

Xenophobia and the Long Road to African Integration

Abstract

It has been about a half-century since most part of the African continent became independent. Ever since, a multitude of regional organizations have been created and designed to ensure prosperity and solidarity on the continent. Unfortunately Africa still lags behind the rest of the world on most aspects of human development. Why have African countries not been successful in their efforts toward regional integration? Does a xenophobia-driven acrimony among Africans play an important role in explaining such failures? Regional specialists on Africa have thus far emphasized the governments' unwillingness to integrate and their competition over resources as the primary reasons for poor cooperation. This research project turns to the scholarship on social identity, however, for an alternative explanation. My study shows that xenophobia, caused by socio-cultural intolerance, plays an important role in the overall backwardness of the continent. Using a quantitative analysis, this paper relies mostly on survey data from the *Afrobarometer* to see how Africans define their identity and how they perceive regional and continental integration. My research finds that the continuing scenes of violence in Africa are both a consequence of the high emphasis Africans place on their socio-cultural identity, and also the cause of failures in socioeconomic integration.

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