TESTING THE CONTACT HYPOTHESIS: EXAMINING THE MODERATING ROLES OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN XENOPHOBIA

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Intergroup contact is proposed as one of the means of increasing tolerance and appreciation of diversity in multi-group settings. The main aim of the present study was to examine how intergroup contact affects xenophobic attitudes and what variables can help to understand the strength of this relationship. The sample consisted of 1050 men and women of an average age of 23.33 from different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Hypotheses were tested with structural equation modelling. The results of the data analysis revealed that people with greater intergroup contact had lesser xenophobic attitudes towards outgroups. Furthermore, a social dominance orientation affected the relationship between intergroup contact and xenophobic attitudes by reducing the strength of the relationship between the two variables. Equally, for people who strongly identify with their ethnic groups, intergroup contact had lesser effect on their xenophobic attitudes. In addition, stronger identification with ethnic group also helped in reducing an aversion to social relations with outgroups. The results of this study were discussed under the socio-cultural context of the Nigerian society that drives ethnic rivalry and ethnic survival consciousness. The implications of the findings for improving relations between ethnic groups in Nigeria were highlighted. Suggestions for future research were provided.

Keywords: *Intergroup contact, Ethnic Identification, Xenophobia, Nigeria, Group Survival, Social Inequality*

1. Introduction

Xenophobia is a major outcome of social diversity in most societies. People, in response to perceived personal threats or threats to the survival of their social group, may display xenophobic attitudes. Such attitudes could take the form of discrimination, hostility, violence, and micro-aggression against those perceived as a threat and/or public protests for their removal from the society.

While xenophobia in mainstream literature is emphasised as fear of perceived threat from foreigners or immigrants, many scholars agree that it transcends nationality to include fear of just about anyone who fits the definition of a stranger. Thus, xenophobia cuts across the fear of

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perceived threat from foreigners to the fear of neighbours and people of different region, ethnicity, community, religion, or sexual orientation (Ajah, 2016; Matsumoto, 2009; Moyo, 2009; Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017; Olowu, 2008; Ullah & Huque, 2014). Therefore, comprehensively, xenophobia is the hostility and discrimination displayed towards other people based on the subjective evaluation of the perceiver that those people are different in personally important characteristics or are inferior in social identities like race, nationality, ethnic group, or religion, and constitute a threat (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017). Given that the mainstream conceptualisation of xenophobia prevails in the literature, few studies have examined xenophobia for co-nationals based on a perceived threat to survival and the competition for resources on which a nation is sustained.

Xenophobic attitude towards co-nationals characterises social relations in Nigeria. The constituent ethnic groups clamour for recognition and relevance, and fear domination from each other. This has been the relational pattern in the Nigerian society since its independence in 1960. This mode of relations has greatly hampered unity between ethnic groups and the solidarity needed to achieve the superordinate goal of national development. Most people identify more with their ethnic cleavages than their national identity and this has made it difficult for the country to become a true nation-state. Competition for resources and political power has been a major divisive element in the country. Ethnic groups, most especially the majority groups, struggle to acquire political power for themselves. Moreover, while business, public policy, work, and economic necessities unavoidably make people of different ethnic groups interact and have led to more in-depth interaction in the form of inter-group marriages, most people show a preference for social relations with members of their ethnic group than for outgroups.

A Nigerian's perception of an ethnic outgroup can be most observed in emotionally charged domains such as politics and political appointments, and resource allocation. The negative remarks and hate speeches with which Nigerians express their disdain for ethnic outgroups can be observed in the social media (Aduloju, 2016; Ahmad, 2018). The manifestations of xenophobia in Nigeria go beyond negative remarks and hate speeches, and extend to full-blown violence between ethnic groups (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017). The Ife and Modakeke conflict in Nigeria is an example of a xenophobic occurrence that led to the destruction of lives and properties. Furthermore, the recurrent clashes between the "indigenes and settlers" in Jos Nigeria, have left many dead and injured. In addition, the secessionist clamours by the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups result from the fear of relegation and perceived subjugation and exclusion of their groups from the political leadership of the country by the northern political elites.

Xenophobia between co-nationals in Nigeria, therefore, manifests in form of ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021). Ingroup centeredness reflects a selfish concern for one's ethnic group and a belief in its superiority over outgroups as well as a perceived threat from outgroups. On the other hand, ingroup exclusivity implies an aversion to social relations with outgroups (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021). The conceptualisation of xenophobia as having the aforementioned two dimensions buttresses extant literature that suggests that ethnic identity is a meaningful concept only in multi-group societies, thus the attitude held towards other ethnic groups is very much an important aspect of an ingroup identity (Phinney, 1992; Worrel et al., 2006). In multi-group societies, groups achieve their significance through differentiation from each other using ingroup protective attitudes or behaviours. Such

attitudes take two forms; the attitude held towards the ingroup and the one held towards outgroups (Adorno et al., 1950; Bizumic et al., 2009). Nevertheless, such attitudinal expressions are expected to be linearly related as they are both expressions of ingroup protective behaviours and should be mutually reinforcing (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Bizumic et al., 2009). Both attitudes should in turn be associated with other intergroup variables largely concerned with ingroup positivity and/or discrimination and negativity towards outgroups (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Bizumic et al., 2009). Therefore, measures of intergroup attitudes in multi-group societies are more likely to be more robust in capturing the underlying construct with aspects that reflect the attitude held towards the ingroup and ethnic outgroups (Bizumic et al., 2009; Phinney, 1992; Worrel et al., 2006). Olonisakin and Adebayo (2021) study corroborated this framework with their xenophobia measure as having the two dimensions of ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity, which were positively related, yet, represent two unique aspects of the intergroup attitude of xenophobia. The effects that xenophobia has on the unity and development of Nigeria make it important for group relations researchers to investigate the factors that are implicated.

2. Intergroup contact and outgroup attitudes

Intergroup contact has been largely tested for its potency in reducing prejudice and discrimination and promoting tolerance between groups. Regular contact between conflicting groups can help to facilitate understanding of groups' cultural differences and increase tolerance for such differences (Bandyopadhyay & Green, 2018; Scacco & Warren, 2018). When contacts are meaningful, it helps to dispense with existing prejudice and stereotypes (Hewstone, 2009). Thus, contact experiences that are positive, beyond superficial, extended, and involve cooperative tasks are more productive in ensuring improved relations between groups (Hewstone, 2009; Kunstman et al., 2013; Levin et al., 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Reimer et al., 2021; Robinson, 2016; Bekhuis et al., 2011; Young et al., 2017). The benefits of contact, could also be extended beyond one member of an outgroup to the outgroup as a whole (Fuochi et al., 2020; Stark, et al., 2013).

Empirical research evidence supports the contact hypothesis for improving group relations. Kunstman and colleagues (2013) found that being accepted by an outgroup increased the motivation to dispense with prejudice against the outgroup and the commitment of resources to facilitate further contact. Similarly, Levin et al. (2003) found that lower ingroup bias and lower inter-group anxiety among college students were associated with having more outgroup friends than co-ethnic friends during the second and third years of school. Likewise, Reimer and colleagues (2021) reported that contact between different ethnic groups led to greater outgroup perspective-taking. Also, Bhattacharya (2021) reported that increased exposure to neighbours of a different caste increased inter-caste trust, support for inter-caste marriage, and the belief that caste injustice is growing in India. In addition, there was a significant increase in prosocial attitudes induced by proximity and exposure to other-caste neighbours.

While decades of research on the contact hypothesis support its effectiveness in improving group relations, these researches also emphasise that the effectiveness of contact varies with the conditions under which it occurs (Paolini et al., 2021). Research on intergroup contact in

Nigeria has mostly focused on the direct relationship between contact and group relations. These researches support the ameliorating effect of contact between groups for improved group relations. For example, research in sixteen African countries, of which Nigeria was included, Robinson (2016) found that in each country, there was increased inter-ethnic trust among people living in ethnic-heterogeneous communities. Robinson (2016) surmised that diversity by itself does not engineer inter-ethnic distrust; rather, it is the combination of segregation and diversity that breeds high inter-ethnic distrust. Likewise, Scacco and Warren (2018) reported, based on a study conducted in Nigeria, that positive social contact for sixteen weeks between a group of Christian and Muslim individuals led to reduced discriminatory behaviours and increased generosity towards each other. In addition, Okunogbe (2018) conducted a study with participants undergoing their National Youth Service in Nigeria, a scheme in which university graduates are randomly posted to different regions of the country. The author found that there was an increased tendency among the participants to be living in a region different from their home region seven years later and to have been or be currently involved in a romantic inter-ethnic relationship. These researches point to the role of intergroup contact in improving group relations and increasing social integration in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence shows that while Nigerians may interact with non-ethnic individuals, events that increase ethnic survival consciousness elicit hate rhetoric against ethnic outgroups. Furthermore, the recurrent conflicts in some regions of the country put to question how effective contact can be in improving relations between groups. A case in point would be the recurrent conflict in Jos, Nigeria which implicates the "indigene-settler" dichotomy as one of the major drivers of the conflict (Oosterom et al., 2021). On a larger scale, the different ethnic groups in Nigeria have coexisted for over 61 years, yet, ethnic conflict and rivalry still prevail. Equally, empirical evidence from the research by Okunogbe (2018) and Scacco and Warren (2018) also shows some limitations to the effect of intergroup contact. For instance, Okunogbe reported that despite the intergroup contact that occurs through national youth service placement, there was no increased closeness or trust for ethnic outgroups or support for inter-ethnic marriage. In addition, being in a different ethnic region increased an individual's attachment and pride for their ethnic group. Similarly, Scacco and Warren reported that the extensive interaction between the groups of Christian and Muslim individuals did not reduce existing prejudice, though it improved relations between them. The outcomes of these two studies suggest that coming in contact with ethnic outgroups perhaps did not reduce existing stereotypes or prejudice for them. Rather, such contact simply provided the opportunity to form relationships with ethnic outgroups, but with some reservations.

Contact hypothesis research and researchers continually reaffirm how effective intergroup contact is in improving group relations and empirical evidence provides some support for this in Nigeria. However, the results of studies on the contact effect suggest that while it encourages more cordial relationships, there is a limit to such relationships as the contact does not increase trust, closeness, or a desire for more intensive contact (e.g. friendship) with ethnic outgroups (Okunogbe, 2018). These findings suggest that there are some intervening variables or conditions under which contact can be most effective. This, therefore, calls for a more nuanced understanding of how intergroup contact facilitates better relations between ethnic groups in Nigeria if its effect is to be harnessed.

2.1.   *Social dominance orientation*

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is a social/political attitude that is closely tied to discriminatory behaviours towards outgroups. It is a consistent predictor of support for ideas, policies, and social processes that maintain group superiority in the society (Mebane et al., 2020; Mifune et al., 2019; Pratto et al., 2013). Most societies are unequal and this produces the perception that social inequality is a natural occurrence and motivates the support for this social hierarchy (Pratto et al., 2013). In unequal societies, there is a prevalence of hierarchy legitimising myths that espouse the naturality of inequality and dominance. Such hierarchy legitimising myths become embedded in the values and ideas that guide social relationships. Examples of such myths are the ideas of destiny, meritocracy, fate, social Darwinism, classism, and the divinity of kings (Pratto et al., 2006; Pratto et al., 1994). These hierarchy-enhancing legitimising myths are used to project social inequality as necessary, natural, unavoidable, and fair in society. These "social rules" and the reality of social inequality are how group-based hierarchies are sustained in societies.

SDO is thus a prominent variable in unequal societies and refers to the extent to which people endorse the presence and continuance of social inequality. This orientation influences the ideologies people hold about their ingroup and the relationship it ought to have with outgroups. SDO thus tend to correlate with attitudes that discriminate between subordinate and dominant groups or ingroup and outgroups (Pratto et al., 2013). For instance, SDO is negatively associated with having cross-group friendships (Kauff et al., 2016) and positively associated with a stigma against gender minorities (Puckett et al., 2020) and support for stricter immigration control (Kleppestø et al., 2019).

Inequality between ethnic groups in Nigeria has been a reality for this society. Numerical strength, political and military presence, and political power have been the bases for the social status of the different ethnic groups in the country (Mustapha, 2010; Salaudeen, 2016). Equally, the location of the natural resources on which the nation is sustained also influences the perception of social status as each ethnic group prides itself on the resources found within its region. Thus, all groups clamour for political recognition and relevance based on the perception that they make a substantial contribution to the nation. Given the state of rivalry between ethnic groups and the fear of domination from one another, a SDO may impact how intergroup contact influences xenophobia towards co-nationals in Nigeria. While intergroup contact may facilitate forming relationships with ethnic outgroups, a SDO may be the mechanism through which such relationships remain superficial. That is, a preference for social hierarchy may limit the extent to which intergroup contact can promote acceptance or tolerance of outgroups.

The aforementioned submission is plausible given that contact with a foreign culture sometimes reinforces an individual's belief in the cultural superiority of the ingroup (Chao et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017). While contact with different cultures can increase knowledge and appreciation of other cultures, it could also increase bias towards outgroups (Chao et al., 2015). This is because one's ingroup culture and values may be challenged in intergroup contacts and this may motivate a rigid defence of the ingroup (Chiu et al., 2009). This can be readily observed in the intergroup contact that occurs in social media in Nigeria. In Nigeria where ethnic groups

clamour for recognition, relevance, and survival, using disparaging remarks to characterise ethnic outgroups has been a mode of emphasising the superiority of the ingroup (Aduloju, 2016; Ahmad, 2018). Furthermore, people tend to consider contradictory norms or practices of other people as moral shortcomings (Bizumic, 2015; Gil-White, 2005). Such a perception may be held by individuals regardless of whether their attitudes toward outgroups are favourable or not (Olonisakin, 2019).

There is some support for this in the outcome of the study by Young and colleagues (2017) that involved four week diversified mentoring relationships between white affluent students (mentors) and refugees (protégées) who recently relocated to the USA. Findings revealed that while the mentoring program increased the cultural intelligence of the mentors, there was also increased ethnocentrism among them. This suggests that contact with outgroups may initiate comparison between ingroup and outgroup cultures that may result in a reinforced belief in the cultural superiority of the ingroup. Likewise, Smith and Stathi (2021) with a sample drawn from the UK reported that having low rather than high SDO strengthened the negative association between intergroup contact and stigmatisation of the homeless. Similarly, using survey data from nationally representative samples in eight European countries, Schmid et al. (2012) found that friendship contact with immigrants, homosexuals, and Jews had a stronger effect on reducing prejudice among those low in SDO than those high in this variable in five of the countries. These findings suggest that a social dominance ideology may detract from the ameliorating impact of intergroup contact such that people hold back or do not fully immerse themselves in interactions with outgroups when these occur. More clearly, SDO may motivate a preference for avoiding to upset an existing social hierarchy when intergroup contact occurs.

2.2. Ingroup identification

The extent to which individuals identify with their ethnic group has also been identified as an influential factor in their response or attitude towards outgroups. Identification with ingroup is a social attitude that implies an attachment and feelings of belongingness to the ingroup, a positive attitude towards it, and practice of its values (Phinney et al., 1994). People that strongly identify with their group aim for positive distinctiveness of the group from outgroups and defend the ingroup practices (Kende et al., 2018; Lalonde et al., 2007; McClanahan et al., 2019). For instance, Kende et al. (2018) found that glorification of European values and attachment to national identity predicted negative attitudes towards immigrants and Muslims in Hungary. Similarly, McClanahan et al. (2019) reported that Whites who strongly identify with their racial identity tend to attribute an individual's minority background to the cause of their bad conduct.

Nigerians identify with their ethnic identity much more than their national identity because of the rivalry and competition between groups (Adebayo & Olonisakin, 2018). Nigeria is also a country in which people are conscious of their ethnic group's survival owing largely to the failure of government in dousing fears of ethnic domination and the machinations of the political elites that pitch ethnic groups against each other (Adebayo & Olonisakin, 2018). While intergroup contact may motivate less discriminatory attitudes towards ethnic outgroups, perhaps ingroup identification may forestall a more integrated relationship. This is because ethnic identity is an

emotionally-charged issue in multi-group societies due to its relationship to social status and its influence in determining life outcomes for people (Smeekes et al., 2015).

Furthermore, perceiving the ingroup and outgroups as clearly distinct and separate ("us" vs "them") may encourage greater social distancing and less support for social processes that try to integrate the group (Hässler et al., 2020). In addition, intergroup contact may also reinforce ethnic identification as it may trigger the comparison of outgroups' cultures with ingroup's culture (Okunogbe, 2018; Young et al., 2017). Thus, the stronger Nigerians identify with their ethnic groups, the less effect intergroup contact may have in reducing xenophobia towards co-nationals.

The preceding submission is corroborated by research that has reported ingroup identification as a variable that promotes outgroup intolerance or prejudice. For instance, in a study conducted by Çoksan (2021) with Turks to examine how different forms of contact (similarity vs difference) with Syrian refugees were associated with support for social policies that are neutral to/against/in favour of Syrian refugees and Turks. The author found that those in the difference-focused contact condition and also in the high ingroup identification condition showed higher support for social policies that favoured Turks and disfavoured Syrian refugees than those who were in the low ingroup identification condition. Likewise, Kauff et al. (2016) found that cross-group friendship was associated with positive outgroup attitudes through reduced ingroup identification.

Based on the foregoing, the study aimed to test how the socio-political attitudes of SDO and ingroup identification would function in the relationship between intergroup contact and xenophobia (ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity) among Nigerians. To achieve this aim, the following hypotheses were put forward in this study.

H1. Intergroup contact will be associated with less xenophobia.
H2. SDO will moderate the association between intergroup contact and xenophobia.
H3. Ingroup identification will moderate the association between intergroup contact and xenophobia.

Xenophobia in this study is conceived as an expression of two distinct yet related dimensions of ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021) and was examined as such. This is because measures of intergroup attitudes containing ingroup and outgroups aspects may sometimes be better explored in their dimensions for more accurate outcomes (Bizumic, 2009; Phinney, 1992; Worrel et al., 2006). Nevertheless, they were expected to show similar relationships with the other variables in this study, as they are intercorrelated. In addition, given the interdependent nature of the Nigerian society, it would be of significance to examine the study variables separately concerning the two dimensions, one which seems to emphasise a pro-ingroup attitude (ingroup centeredness) and the other an anti-outgroups attitude (ingroup exclusivity). Lastly, the scale is recommended for use in its two dimensions (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2021).

3. Method

3.1. Study design

This study adopted a quantitative research approach by utilising questionnaires containing statements to capture the study variables. Data were sourced from six public universities in Nigeria. The choice of public universities was because they are settings in which extended contact and interaction between people of different ethnic groups in the country occur. This contact occurs between students and university staff on campus and in their residents. The university provides the opportunity for more intimate contact with members of outgroups. Contacts with outgroups in the form of close relationships such as friendships and cooperative learning are the most effective form of contact (Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). A multi-stage sampling approach was adopted for this study. First, consideration was given to the representativeness of different regions in the country, then a public university in an ethnically heterogeneous state was chosen and, lastly, the final sample was conveniently sourced from each university.

3.2. Sample

Participants were undergraduate students in their third to fifth year in the university selected from physical, social, and humanity disciplines. They were comprised of 54.9% men, 45% women, and one unreported sex totalling 1050 participants with a mean age of 23.33 (*SD* 4.22). Their ethnic affiliations spanned 15 ethnic groups in the country which are Nembe (14), Ogbia, (12), Rivers (1), Epie (5), Uhrobo (4), Biseni (4), Igbriran (2), Atissa (40), Kolokuma (18), Ijaw (402), Hausa/Fulani (145), Ekpetiama (9), Igbo (184), Yoruba (196), and "other ethnic groups" (4).

3.3. Procedure

This research was approved by the Academic and Research Committee of the University of the Author. The questionnaires were distributed in Lecture rooms to participants who indicated their interest after the author stated the purpose of the study and what was required of the participants. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of responses provided in the questionnaire. All participants voluntarily took part in the study and were given no incentives for their participation.

3.4. Research instrument

The items of the different scales measuring the study variables were assembled in a questionnaire. Data on intergroup contact were collected with four items asking participants about the frequency, existence, and duration of contact with ethnic outgroups in general. Sample question includes "*How many of your friends belong to a different ethnic group from you*? (*Response*: "*None, one, two, three, four,* and *5 and above"*)" and "*How often do you interact with people of a different ethnic group* (*Response: "Never, rarely, occasionally, often, almost every*

time, and *all the time"*)". Different response anchors were used to respond to the measure of intergroup contact. Responses to these items were then standardised and averaged together to get a participants' score on contact with ethnic outgroups. A high score reflects greater intergroup contact. The Cronbach's alpha for the intergroup contact measure is .63.

Xenophobia was measured with the xenophobia scale developed by Olonisakin and Adebayo (2021). This scale was developed and validated with a Nigerian sample. It has 24 items and two subscales of ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity. Ingroup centeredness captures an egocentric concern for the ingroup's welfare, belief in the ingroup's superiority over outgroups, and a perceived threat from outgroups. Sample items are "*I don't care if protecting the interests of my ethnic group results in violence and discomfort of other ethnic groups"* and *"Having inter-ethnic relationship of an intimate nature will lead to the erosion of the cherished values of my ethnic group"* On the other hand, ingroup exclusivity refers to an aversion for social relations with outgroups. Some of the items include *"It is possible to genuinely like people of other ethnic group" (reversed-scored)* and *"Coexisting/living with people of other ethnic group(s) can be an interesting experience"* (reversed-scored). Responses were provided in a five-point format ranging from *strongly disagree to strongly agree.* Olonisakin and Adebayo (2021) recommend that the measure be used as a two-factor scale than a unidimensional one. The Cronbach's alphas for the ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity subscales are .85 and .83. The higher the score, the higher the xenophobic attitude.

SDO was measured with the Dominance dimension of the SDO_7 developed by Ho et al. (2017) and as adapted by Olonisakin (2019). The scale contains seven items and measures support for group-based dominance, that is, the subjugation or domination of some groups by other groups. Some of the items are "*An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom"* and *"Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups".* Responses were given on a seven-point scale ranging from *strongly oppose to strongly favour.* The Cronbach's alpha for this scale .76. The higher the score of a participant, the higher the support for group dominance.

Lastly, ingroup identification was measured with the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) scale by Roberts et al. (1999). It consists of 12 items and measures the extent to which an individual identifies with their ethnic identity and the psychological attachment to such group. Sample items are *"I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership"* and *"I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group."* Participants responded on a five-point scale of *strongly disagree to strongly agree.* Reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha of .88. Items responses are summed to give a score on the MEIM, the higher the score, the higher the level of ingroup identification.

3.5. *Data analysis*

Data were analysed with SPSS and Amos software version 27. Analyses were conducted for univariate and multivariate outliers with *z*-test and Mahalanobis D^2 statistics, means and standard deviations, normality of data distribution using skewness and kurtosis statistics, and correlation between variables using Pearson's correlation statistics. For univariate outliers cases with *z*-scores >/= 3.29 indicate univariate outliers (Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996) while cases with P-

values less than 0.001 are considered multivariate outliers (Werner, 2003). The assumption of normality of distribution of data is met when skewness does not exceed two and kurtosis does not exceed seven (Kim, 2013). Furthermore, the study hypotheses were tested with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The following fit indices χ2/df, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMSR) were used to determine the acceptability of a model. A model was considered to have a good fit when χ2/df < 5, CFI ≥ .95, RMSEA < .06, and SRMSR ≤ .06 (Cangur & Ercan, 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schreiber, et al., 2006).

4. Results

There were no significant outliers in the dataset and the assumption of normality of distribution of data was met. Outcome of analyses for means and standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis, and correlations between study variables are presented in Table 1. There were significant negligible to moderate relationships between the variables. A correlation coefficient of less than .10 is generally considered negligible (Schober et al., 2018) while .10 is considered a weak or small correlation; .30, a moderate correlation; and .50 or larger, a strong correlation (Cohen, 1988). Intergroup contact had a significant relationship with Xeno-IC (r = -.14, p < .01), Xeno-IE (r = -.14, p < .01-), and SDO (r = -.06, p < .05). Xeno-IC had a significant relationship with Xeno-IE (r = .25, p < .01), SDO (r = .36, p < .01), and ingroup identification (r = .14, p < .01). Also, Xeno-IE had a significant relationship with SDO (r = .09, p < .01) and ingroup identification (r = -.17, p < .01). Lastly, SDO was significantly associated with ingroup identification (r = .07, p < .05).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, skewness and kurtosis, and correlation for study variables (N = 1050)

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergroup contact	15.64	4.71	-.34	-.49	-				
2. XENO-IC	41.39	11.68	.35	.33	-.14**	-			
3. XENO-IE	13.49	5.39	.97	.88	-.14**	.25**	-		
4. SDO	23.25	9.97	.26	-.70	-.06*	.36**	.09**	-	
5. Ingroup-ID	43.95	9.47	-.65	.13	.01	.14**	-.17**	.07*	-

Note. Xeno-IC - xenophobia ingroup centeredness, Xeno-IE - xenophobia ingroup exclusivity, SDO - social dominance orientation, Ingroup-ID - ingroup identification.
** p < .01; * p < .05

The study hypotheses were tested in a structural equation model (Figure 1) with all variables entered simultaneously. Scores on intergroup contact, SDO, and ingroup identification respectively were mean-centred before their products were entered into the model. The Maximum Likelihood method of model estimation was utilised. Analysis showed that the path from the interaction of intergroup contact and SDO and intergroup contact and ingroup identification to ingroup centeredness dimension of xenophobia respectively were not significant. Eliminating these paths improved the fit of the model. Result shows good fit of the

model as indicated by fit indices, $\chi^2/$ df = 2.80/2 =1.40, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .02 (90% CI, .00, 06), and SRMSR = .01. This model accounted for approximately 15% [d = .18] of the variance in ingroup centeredness and 7% [d = .08] of the variance in ingroup exclusivity dimensions of xenophobia. Intergroup contact had a negative relationship with ingroup centeredness (β = -.12, p < .001) and ingroup exclusivity (β = -.14, p < .001).
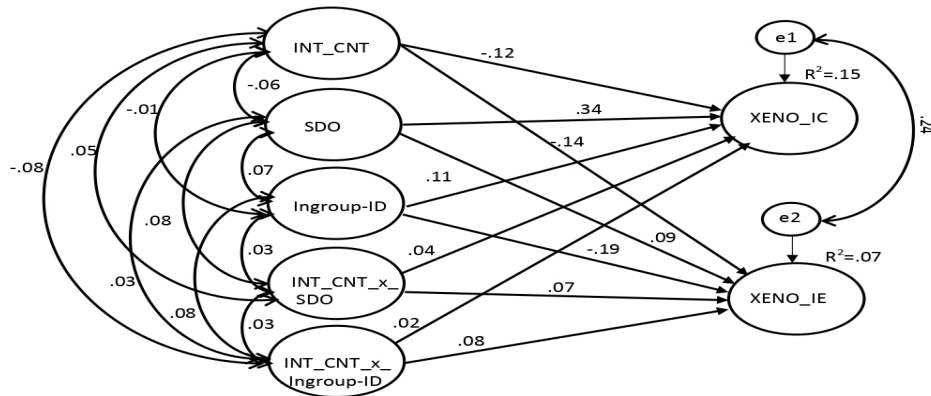

Figure 1. Path analysis from intergroup contact (INT_CNT) to XENO-IC (xenophobia ingroup centredness) and XENO-IE (xenophobia ingroup exclusivity) with social dominance orientation (SDO) and ingroup identification (Ingroup-ID) as moderator.

This means that intergroup contact was associated with lower ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity (xenophobia). SDO was associated with greater ingroup centeredness (β = .34, p < .001) and ingroup exclusivity (β = .09, p < .01). In addition, ingroup identification was associated with greater ingroup centeredness (β = .11, p < .001) and lower ingroup exclusivity (β = -.19, p < .001).

Further, the interaction term of intergroup contact and SDO was associated with greater ingroup exclusivity (β = .07, p < .05) while the interaction term of intergroup contact and ingroup identification was also associated with greater ingroup exclusivity (β = .08, p < .05). These results confirm the significant moderation effects of SDO and ingroup centeredness in the relationship between intergroup contact and xenophobia (ingroup exclusivity). To further understand these moderation effects, the interaction terms were graphed using the 2-way interaction analysis recommended by Gaskin (2016). Figures 2 and 3 display the relationship between intergroup contact and ingroup exclusivity at high (+1 SD above the mean) and low (-1 SD below the mean) levels of SDO (Figure 2) and ingroup identification (Figure 3). Figure 2 shows that the negative relationship between intergroup contact and ingroup exclusivity is stronger at low levels of SDO (β = .-23, SE = .04, p < .001, $95\%CI$, -.31, -.14) and not significant at high levels (β = -.06, SE = .04, p = .16, $95\%CI$, -.14, .02). Equally, Figure 3 shows that the negative relationship between intergroup contact and ingroup exclusivity is stronger at low levels of ingroup identification (β = -.22, SE = .04, p < 001., $95\%CI$, -.30, -.14) and not significant at high levels (β = -.06, SE = .04, p = .20, $95\%CI$, -.14, .03).

Table 2. Regression paths from intergroup contact to xenophobia (ingroup centredness and ingroup exclusivity) with social dominance orientation and ingroup identification as moderators

N= 1050

Dv	iv/mod	CR	SE	β
XENO-IC	Intergroup contact[a]	-4.16	.01	-.12***
XENO-IC	SDO[b]	12.01	.03	.34***
XENO-IC	Ingroup-ID[b]	3.89	.03	.11***
XENO-IC	Intergroup contact[a]* SDO[b]	1.47	.03	.04
XENO-IC	Intergroup contact[a]* Ingroup-ID[b]	0.75	.03	.02
XENO-IE	Intergroup contact[a]	-4.63	.01	-.14***
XENO-IE	SDO[b]	3.13	.03	.09**
XENO-IE	Ingroup-ID[b]	-6.24	.03	-.19***
XENO-IE	Intergroup contact[a]* SDO[b]	2.52	.03	.07*
XENO-IE	Intergroup contact[a]* Ingroup-ID[b]	2.57	.03	.08*

Note. XENO-IC - xenophobia ingroup centeredness, XENO-IE - xenophobia ingroup exclusivity, Ingroup-ID - ingroup identification, SDO - social dominance orientation, dv- dependent variable.
[a] independent variable (iv). [b] moderator (mod). *CR*= critical ratio. *SE* = standard error.
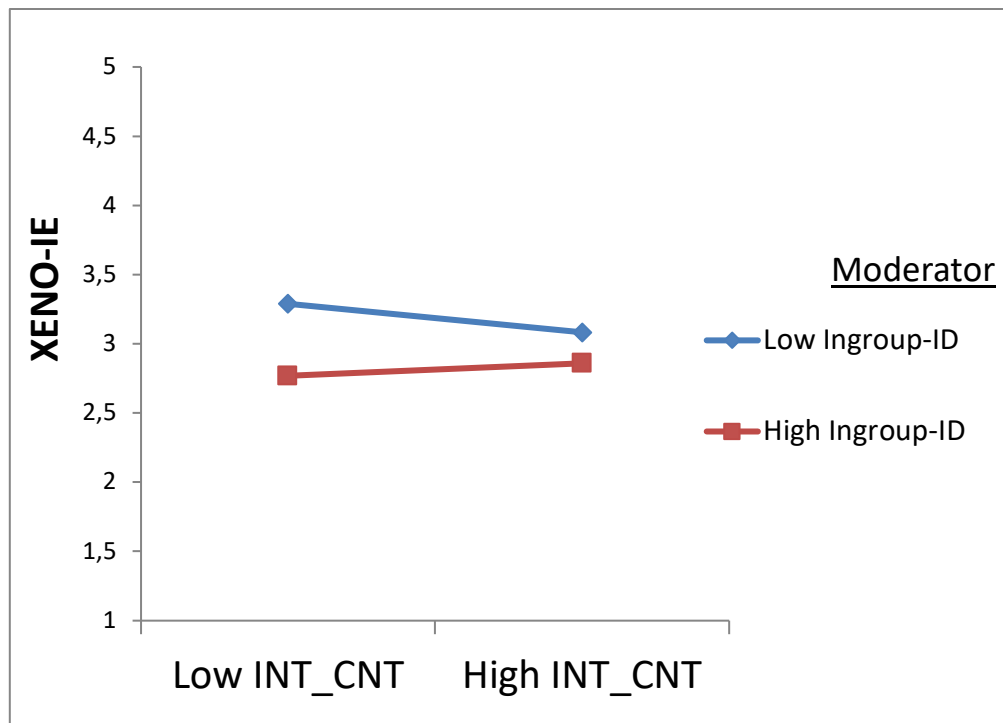*** $P < .001$; ** $P < .01$; * $P < .05$

Figure 2. Simple slopes for the interaction between INT_CNT (intergroup contact) and XENO-IE (xenophobia ingroup exclusivity) at low and high levels of Ingroup-ID (ingroup identification)
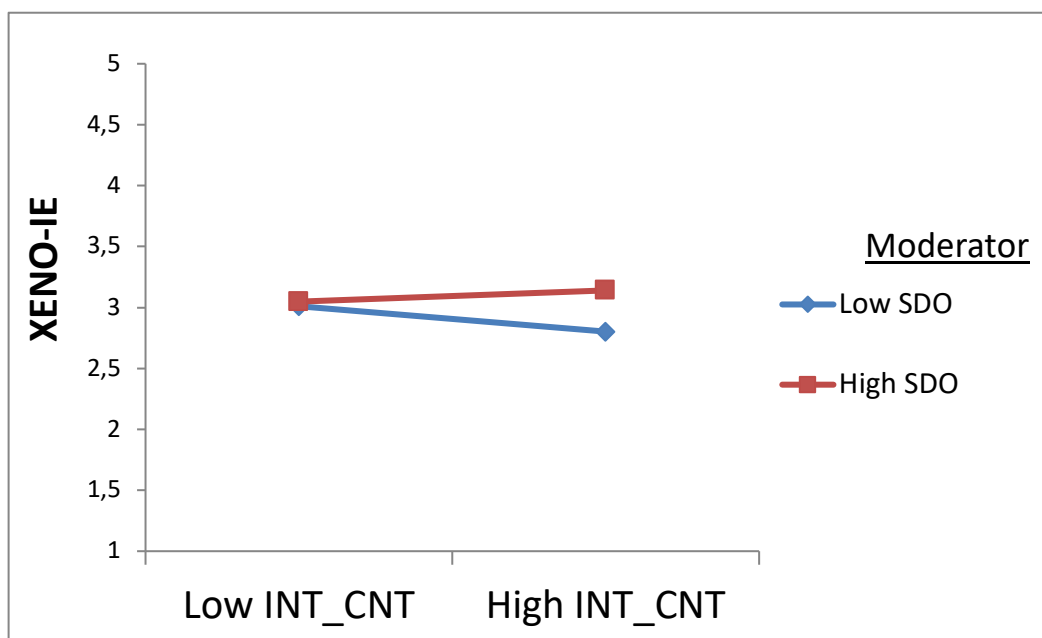
Figure 3. Simple slopes for the interaction between INT_CNT (intergroup contact) and XENO-IE (xenophobia ingroup exclusivity) at low and high levels of SDO (social dominance orientation)

5. Discussion

This study examined how SDO and ingroup identification affects the relationship between intergroup contact and xenophobia among Nigerians. First, it was expected that intergroup contact, operationalised as contacts with ethnic outgroups in general, would be associated with less xenophobic attitudes. The result of this study supported this hypothesis. Intergroup contact was associated with less ingroup centeredness and ingroup exclusivity. These findings are in line with previous reports on the ameliorating role of intergroup contact in reducing discriminatory attitudes against outgroups (Bhattacharya, 2021; Kunstman et. al., 2013; Levin et al., 2003; Reimer et al., 2021). Intergroup contact provides the opportunity for interaction between groups and understanding cultural differences. Successful intergroup contact can encourage more positive, or at the very least, less negative attitudes towards outgroups (Hewstone, 2003; Okunogbe, 2018; Scacco & Warren, 2018). Furthermore, intergroup contact can help to eliminate the perceived homogeneity of outgroup members that could help dispel the application of stereotypes and prejudice and increase the perceived variability of the outgroup (Hewstone, 2003). Likewise, intergroup contact can bring about forgiveness for past misdeeds and increase trust for outgroups (Hewstone et al., 2005). Lack of contact can sustain enmity as it can create an atmosphere of mutual ignorance and suspicion between groups (Gallagher, 1995). Living within such an atmosphere of mutual distrust over an extended period results in a persistent pattern of hostile relations and hypersensitivity to threat cues for all groups (Jaspal et al., 2021; Whaley, 2001).

Further, SDO had a positive association with both dimensions of xenophobia. In addition, in support of the hypothesis put forward in this study, SDO weakened the relationship between intergroup contact and xenophobia (ingroup exclusivity). Intergroup contact was associated with lesser xenophobia at a low levelof SDO whereas, with high SDO, intergroup contact had no effect on xenophobia. This means that the higher an individual is on SDO the less effect intergroup contact will have in reducing their xenophobic attitudes towards ethnic outgroups. This finding confirms SDO as a variable that promotes discrimination between groups. SDO encourages the perception that some groups ought to dominate other groups and this can affect the extent to which an individual immerses themselves in interaction with ethnic outgroups. When interactions or contact occurs, an orientation towards group dominance may cause an individual to hold back or approach such contact with reservations. Such reservations might be an attempt to still maintain ingroup superiority and distinctiveness and emphasise outgroup inferiority or generally express a desire for a social gap with outgroups.

As previously stated, ethnic group inequality or dominance is a prominent feature of social relations in Nigeria. Such inequality or dominance may become salient in intergroup contact due to ethnic identity consciousness and prevent complete openness to the experience of interacting with ethnic outgroups. Okunogbe (2018) also proposed this line of thought in explaining the findings of the study conducted with Nigerian youths. The author surmised that intergroup contact did not result in updating of attitudes towards outgroups and that while intergroup contact aided the development of relationships, such relationships were conditional "on a given affinity level". Thus, while intergroup contact may encourage less inclination to avoid social relations with outgroups (ingroup exclusivity), an orientation toward group inequality or dominance may keep the depth of such relationships minimal. Further support for this inference can also be drawn from the findings reported by Scacco and Warren (2018) and Young et al. (2017).

This study also found significant association between ingroup identification and xenophobia. A peculiar outcome was that ingroup identification was associated with increased ingroup centeredness and lower ingroup exclusivity. This differential association with the dimensions of xenophobia suggests that the stronger the identification with an ingroup the more people are likely to exalt the ingroup over outgroups, protect its welfare, and perceive a threat from outgroups. On the other hand, such identification would also motivate a lesser inclination for aversion towards relationships with outgroups. This result could be understood within the socio-cultural context of Nigeria in terms of group competition, ethnic survival consciousness, and group interdependence.

Ethnic identity is very salient in Nigeria and all ethnic groups vie for recognition. All groups perceive a threat to their political relevance and continuity when political power and the country's governance are dominated by members of ethnic outgroups (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017). Thus ethnic groups organise themselves to rebuff any perceived threat or condescension from other ethnic groups. Such efforts have led to the development of ethnic-affiliated militias and social and political movements in the country. Examples include the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra and the "Oduduwa" Nation secession clamours headed by the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups respectively. Because ethnic groups provide succour to their members amidst the uncertainty that prevails in the country, such movements

receive support from members of each group. That ingroup identification encourages more ingroup protective behaviours is largely supported by the literature on intergroup relations (Jang & Walther, 2019; Kende et al., 2018; Lalonde et al., 2007; McClanahan et al., 2019). The shared social identity of an ethnic group motivates members to engage in ingroup protective behaviours such that they emphasise and defend the group; its history, resources, and distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Nevertheless, the interdependence among groups for survival in multi-group societies tempers outgroup attitudes such that identification with the ingroup may not necessarily translate into hostility towards outgroups (Baldassarri et al., 2021; Duckitt et al., 2005; Kosic & Caudek, 2005). The relationship between ingroup identification and outgroup hostility has been shown to vary depending on the nature of the relationship that exists between coexisting groups. With an interdependent relationship comes a more tolerant attitude towards outgroups (Baldassarri et al., 2021; Duckitt et al., 2005; Phinney, 1989; Tanaka et al., 2017). This has been attributed to the reality that intolerance towards outgroups may very well pose a threat to the wellbeing of the ingroup as well (Lee et al., 2011). When groups are bound by common goals or mutual needs, there may be less intolerance or greater acceptance of outgroups despite the persistence of discriminatory attitudes towards them (Baldassarri et al., 2021). Nigeria thrives on the resources that are located in different parts of the country. While all groups feel threatened about their status and seek relevance, perhaps they still recognise the interdependence on which the country is sustained. Therefore, more identification with the ingroup could motivate greater ingroup protective behaviours and equally less outgroup intolerance to avoid a mutually destructive outcome for the ingroup and outgroups.

Furthermore, a different outcome is observed with ingroup identification as a moderator of the relationship between intergroup contact and xenophobia. With stronger ingroup identification, intergroup contact has no effect on xenophobia (ingroup exclusivity), whereas low ingroup identification strengthened the effect of intergroup contact on xenophobia. This means that identification with the ingroup may also motivate an individual to hold back from more intensive interaction when contact occurs with ethnic outgroups. This is perhaps also due to the salience of ethnicity in determining social relations in the country and ethnic survival consciousness that is constantly triggered by social events and political shenanigans. In addition, competing groups tend to hold an ethnocentric attitude in which each portrays its values and practices as superior and moral and as the standard by which other groups should live (Gil-White, 2005; Vandeyar &Vandeyar, 2017). Thus, such perception of the superiority of the ingroup may also make people limit the extent of their interaction with ethnic outgroups when contact occurs. Ethnic identity provides succour for its members in multi-group societies and helps them to cope with experiences of discrimination (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2019; Jaspal et al., 2021). While individuals may be unable to change outcomes for themselves, the strength which lies in the collective identity of the ethnic group motivates attachment and devotion to the ingroup (Reicher, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

6. Conclusion and implication of findings

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on the role of intergroup contact in reducing discrimination between groups. In addition, they provide a better understanding of how intergroup contact facilitates less discriminatory attitudes towards ethnic outgroups based on the socio-political attitudes of Nigerians. This study and its findings are significant as it is the first study in Nigeria to go beyond examining the link between intergroup contact and discriminatory attitude to investigating variables that might intervene in this relationship.

The role of intergroup contact in potentially encouraging inter-ethnic interactions or relationships is supported in this study. This implies that creating an opportunity for different ethnic groups to interact with each other could help to foster more cordial relationships between ethnic groups in Nigeria. Further, the effect of intergroup contact was measured in this study among participants who have extended interactions with ethnic outgroups through cooperative learning in school activities and through living in ethnically heterogeneous communities. These forms of contact are the most effective for improving group relations (Allport, 1954; Hewstone, 2003; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This suggests that being engaged in joint tasks and living in a socially diverse environment could be important in the effect that intergroup contact has on xenophobic attitudes. Although these effects were not directly tested in this study, perhaps they could help in fortifying intergroup contact for improved group relations. Regardless, Robinson (2016) did report that living in an ethnically diverse community was associated with higher inter-ethnic trust in Nigeria.

SDO is reinforced by a social reality of inequity and inequality in society. This in turn could make the idea of social exclusivity of the ingroup natural or "normal". As such, the social reality fostered by occurrences that amplifies inequality among the Nigerian ethnic groups may deter any meaningful social integration in the country. Thus, efforts to remove discriminatory treatment of ethnic groups in social and political spheres and increase their participation and relevance in governance could help refute the idea of ethnic group superiority in the country and in turn lessen the ideology of group domination.

Furthermore, this study shows that ingroup identification may not necessarily be detrimental to cordial relations between groups. This variable motivates a lesser inclination for aversion to social relations with outgroups. While it might also lessen the effectiveness of intergroup contact in social relations with ethnic outgroups, this finding speaks more to why ethnic identity consciousness may be heightened when contact is made with ethnic outgroups. The research by Okunogbe (2018) showed that participants' identification and pride in their ingroup increased when contact is made with ethnic outgroups. Taken together, these findings suggest that how ingroup identification undermines the effect of intergroup contact might be through the perceived superiority of the ingroup relative to outgroups or a lack of tolerance and appreciation for a different culture. If this is the case, what ought to be targeted for improvement is the perception of ethnic superiority and respect for cultural differences. Social processes that reinforce the perception of superiority and inferiority of ethnic groups, and heighten ethnic survival consciousness are more responsible for higher ethnic identification than national identification in the country (Adebayo & Olonisakin, 2018). Ethnic identity is ingrained and cannot be removed; thus, a more worthwhile effort for ensuring that ethnic identification does not

interfere with better social relations between ethnic groups in Nigeria is to focus on eliminating the factors that sustain ethnic rivalry and inequality.

Lastly, the findings of this study and the conclusions and implications drawn from them fit within extant literature on the contact hypothesis and align with theoretical propositions on the conditions/situations for obtaining a positive effect of intergroup contact. These conditions are equal group status, cooperative tasks or superordinate goals, encouraging cooperation, and the legitimisation of contact through institutional support (Allport, 1954; Sherif, 1958)

6.1.   Limitations of the study

While university students constituted an appropriate sample for this study given the parameters for intergroup contact that were of interest in this study, they, however, may not be representative of all other characteristics that could potentially influence the outcomes of this study. For example, they constitute an educated sample that excludes non-educated individuals. Further, the correlational design adopted in this study speaks more to a relationship but limits a conclusion about the causal link between intergroup contact and xenophobia. Findings should therefore be applied in line with these limitations.

6.2.   Suggestions for future research

More research on ethnic group relations and the factors that can foster better relations need to be conducted in Nigeria. Some of the conclusions and implications that were drawn from the findings of this study can also be further tested using different research methods to have a more varied understanding of how the contact hypothesis may be applied in interventions for improved group relations in the country. Furthermore, the measure of intergroup contact utilised in this study assessed contact with ethnic outgroups in general. Subsequent studies could investigate contact with specific ethnic outgroups as there may be varying levels of receptivity to contact based on the ethnic origin of an individual as shown in previous research. This in turn could have implications for the effect and utility of intergroup contact as a viable tool for improved group relations. Lastly, participants of varied demographic characteristics should also be considered for studies on group relations to elicit more generalisable findings.

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