, as they help elites consolidate support in contexts of declining governance legitimacy.

Developmental Failure and the "Babelization" of Society

Developmental failure constitutes one of the most profound structural conditions shaping the fragmentation of contemporary societies and the rise of exclusionary nationalism. Across both African and global contexts, uneven development outcomes have weakened the capacity of states to sustain inclusive citizenship and shared national identity. Recent development reports indicate that rising inequality, stagnant wage growth, and youth unemployment have intensified perceptions of systemic exclusion, particularly in urban centres where migrants and locals compete for limited opportunities (UNDP, 2024; World Bank, 2025). In such contexts, development ceases to function as a unifying national project and instead becomes a site of contestation, where different social groups interpret economic hardship through identity-based lenses. This transformation sets the stage for what this study conceptualizes as the "Babelization" of society, a condition where fragmented identities replace collective national cohesion.

Social fragmentation emerges as a direct consequence of uneven development, particularly in societies where economic growth is not accompanied by equitable distribution. In South Africa, Nigeria, and several other African states, spatial inequality between urban elites and peri-urban informal settlements has generated distinct socio-economic worlds that rarely intersect meaningfully. Afrobarometer data (2023–2024) consistently show declining trust in national institutions and increasing perceptions of exclusion among lower-income groups. This fragmentation weakens the social glue necessary for inclusive citizenship, as individuals begin to interpret state failure not as a shared governance problem but as evidence of group-based competition. Consequently, migrants and foreign nationals are often positioned within the "out-group," reinforcing identity polarization and deepening social divides.

Identity polarization is further intensified by the politicization of economic hardship, where political and social actors frame development failures through ethnonational or xenophobic narratives. Instead of mobilizing citizens around inclusive development agendas, elites frequently exploit identity differences to consolidate political support during periods of crisis. In South Africa, research by Misago (2024) and Landau (2024) demonstrates how local grievances in townships are often redirected toward foreign African migrants, particularly in informal trade sectors. Similarly, in Nigeria and other ECOWAS states, periodic economic downturns have triggered renewed debates over citizenship entitlement and national preference policies. These dynamics illustrate how developmental failure does not only produce poverty but actively reshapes political identities in ways that pit groups against one another.

Within this context, nationalism increasingly emerges as a political survival strategy rather than a cohesive developmental ideology. Political elites facing legitimacy crises often resort to exclusionary narratives that redefine citizenship along narrow, often ethnic or economic, lines. Recent studies indicate that populist mobilisation around anti-immigrant sentiment tends to increase during periods of economic downturn and governance crisis (Mudde, 2023; Norris & Inglehart, 2021). This strategy allows political actors to displace accountability while consolidating short-term political support.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is the weakening of inclusive citizenship, where rights and belonging become contingent upon identity rather than constitutional guarantees. Developmental failure thus transforms citizenship into a contested resource, producing what this study conceptualizes as **"**Babelization**"**, a condition in which national cohesion is fragmented through fear-driven identity politics. In this state of Babelization, societies lose the ability to articulate a unified developmental vision, as competing identities replace shared aspirations. Empirical evidence from South Africa's recurrent xenophobic outbreaks and ECOWAS migration tensions illustrates how rapidly social cohesion can disintegrate when development fails to produce inclusive outcomes.

Political Elites and the Instrumentalization of Xenophobia

A growing body of comparative political scholarship suggests that xenophobia is not merely a spontaneous social reaction to migration pressures, but often a politically constructed outcome shaped by elite incentives and electoral competition. In contexts marked by governance crisis and developmental stagnation, political elites frequently exploit identity-based cleavages to mobilize support, particularly during election cycles. Recent studies in political communication and populism indicate that economic anxiety, when combined with weak institutional trust, creates a receptive environment for exclusionary narratives (Mudde, 2023; Norris & Inglehart, 2021). In Africa and parts of Europe, electioneering strategies increasingly incorporate anti-immigrant messaging as a means of consolidating domestic constituencies. In South Africa, for example, xenophobic rhetoric has periodically intensified during local and national elections, with political actors framing foreign nationals as competitors for jobs, housing, and public services, despite limited empirical evidence supporting such claims (Landau, 2024; Misago, 2024).

Media systems and communication infrastructures further facilitate the instrumentalization of xenophobia by amplifying selective narratives and framing migration as a security and economic threat. Studies in media discourse analysis demonstrate that repeated exposure to negative portrayals of migrants significantly increases public support for restrictive immigration policies (Wodak, 2021; Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2022). In several African and European contexts, sections of the media have contributed to moral panics by disproportionately linking migrants to crime, unemployment, and urban insecurity. In South Africa, for instance, sensationalist reporting during episodes of xenophobic violence has reinforced public perceptions of migrants as destabilizing agents, even when official crime statistics do not support such generalizations.

The securitization of migration represents a key mechanism through which elites transform ordinary governance challenges into issues of national security. Drawing on securitization theory, recent scholarship demonstrates how political leaders frame migration as a threat requiring extraordinary measures, including border militarization, deportation policies, and restrictive citizenship regimes (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 2022). In Africa, ECOWAS migration debates periodically become securitized during economic downturns, with states temporarily tightening border controls despite formal commitments to free movement protocols. This securitization process legitimizes exclusionary governance practices and reinforces public perceptions of migrants as security risks rather than economic contributors. The strategic framing of migration as a security issue thus enables elites to justify policy decisions that might otherwise face resistance under normal democratic deliberation.

Ultimately, elite diversion tactics consolidate the argument that xenophobia is often politically manufactured rather than naturally occurring. By redirecting public frustration away from structural governance failures, political actors externalize blame onto vulnerable migrant populations. This diversionary logic is particularly effective in contexts where institutional accountability is weak and economic hardship is widespread. Empirical evidence from both African and European cases indicates that spikes in xenophobic rhetoric frequently coincide with periods of political scandal, economic crisis, or declining government legitimacy (Crush & Ramachandran, 2023; Mudde, 2023). The instrumentalization of xenophobia therefore reflects a broader political economy of survival, where elites strategically manipulate identity politics to maintain power.

Concluding remarks

The foregoing analysis consolidates a central theoretical and empirical position: xenophobic nationalism is not an accidental eruption of social hostility, but a structurally embedded outcome of governance failure and developmental contradictions. Across the different dimensions examined, the evidence consistently points to the same underlying condition: when the state is unable to fulfil its developmental and distributive obligations, the idea of inclusive citizenship becomes weakened, contested, and ultimately redefined through exclusion. In such contexts, migrants and foreign nationals become symbolic repositories for deeper systemic frustrations, even though the origins of these crises lie within the architecture of governance itself. The “New

Babel Order" thus captures more than metaphor; it reflects a lived political reality in which fractured societies struggle to maintain coherence under the weight of unmet expectations and eroding trust in public institutions.

In essence, xenophobia must be understood as governance and development crisis before it is interpreted as a cultural or migratory phenomenon. Where states fail to deliver inclusive growth, equitable opportunity, and accountable leadership, exclusionary nationalism becomes a predictable political consequence rather than an anomaly. This study therefore reaffirms that sustainable responses to xenophobic nationalism cannot be anchored in securitization or reactive border control alone, but in the deep restructuring of governance systems toward transparency, redistribution, and institutional legitimacy. Inclusive development, strengthened state capacity, and credible social protection systems remain the most durable antidotes to the politics of exclusion. Ultimately, the pathway away from the "New Babel Order" lies in rebuilding the social contract between the state and its citizens, one grounded not in fear of the outsider, but in shared developmental purpose and equitable governance outcomes.

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