

СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА ПІДТРИМКА ОСОБИСТОСТІ В УМОВАХ КРИЗОВИХ, МІГРАЦІЙНИХ І ВОЄННИХ ВИКЛИКІВ

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SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF IMMIGRANTS AND VIOLENCE: PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL POPULATION IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL

Міграція є складним і багатовимірним соціальним явищем, що суттєво впливає на формування індивідуальних траєкторій, соціальних взаємодій та колективних ідентичностей. Вона охоплює як добровільні (плановані), так і вимушені (зумовлені необхідністю виживання або зовнішнім примусом) переміщення, які відбуваються в контексті ширших соціально-економічних і політичних процесів. У сучасній Бразилії, попри декларовану відкритість до іммігрантів, спостерігається низка суперечностей, пов'язаних із недостатньою ефективністю державної політики та наявністю поляризованих соціальних уявлень щодо іммігрантів і їхнього місця в суспільстві.

Мета дослідження полягає у вивченні соціальних уявлень про іммігрантів та сприйняття насильства щодо них серед місцевого населення південного регіону Бразилії.

У дослідженні застосовано змішаний дизайн, який поєднує кількісні та якісні підходи, та передбачає онлайн-опитування (n = 189) та напівструктуровані інтерв'ю (n = 20) з повнолітніми респондентами, які народилися та проживають у південній Бразилії.

Установлено амбівалентний і внутрішньо суперечливий характер соціальних уявлень про іммігрантів. З одного боку, вони пов'язуються з позитивними значеннями (культурне різноманіття, можливості, соціальне збагачення), з іншого – із негативними (загроза, упередження, ксенофобія). Попри загальну підтримку ідей прийняття іммігрантів, зафіксовано наявність структурного й інституційного насильства. Виявлено значущі зв'язки між сприйняттям імміграції як загрози та ксенофобними установками, тоді як соціальний контакт із іммігрантами та прогресивні політичні



орієнтації корелюють із більш інклюзивними позиціями. Якісний аналіз підтверджує цю подвійність і демонструє варіативність соціальних уявлень залежно від освіти, статі, політичних переконань і досвіду взаємодії з іммігрантами.

Висновки. Співіснування інклюзивних та ексклюзивних дискурсів відображає складність і поляризацію соціальних уявлень про іммігрантів у сучасному бразильському суспільстві. Виявлено розрив між декларованою толерантністю та реальними соціальними установками, а також тенденцію до недооцінки проявів насильства щодо іммігрантів. Отримані результати підкреслюють необхідність розширення публічного дискурсу, формування критичного осмислення міграційних процесів і розроблення ефективних політик соціальної інтеграції, спрямованих на зниження рівня упередженості та підтримку іммігрантів.

Ключові слова: імміграція, соціальні уявлення, насильство щодо іммігрантів, ксенофобія, соціальні установки, соціальна психологія

Problem statement. Immigration transcends geographical displacement, becoming a complex crossing of borders that redefines identities and life trajectories. More than a one-off event, it is a dynamic process, marked by stages involving decisions, adaptations and profound transformations. This procedural notion is fundamental to understanding migration in its multidimensionality. The very categorization of migrant subjects reveals this complexity. The term “immigrant” encompasses a diversity of meanings, re-signified by social, economic and political contexts. In this study, an essential distinction is made: on the one hand, voluntary immigration, driven by the search for new opportunities and personal fulfillment, where there is room for planning and the possibility of return; on the other hand, involuntary immigration, marked by coercion and the urgency of survival, in which individuals flee violence, persecution or crises. In these cases, migration is not a choice, but the only alternative, with return often becoming impossible.

The Brazilian Ministry of Justice and Public Security estimates that, in 2024, there were approximately 1,700,686 immigrants in the country, representing 0.8% of the Brazilian population. Regarding refugees, 450,752 applications were active and 146,109 had been recognized – the majority from Venezuela, followed by people from Syria, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It should be noted that, according to the International Organization for Migration, the main motivations for migration involve the search for opportunities to improve the socio-economic situation and political stability.

According to studies [Rozeno, Giacomozzi, & Vitali, 2022], Brazil is experiencing conflicting positions on the issue of migration. In this sense, there is a polarization between states' duty to welcome and respect human rights, as opposed to the right to exclude (state sovereignty), through ethnocentric and intolerant arguments. These nationalist arguments are often made without technical knowledge, in an eminently sentimental way and based on beliefs and stereotypes. This polarization reflects a broader crisis of social representations in contemporary Brazil, documented also in relation to democratic values and political legitimation [Giacomozzi & Vitali, 2022].

Analysis of the latest research and publications. Countries receiving immigrants should develop immigration policies such as reception, asylum and integration. In this sense, Z. Bauman [2017] states that hospitality is an immigrant's right, not a matter of philanthropy. In this direction, it is not enough to accept them into the country, but that effective reception measures must be provided. Integration aims to rebuild and adapt the immigrant to the new society, but the immigrant must not abandon their culture, as it is an interactive process of adaptation and mutual adjustments. Immigrants and locals need to adjust harmoniously, in a sense of co-belonging.

However, most countries have policies that oppose integration, seeking to limit residence permits to highly qualified immigrants from developed countries. There are various barriers to integration, such as the lack of public policies, bureaucratic obstacles, difficulties in learning a new language, issuing documentation, validating diplomas, entering the job market, having guaranteed rights, owning a decent home, accessing social programs, dealing with prejudice, among others. And these barriers are aggravated by the vulnerability of the immigrant condition itself.

In addition, the migratory experience varies according to various intersectionalities, such as race, gender, poverty and religion, aspects that can act as facilitators or hindrances. Receptivity

varies according to the hierarchical categories of immigrants considered desirable or undesirable by the discourses of power. Research shows that Black immigrants and refugees suffer the most from social exclusion and human rights violations. D.M. Faustino and L.M. Oliveira [2021] propose using the term “racialized xenophobia”, given the importance of this social marker in the experience of Black immigrants. Gender issues also promote greater vulnerability in the context of immigration [Koshulko, 2018]. Also, there are specificities in relation to Black women, as racism linked to sexism contributes to a greater chance of suffering violence. Other social markers are also relevant, such as religion; immigrants from Muslim countries are negatively associated with terrorism for example. In addition, the poverty of some immigrants reflects the existing aporophobia. From this, it can be understood that vulnerabilities are articulated according to intersectionalities and social hierarchies.

Brazil has traditionally been considered a welcoming country, with laws that are considered innovative. However, in practice this discourse is demystified, as it is observed that the laws do not guarantee that the executive power ensures the rights provided, due to the insufficiency and inefficiency of public policies for this population. As an example of this contradiction, the public administration’s initiatives have been punctual, disintegrated and late in responding. As a result, prejudiced relations between Brazilians and immigrants become more acute when they start using the same deficient public system. In this direction, the omission of the state and the “dispute over vacancies” in care spaces contribute to exclusion and incite violence.

The Social Representations (SR) that circulate in society about immigrants are generally controversial, presenting contradictory discourses and ambivalent feelings, representing the polarization around the subject [Moscovici, 1988]. Sometimes the SR of the immigrant is anchored in the image of a victim, who needs help and protection, in a paternalistic conception; but most of the time, the SR is anchored in prejudice and xenophobia, based on nationalist feelings, the threat of the “other” considered inferior, criminal, ignorant, among others.

Specifically, in relation to violence, we highlight that Brazil is a country with countless forms of violence against various social groups, including immigrants [Bousfield, Bertoldo, da Silveira, Justo, & Bousfield, 2025; Giacomozzi, Vitali, Presotto, Vidal & Gomes, 2024; Giacomozzi et al., 2020a; Giacomozzi et al., 2020b; Giacomozzi et al., 2021]. We therefore understand that negative and pejorative SRs towards immigrants contribute to legitimizing xenophobic, discriminatory and violent practices against this population. In this way, immigrants are portrayed as the cause of various social, economic and health problems, among others, and by becoming “scapegoats” they suffer various forms of violence. It is considered that the SRs of violence and immigrants intertwine and contribute to decision-making, attitudes and behaviour in the face of the migratory phenomenon. In this sense, to know how a given phenomenon is represented by society is to advance in the knowledge of society itself.

Previously unresolved parts of the general problem. Despite the growing body of research on migration, integration, xenophobia, and social representations of immigrants, the issue of violence against immigrants remains insufficiently explored from the perspective of local populations’ social representations. In particular, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how violence against immigrants is perceived, interpreted, and symbolically constructed by locals in the Brazilian context, especially in the southern region of the country.

The purpose of the article is to identify the social representations of immigrants and violence against immigrants among local Brazilians in the southern region of the country.

Presentation of the main research material. According to M.S.G. Porto [2015], the conceptual definition of violence presents significant epistemological challenges: while the search for a universal definition proves to be insufficient to encompass sociocultural particularities, the adoption of radically relativistic perspectives also proves to be limiting for consistent analyses. Along these lines, P. Kerr, K. Durrheim, and J. Dixon [2019] state that the concept of violence can be transformed according to different contexts. One possibility would be to consider violence as an intentional action by an individual, group or institution directed at another, which can cause harm or damage [Porto, 2015]. For the World Health Organization, violence is the use of force or power, in threat or practice, against oneself, another person or against a group that results in suffering, death, psychological harm, impaired development or deprivation [Koshulko, 2018].

Violence can take different forms: direct (physical, sexual, psychological, symbolic violence and neglect); structural (discrimination, exploitation, marginalization or domination); and cultural (rationalizations that justify and legitimize violence) [Jodelet, 2011; Faustino & Oliveira, 2021]. The latter refers to power relations and domination, which underlie relationships. Representations are affected by the effects of symbolic power in legitimizing and naturalizing the social world. In this direction, violence is understood as structured/structuring in society, serving as the basis for social relations rooted in increasing social inequality – not only in the individual field, but as socially produced.

With specific regard to the theoretical and methodological strategy of the Social Representation Theory (SRT) for understanding the phenomenon of violence, D. Jodelet [2017] states that it is not possible to detach violence from its representations; the very act of naming certain gestures and behaviours as violence is carried out in a representational context. In this sense, M.S.G. Porto [2015] states that the SR of a phenomenon constitutes itself, “creating” it, in a way. SRT makes individual experiences possible without neglecting their context, given that SRs differ depending on the context in which they are inserted.

Based on the above and with the support of the SRT, we sought to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of violence against immigrants in Brazil. According to S. Moscovici [2003], the construction of SRs arises from a tension between the knowledge already acquired and the unknown, making it necessary to reorganize them so that the unfamiliar becomes familiar.

Methodology. This descriptive study was carried out using a mixed approach, with quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative stage was based on a survey of data through indirect observation, using a self-administered and structured online questionnaire. The qualitative stage was carried out using semi-structured interviews.

The quantitative stage involved 189 participants, 72% of whom were women. Age and geographical location were used as inclusion criteria, covering participants over the age of 18 who were born and lived in the southern region of the country at the time of data collection. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 75 years old ($M = 39.59$; $SD = 1.68$). Of the total number of participants, 63% currently live in a municipality other than their place of origin. However, despite living in another municipality, the participants were born and currently live in the southern region of Brazil. Only 8.5% have ever lived in another country. Regarding race, the majority (88.9%) declared themselves to be White, followed by Brown (7.4%), Black (2.1%), and “Yellow” (1.6%). Regarding their political position, the majority consider themselves to be left-wing (49.7%), followed by centre (26.5%), right (21.2%) and extreme left (2.6%). In terms of education, 17.5% have a high school degree, 37% have a university degree, 25.6% have a specialization degree, 14.8% have a master’s degree and 4.2% have a PhD. In terms of income, 40.7% earn between 2 and 5 minimum wages, 25.4% earn 9 or more minimum wages, 23.3% earn between 5 and 9 minimum wages and 10.6% earn up to 2 minimum wages.

The qualitative stage involved 20 local participants who were born in and resided in southern Brazil. Of these, 14 were women; eight were aged between 18 and 30, five between 31 and 50 and seven over 51, with an average age of 40 [$SD = 14$ years]. In terms of place, nine participants were from the Greater region of Florianópolis, four from the interior of Paraná, three from Curitiba and the metropolitan region, two from the interior of Santa Catarina and two from the interior of Rio Grande do Sul. Of these, ten lived in the Greater region of Florianópolis, six in Curitiba or the metropolitan region, three in the interior of Santa Catarina and one in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul. It should be noted that despite migrating to the same region (southern Brazil), a fact which in this study still considered them to be locals, 10 participants had migrated from their hometown. Regarding race, 19 were White and one Black. Regarding their political position, nine declared themselves to be left-wing, seven – centre, and four – right-wing. In addition, among the local participants, only one had lived in a country other than Brazil. Regarding occupation / profession, 11 worked in areas that do not require technical / higher education, three were in the humanities, two in education (student / teacher), two in health, one in the exact sciences and one in economics. As for schooling, 16 local people had completed higher education and four had completed high school. Regarding marital status, 12 were married / in a stable union, seven were single and one was divorced. Regarding income, seven earned between three and five minimum wages, seven between six and nine, and six between 10 and more minimum wages.

Sampling and procedures. The criterion for the number of participants was based on the type of analysis the research was intended to carry out. The variables controlled were gender, political position, schooling and proximity to immigrants. An intentional non-probabilistic sample was used, as the participants were chosen based on criteria decided in advance, in order to obtain in-depth information. In addition, the snowball technique was used, in which participants indicated acquaintances to take part in the research. The inclusion criteria were the same as in the previous stage, while the exclusion criteria were subjects who were carrying out a professional activity directly related to the subject of the study.

The study was conducted in the southern region of Brazil (Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul), with a higher concentration of participants in Santa Catarina due to the convenience of the sample for the researchers. According to data from the International Migration Observatory [Cavalcanti, Oliveira, & Silva, 2024], the region registered 62,839 immigrants in 2023, with a predominance of Venezuelans, followed by Argentinians and Haitians. The region ranks third in requests for refuge in the country, with Cubans and Venezuelans as the main applicants. These immigrants are mostly employed in labour-intensive sectors, particularly in the poultry and pork slaughtering industries.

Data collection instruments. In the **quantitative stage**, data were collected using a self-administered, structured online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument was developed by one of the authors of this study based on the appropriation of scientific literature on the subject. A pre-test was carried out in order to test the consistency of the items, followed by an analysis by judges including two doctors and a doctoral student in psychology. The questionnaire consisted of open and closed answers and was divided into three parts. In the first, an evocation test was carried out, in which participants were asked to name five words that came to mind from the inducing terms “immigrants” and “violence against immigrants”, followed by a request to place the words in order of importance and explain them. This technique is widely used by the structural approach, as it helps to locate areas of repression and allows mental content to be grasped objectively, revealing implicit content that is not usually remembered.

In the second part, a set of questions was drawn up based on the proposed operationalization of a representative scheme. Thus, a set of statements associated with immigration and violent and discriminatory practices against immigrants was presented, which were answered using a Likert scale. This set of statements covered the three dimensions of SR (information, attitude and image) [Moscovici, 2012]. In addition, statements derived from part of the planned behaviour model were presented. It covered questions about immigration, violence against immigrants, xenophobic aspects, COVID-19’s relationship with immigrants, among others. Finally, in the last part, the instrument included sociodemographic questions to characterize the subjects.

In the **qualitative stage**, a semi-structured interview was conducted using a script developed on the basis of the literature review. It covered more general questions about the SRs of immigrants, which were considered important for addressing the specific issue of violence against immigrants; questions relating to violence against immigrants; and questions that could contribute to a deeper understanding of these SRs, such as participants’ relationship with these phenomena. The questions also involved techniques to reduce the normative pressure on the participant, in order to investigate the mute zone [Camargo & Justo, 2021], which refers to spaces of SRs that, although common, are not easily revealed in the discourses, as they are considered to be inappropriate to social norms. Thus, the technique of substitution and decontextualization was used, allowing them to express their thoughts more freely. Finally, a sociodemographic questionnaire was carried out to investigate the variables characterizing the participants.

Data collection procedures. In the **quantitative stage**, initial contact was made with local residents who met the inclusion criteria, via e-mail, social networks, and personal contact. The snowball technique was also used. A pilot study was carried out beforehand with 20 participants, with the aim of checking that the questionnaire met the research objectives. No reformulations were necessary after the pilot study. Before starting the online questionnaire, the participants were given some information about the research and were assured of the confidentiality of their information.

In the **qualitative stage**, an analysis was initially carried out by judges specializing in psychology, followed by a pilot with two interviews to check that the questions were suitable for

the study proposal. After making the necessary changes, data collection began. The participants were contacted through the personal and professional contact of one of the authors. From the first contacts, the snowball technique was used. Due to the difficulty in collecting data because of the pandemic, most of the interviews were carried out virtually. All the interviews were conducted individually and all the content obtained was recorded using a tape recorder and notes. The data was transcribed and analysed.

Data analysis. In the **quantitative stage**, IRaMuTeQ software was used to analyse the data obtained through the free recall technique, which allows work with matrices involving categorical variables and lists of words. In this case, the software enables frequency counting and prototypical analysis, thus making it possible to identify the elements of the SR, classifying them into central and peripheral elements. The data from the questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis (mean, median, standard deviation, standard error and frequency) and inferential analysis, such as Spearman's correlation and MANOVA, using SPSS 26.0 software. Linear regression was carried out using Jasp 0.14.1.0 software.

Finally, Network Analysis was used in the Jasp 0.14.1.0 software. This analysis represents the pattern of association of variables in a two-dimensional graphic object. The representation is made up of nodes and lines, which represent the variables analysed and the relationships between them, respectively. The arrangement of the variables is defined in such a way that: a) related variables attract and unrelated ones expel; b) the more central a variable is, the more related it is to the others; c) lines represent the weighted association between the nodes, whether positive or negative. The correlation and partial correlation networks were analysed (controlling for the multivariate effect), with the r^2 values being a weighted measure of effect. Measures of connectivity, proximity, strength and expected influence were also calculated.

In the **qualitative stage**, a Hierarchical Descending Classification (HDC) was performed using IRaMuTeQ software to analyse the content of the interviews [Camargo & Justo, 2013]. The transcribed interviews were compiled into a textual corpus, with association variables such as gender, political party identification, proximity to immigrants, and education levels.

Findings. The results are presented according to the stages of the study, including the analysis of evocations, questionnaire data, and qualitative findings. The statistics for the evocations of the inducing term "immigrants" in the Free Word Association Technique (FWA) showed that 945 evocations were obtained (5 evocations per participant), with 370 different words, 236 words that were evoked only once and 134 words with at least 2 occurrences. The minimum frequency was 2.55, the diversity index was 0.39, and the variability index was 0.64. In this study, the statistics show that the variability index indicates a moderately homogeneous group in terms of the evocations related to the inducing term. The diversity index indicates greater homogeneity. As a criterion for selecting the words used for analysis, in order to make the graphic representation clearer, around $\frac{1}{4}$ of the different forms were used, which resulted in a cut-off frequency of 4.

As can be seen in Figure 1, among the words evoked, the word "opportunity" (31) was the most frequently evoked, followed by the words "culture" (28), "foreigner" (28) and "hope" (27). The elements in the first quadrant define the consolidated meanings for this social group and organize the SR about immigrants. In this quadrant, the words stand out: opportunity, foreigner, courage, and suffering. As a result, elements involving the meanings and feelings in the migratory experience, the reasons for migrating and definitions/nomenclatures are presented as a possible central nucleus.

Then, in the first periphery (upper right quadrant), there are words that are evoked frequently, but not as readily. These are elements that give strength to the SR, complementing the meaning of the central nucleus, and the words "culture", "hope", "refugee" and "difficulty" stand out, bringing complementary aspects to the first quadrant, based on feelings, definitions and migratory experience, which go, above all, through culture, presented as the most prominent element.

In the lower left quadrant is the contrast zone, which contains elements that are readily evoked, but with below-average frequency. This quadrant highlights the words: "language", "housing", "adaptation", and "unemployment". This brings up elements associated with the migratory experience, with practical day-to-day issues that can facilitate or hinder the immigration process, such as language barriers, financial difficulties, adaptation, among others.

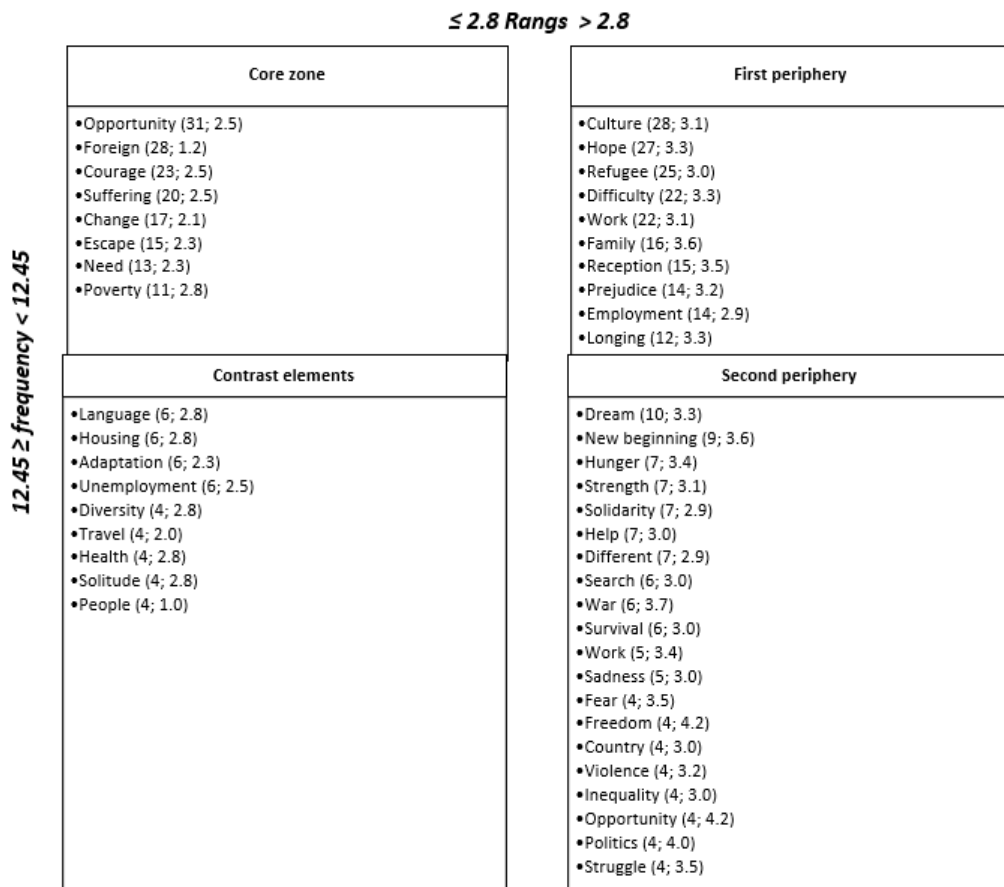


Fig. 1. Results of the IRaMuTeQ ranking of evocations produced in response to the inducing term “immigrants”

The fourth and final quadrant (bottom right) shows the terms in the second periphery. These are words with lower frequency and higher order of evocation and indicate the differentiations in the group surveyed. This is the quadrant with the highest number of words, where the following stand out: “dream”, “new beginning”, “hunger”, “strength”, “solidarity”, among others. It presents diverse and peripheral aspects, both positive and negative, which they believe are associated with the migratory process.

The words cited may have been more readily evoked for various reasons, such as social contexts, situations experienced, readings, among others, and do not necessarily reflect what is most important in the subjects’ SRs. For this reason, it is also important to consider the importance attributed to the evocations, based on a conscious valuation by the subjects. With this in mind, the participants were asked to indicate, among the words evoked, the two they considered to be the most important. When asked to indicate the most important words, the word “opportunity” was the most frequent, mentioned 19 times. This was followed by the words “courage” (f=16), “hope” (f=14), “culture” (f=14), “foreign” (f=13), and “refugee” (13). When we compare the words that were in the possible central core zone, we can see that not all of them confirm their centrality based on the respondents’ attribution of importance. Thus, the words “opportunity” and “courage” are those with the strongest indications of occupying the central elements of the SR about immigrants.

Regarding the evocations of the inducing term “violence against immigrants”, 945 evocations were obtained (5 evocations per participant), with 336 different words, 234 words

that were evoked only once and 102 words with at least 2 occurrences. The minimum frequency was 2.81, the diversity index was 0.35 and the variability index was 0.30. Thus, there is greater homogeneity. In the prototypical analysis (Figure 2), among the words evoked, the word “prejudice” (96) had the highest frequency of evocation, followed by the words “xenophobia” (53), “racism” (43), “ignorance” (39) and “intolerance” (30).

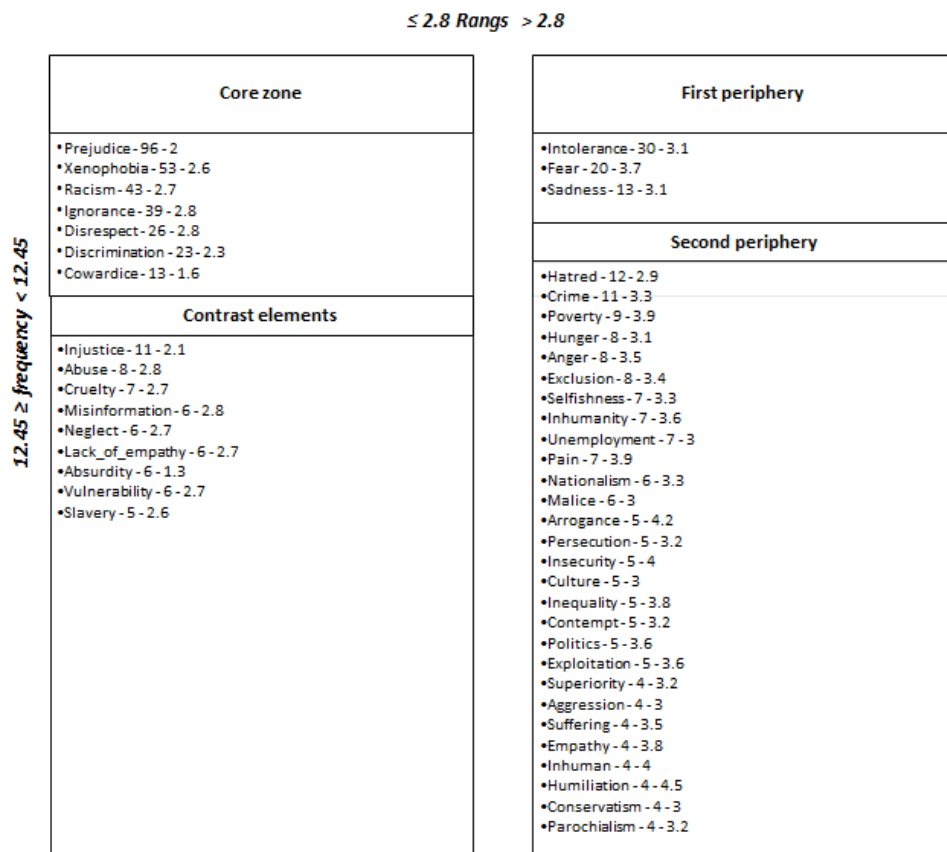


Fig. 2. Results of the ranking analysis of evocations produced in response to the inducing term “violence against immigrants”

In the elements of the first quadrant, the same words cited as the most frequent stand out. This indicates that a possible central core of this SR involves the meanings, theoretical concepts, motives and characteristics related to violence against immigrants. Then, in the first periphery, there are elements that give strength to the SR, complementing the meaning of the central core. The words “intolerance”, “fear”, and “sadness” bring complementary aspects to the first quadrant, based on negative feelings and motives related to the phenomenon. The lower left quadrant shows the contrast zone, containing the words “injustice”, “abuse”, “cruelty”, “misinformation”, “neglect”, among others. This shows elements associated with moral evaluations, criticism and influences related to violence against immigrants. The fourth and final quadrant (bottom right) shows the terms of the second periphery. This is the quadrant with the highest number of words, where the following stand out: “hatred”, “crime”, “poverty”, “hunger”, “anger”, among others. It presents diverse and peripheral aspects, complementary to the previous quadrant. Elements related to feelings, concepts, consequences and practical issues surrounding the experience of violence against immigrants are present.

When participants were asked to name the two words, they considered to be the most important, the word “prejudice” was mentioned 58 times as the most important. This was

followed by the words “xenophobia” (f=29), “intolerance” (f=19), “ignorance” (f=18), and “racism” (f=18). Of all the evocations, when we compare those that were in the possible central core zone, we can see that there are slight changes in their centrality based on the respondents’ attribution of importance. Thus, the words “prejudice”, “xenophobia”, and “intolerance” have strong indications of being the central elements of the SR on violence against immigrants.

In terms of statistical analysis based on the answers to the online questionnaire, most participants disagreed that immigrants are a threat; however, among the nationalities, the Chinese were rated as slightly more threatening. In relation to border control, the majority were against it; however, compared to the question about threat, there was a lower percentage against it. Most participants do not consider that immigrants contribute to the increase in violence in Brazil; however, among the nationalities, Venezuelans were considered to contribute the most to the increase. Regarding rights and public policies, half of the participants totally agreed that immigrants and locals should have the same rights, and only 29.6% totally disagreed that only Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should support immigrants.

More than half of the participants had medium responses (partially disagree, neither agree nor disagree, and partially agree) to the items “Immigrants contribute to the competition for vacancies in public services” (53.4%) and “the number of immigrants in Brazil is worrying” (52.9%). Only 31.7% of respondents totally disagreed that immigrants contribute to increased competition in the job market, and despite the small percentage of those who totally agreed (7.4%), more than half of them marked the middle items (60.8%). Less than half of the participants totally disagree that the government should close all borders until the coronavirus is under control (41.8%); that the government should be more concerned with the local population than with immigrants (46%); and totally agree that the government should provide emergency aid to immigrants (49.7%). A significant number of participants believe that immigrants should be treated with respect (91%). 98.4% report that they have never practised violence or been involved in conflicts with immigrants, but only 64.6% of participants have never witnessed violence against immigrants. Furthermore, when calculating the total scores, for the “violence and threat” factor there was an average of 1.39 (SD = 0.52), for the “aspects favourable to immigration” factor M = 4.14 (SD = 0.71), and for “aspects unfavourable to immigration and xenophobia” M = 1.55 (SD = 0.60). The final ranking shows that the majority (88.90%) have a positive perception of immigrants.

Of those who said they had witnessed violence against immigrants, most said they had witnessed structural violence (24.9%), institutional violence (21.7%), and psychological violence (19%). More than half reported not being close to immigrants (75.6%), but most respondents said they would study, work and be friends with immigrants. However, this number drops significantly when the relationship becomes closer: approximately half would invite an immigrant to visit their home, and only a third would have a romantic relationship. In general, participants tended to relate slightly more to Europeans and less to Chinese, compared to Venezuelans and Haitians.

A Spearman correlation was then carried out, which showed that: people who are concerned about / fear the entry of immigrants into the country had greater agreement with the factors “violence and threat” and “unfavourable aspects of immigration and xenophobia”. Participants who considered Haitians to be colder people were more likely to agree with the “violence and threat” factor. Those who agreed with the statement that people need to deserve to get support from others had answers that were more related to the factors “violence and threat” and “unfavourable aspects of immigration and xenophobia”. Participants who answered that they would like to help immigrants in need more; consider their political position to be extreme left or left-wing; would start a friendship with Venezuelans; and would invite a Haitian immigrant to visit their home, showed greater agreement with the factor “aspects favourable to immigration”, demonstrating a higher level of acceptance of immigrants’ presence. Using MANOVA, it was possible to see that “Do you fear / worry about immigrants entering the country?” is related to the factor “violence and threats” (F = 10.049; p = 0.0001) and to the factor “aspects unfavourable to immigration and xenophobia” (F = 8.271; p = 0.0001). Those who are more fearful and concerned about immigrants entering the country are more unfavourable and show more violence and threats. Additionally, respondents who had witnessed cases of sexual violence against immigrants tended to associate immigration predominantly with the “violence and threat” factor.

Political position was significantly related to the factor “aspects favourable to immigration” ($F = 4.944$; $p = 0.003$). The far-left group had a significant difference with the far right ($p = 0.002$); the left had a significant difference with the right ($p = 0.033$); and with the far right ($p = 0.0001$). Thus, those on the extreme right differed the most in terms of favourable aspects, i.e. they were the least favourable to immigration, followed by those who considered themselves to be on the right. Political position is also significantly related to the factor “aspects unfavourable to immigration and xenophobia” ($F = 4.002$; $p = 0.010$). There was a significant difference between extreme left and extreme right ($p = 0.07$); left and extreme right ($p = 0.0001$); there was even a significant difference between right and extreme right ($p = 0.004$). In this case, those who considered themselves to be on the extreme right were the most opposed to immigration.

The results of the network analysis revealed significant correlations between the variables studied. There was a strong negative association between race and reports of physical violence, with White participants reporting having witnessed more cases of aggression against immigrants compared to other groups. Race was also shown to be related to political positioning, as most self-declared extreme right-wingers were White. On the other hand, participants who identified with the far left were the ones who most often reported having witnessed physical violence against immigrants. As for sexual violence, age emerged as a relevant factor: younger participants were the ones who most often mentioned having witnessed this type of violence. The analysis also showed that Black respondents tended to be younger than other respondents. Regarding gender, women reported feeling more fear in the presence of immigrants than men. These patterns suggest complex dynamics between sociodemographic characteristics and perceptions of immigrants, with significant variations depending on the type of interaction analysed.

Furthermore, the analysis identified significant positive correlations between certain experiences and attitudes towards immigration. Participants who had lived abroad showed noticeably more favourable responses towards immigrants, as did those who knew immigrants personally or were closer to this group. It was also observed that participants who declared some religious affiliations were more likely to know immigrants personally.

In the centrality measures, it can be seen that the most important question in the questionnaire, which directly influences the participants' answers, is whether the participant knows any immigrants. In addition, having witnessed sexual violence against immigrants is the second variable that makes the most connections with others, with the least distance from the other variables and the greatest strength. The participant having lived in other countries and feeling afraid of immigrants are also relevant items in this system.

Regarding the qualitative study into SRs on violence against immigrants, the data was analysed using a text corpus, which was submitted to a CHD using the IRaMuTeQ software. 235 text segments (TS) were analysed, retaining 76.6% of the total, generating five classes (Figure 3). In addition, the variables gender, political position, schooling and proximity to immigrants were controlled for. In the first partition, subcorpus A was divided into class 5 (Lack of opportunities and exclusion) and a subcorpus, which was divided into two distinct classes, class 3 (Explanations and influences) and class 2 (Beliefs related to immigration). In a new partition, subcorpus B was divided into class 1 ((In)existence and forms of violence against immigrants) and class 4 (Macrosocial aspects), giving rise to a total of five classes. These were named and given meaning by the researchers based on the Text Segments (STs) belonging to each class. The divisions between the classes are made by semantic similarities and differences and the most significant words were verified using the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 3.84$, considering a degree of freedom equal to 1) and p -value < 0.0001 .

The first class to differ from the rest of the corpus was class 5 “Lack of opportunities and exclusion”. Representing 14.4% of the content analysed, it is made up of terms associated mainly with locals who are postgraduates / graduates and who do not know immigrants. Its content revolves around the difficulties encountered by immigrants in Brazil, due to the lack of opportunities and / or finding low-paid jobs, discriminatory and exclusionary relations in work and education spaces, among others. To elucidate these aspects, the following is an excerpt referring to workplaces: “*I find it difficult for a company to give an opportunity in a more intellectual position*” (local man, centre political position, graduate and does not know immigrants).

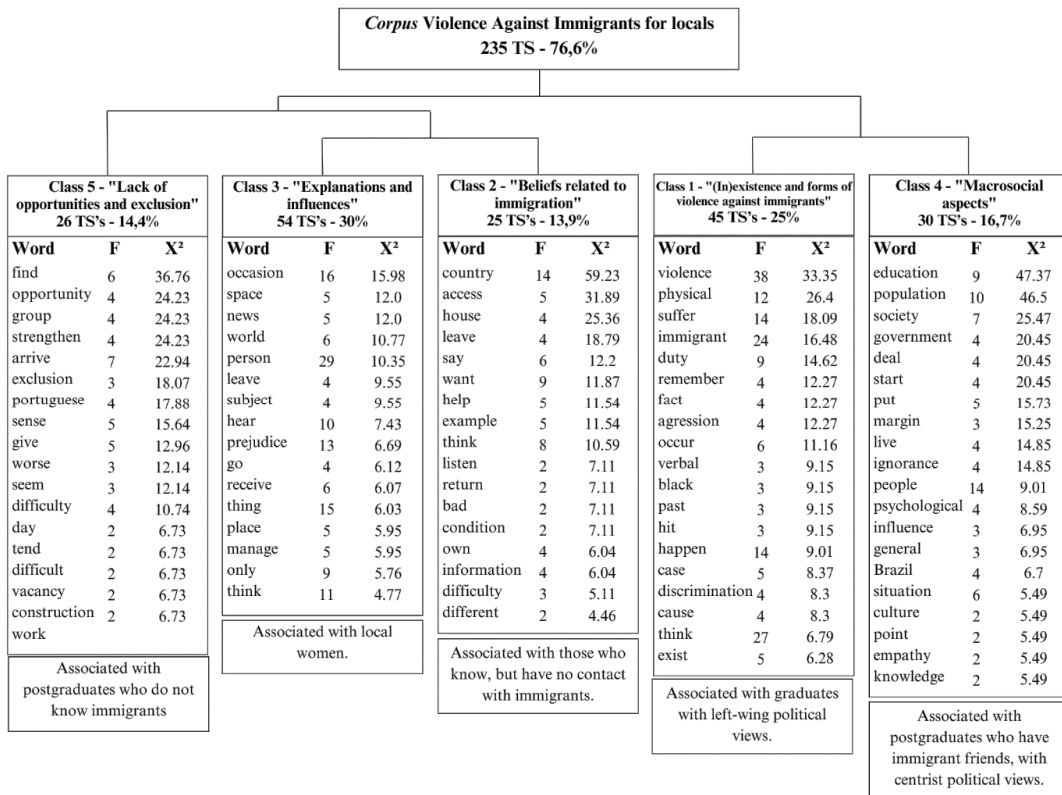


Fig. 3. Dendrogram of the corpus "violence against immigrants for locals"

The second class to be differentiated, class 3, named "Explanations and influences", corresponds to 30% of the STs that the analysis obtained and is mainly associated with local women. This lexical context talks about explanations and influences of violence against immigrants, the influence of the media and relations between locals and immigrants. The following excerpts illustrate the content of this class, based on speeches that point to explanations of the causes and influences attributed to the problematic phenomenon: "so they have to adapt to us and we have to adapt to them, but this often doesn't happen and because people don't have any education or information, they think they can treat people who come from outside in any way" (local man, left-wing, postgraduate and knows but has no contact with immigrants); "One person's attitude has repercussions on others too, the way they think, social networks also contribute a lot to this prejudice and so it often spreads false news and ends up influencing them" (local woman, left-wing position, postgraduate student and friend of immigrants).

Next, class 2 "Beliefs related to immigration" corresponds to 13.9% of the STs that the analysis obtained. This appeared associated with those who know but do not have close contact with immigrants. The excerpts present beliefs about immigration, how the government and the population itself should deal with the phenomenon, motivations and behaviour of immigrants in the country. As in the content shown below: "I think that if the issue were dealt with more and in the right way and seen from a different perspective, perhaps from their perspective, because I don't think that anyone in their right mind who isn't going through difficulties in their home country would leave there to come here simply for the sake of coming, there's a reason" (male, left-wing local, graduate and knows, but has no contact with immigrants); "There are different types, those who want to come here and make a life for themselves, work, make a family, help the country they're coming from, and those who want to stay on the soft side, on the poverty line, just like anywhere else" (local woman, right-wing, graduate, has contact, but is not friends with immigrants).

Class 1, named “(In)existence and forms of violence against immigrants”, corresponds to 25% of the STs and is mainly associated with graduates with a left-wing political stance. The excerpts refer to opinions on the existence or not of violence against immigrants and its different forms. The different types of violence can be seen in the following statements: *“I believe that it is in selection processes, in job vacancies, of someone not hiring him for the simple fact that he is an immigrant, even really physical violence or violence of the kind that I believe is disregard”* (local woman, left-wing, graduate and has contact with, but is not friends with immigrants); *“they suffer all this kind of violence, physical violence, humiliation, being in need”* (local woman, right-wing, with high school education and knows, but has no contact with immigrants). Beliefs and opinions about the existence and form of violence can be seen in the following statement: *“I don’t see anyone beating up immigrants, I think that perhaps other classes suffer more from violence [...] not that this type of violence doesn’t exist, but I think that in general they are not discriminated against because they are immigrants, when they are, it’s rarely a minority”* (local man, centre, with a degree and immigrant friends).

Class 4, called “Macrosocial aspects”, corresponds to 16.7% of the STs that the analysis obtained. It was associated with postgraduates, who have immigrant friends, with a centre political position. The excerpts present macro-social aspects, explanations, beliefs and opinions about rights, government actions, actions that could reduce violence, among others. As shows below: *“I think that the root of everything is education and, of course, the very vulnerability that we have in Brazil, so there are already a lot of people going hungry”* (local woman, from the centre, with a postgraduate degree and immigrant friends); *“a certain form of violence on the part of the government in not treating these people, in not welcoming them”* (local woman, from the left, with a degree and knowledge, but no immigrant friends).

In general, the interviews were permeated by SRs related to violence against immigrants, its existence or not, different forms, beliefs about the relationship between locals and immigrants, behaviours, explanations, influences on the causes of this phenomenon, among others. Psychological, verbal and symbolic types of violence were more present, while physical violence was less frequent. This appeared, in general, when the participant reported hearing someone talking about or in the media, for example: *“there is an aggressiveness and a lack of respect towards immigrants, who consider that they are coming to steal jobs, that they are taking advantage, so there is not only physical violence, but mainly in a more verbal form”* (local man, left-wing, graduate and with immigrant friends).

There were also statements comparing the South with the North of the country, with beliefs that differentiate the form of violence suffered here and there. The majority of those interviewed said they had not witnessed it, but believed that violence against immigrants does exist, generally with positions against violence: *“for me it’s absurd, it’s absurd in any case, it’s pure hatred and prejudice and it’s sad like that”* (local woman, left-wing, high school graduate and knows, but has no immigrant friends). It should also be noted that many participants said they had never stopped to think about the phenomenon, had no knowledge or opinion on the subject. One of the participants said: *“To be honest, I don’t know much about it, I don’t see much about it on the traditional media, television at least”* (male immigrant, left-wing, graduate, knows, but has no contact with immigrants).

As a way of investigating the mute zone of the SR, participants were asked what they believe family members, friends and other people in general (the Brazilian population) think about violence against immigrants, divided into four categories: polarization, unfavourable to violence against immigrants, favourable to violence against immigrants, and neutrality. It should be noted that some participants distinguished family members from friends, considering that friends would have more similar representations to the participant compared to their family.

When asked if they had ever been involved in a conflict with immigrants, 19 people replied that they had never been involved in such situations, while one person reported an episode in which an immigrant, after having his job application turned down due to the unavailability of a vacancy, reacted with insults. When asked if they had ever witnessed any conflict or violence with immigrants, seven said no. Of those who had, five had witnessed situations of prejudice and / or discrimination; three had witnessed situations of humiliation and verbal aggression; two had seen it in the media; two had witnessed job insecurity; two had witnessed situations of

racism and xenophobia; and two had witnessed institutional violence (one in health and one in public security). As an example: *“I’ve witnessed a few moments where they’ve been humiliated, treated like thieves, like indigents and had to abandon their merchandise [referring to immigrants who sell things on the street]”* (local man, left-wing position, with higher education and knows and has immigrant friends).

From the above, it emerged that immigrants were represented by local people based on definitions, motivations for migrating, personal characteristics, positions, difficulties, among others. The attitude of the participants was generally in favour of immigration and the development of public policies for this population, although almost half said they had no knowledge or opinion on the subject and there were statements with stereotyped beliefs. In addition, most interviewees believe that the SR that circulates in society about immigrants is negative and unfavourable to them. In relation to violence against immigrants, there were SR permeated by opinions about the existence or not of violence, the types involved, the presence of stereotypes, influences / explanations about violence, among others. The majority said they had never practiced violence, but the percentage decreased when asked if they had ever witnessed the phenomenon. In addition, other themes were mentioned, such as macro-social aspects, possible actions to reduce violence, comparisons between regions, among others.

Discussion. Based on the content obtained from the evocations related to the inductive term “immigrants”, it is possible to highlight the polysemy present in the SR of this phenomenon for locals from the southern region of Brazil. In general, the elements evoked by the participants refer to explanations about motivations to immigrate, different concepts that are disseminated and associated with immigration, cultural differences, personal characteristics, such as courage, as well as negative aspects commonly experienced when migrating, such as difficulties, work issues and suffering. In line with the literature, the participants attributed a series of motivating factors to migration, such as the search for work and study opportunities, better pay and higher quality public services. The broad meaning of the term “opportunity” refers to one of the main motivations for voluntary immigration, related to a life plan or project and the search for better living conditions.

Linked to this, another term frequently evoked by the participants was “hope”, associating a possible feeling experienced by immigrants, a subjective issue linked to the materiality of the motivations for immigrating. However, the hope for better living conditions and opportunities is not necessarily realized on arrival in the country of destination, many immigrants become victims of exclusionary relations. The motivations for immigration (whether voluntary or involuntary) also reflect the evocation of other terms associated with immigrants, such as foreigner and refugee. The term “foreigner” is an old one, once seen as the “other”, the “stranger”. In the scientific and legislative world (reified universe) the term is no longer used, but it still circulates in the consensual universe (common sense). The term “refugee” is widely used in both universes, but with the specificity of involving involuntary immigration. In this way, we can see that the reified and consensual universes are in constant interaction and imply relationships and an understanding of the world [Moscovici, 2003]. It is important to note that SRs emerge from this interaction, tending to make the unfamiliar familiar [Moscovici, 2003].

By highlighting the terms “culture” and “suffering”, the participants’ statements appear to be in line with the scientific literature in the area. The migratory process involves removing the subject from their cultural context, which can lead to a state of psychological vulnerability and, consequently, suffering. Among various definitions, theories and different perspectives on culture, one possibility is to consider it as a system made up of different elements that provide the subject with indications of how to act and think coherently, acting as a compass that guides the subject in their life. Language, customs, food, artistic manifestations, social functions and forms of care are examples of the properties of culture. Immigration is an encounter between different cultures, ways of living and ways of knowing how to exist. According to the author, this encounter generates changes, which can take the form of integration, expansion and cultural enrichment, or a negative direction of increased prejudice and exclusion.

Before migrating to Brazil, immigrants tend to imagine it as a country with many opportunities, high salaries and great hospitality; however, after migrating, they tend to face heavy work, low salaries, exhausting working hours and precarious conditions. This false image of hospitality is

also reflected in various difficulties usually faced by immigrants, such as bureaucratic obstacles, difficulties in learning the language, issuing documents, validating diplomas, guaranteeing rights, obtaining decent housing, accessing public services and social programs, as well as dealing with discrimination, social isolation and poverty. In this sense, by mentioning suffering, courage and difficulties, a large proportion of the participants recognize that this process involves a series of challenges. Other terms, such as dream, new start and strength, bring a perspective that, despite so many difficulties, immigrants have personal characteristics and goals that make “migrating” possible. Thus, overcoming difficulties appears to be linked to individual characteristics. This discourse is in line with neoliberal and conservative logic, which individualizes social phenomena. These terms are complementary to the central elements of the local’s SR about the immigrant.

In several statements, it was possible to observe an understanding that the injustice, poverty and misinformation to which immigrants tend to be subjected increase the group’s vulnerability, either through a lack of knowledge about their rights or exposure to situations of inequality and abuse. From this perspective, the exploitation inherent in the neoliberal capitalist system, especially through the dismantling of social rights, worsens living conditions, widens inequalities and increases social frustrations. This context contributes to the perception of immigrants as “problems” for the locals in the destination country.

Regarding attitudes towards government actions, there was a polarization in the speeches, with participants defending the expansion of policies favourable to immigration and others being opposed. With regard to the favourable perspective, the importance of welcoming policies, integration into the job market, housing, among others, was present. These elements corroborate studies that point to the importance of adequate public policies that enable immigrants to be welcomed with dignity and integrated into society. Although the Migration Law (Law 13.445, of May 24, 2017) [Brasil, 2017] guarantees immigrants, on an equal footing with nationals, the inviolability of various rights through public policies, there are still profound challenges in its consolidation [Bousfield, et al., 2025].

As for the perspective unfavourable to immigration, there were aspects such as advocating greater border control and opposing public policies in general. These included statements that raised concerns about the number of immigrants, the fear of change and the beliefs involved, such as linking immigration to an increase in crime, illustrating the xenophobia present. Thus, according to Z. Bauman [2017], xenophobia arises from the fear that is constituted by stereotypes of immigrants as “invaders”, “criminals”, among others. However, according to the literature, there is no statistical evidence that can link an increase in the number of immigrants to an increase in the rate of any type of crime.

Furthermore, some interviewees based their rejection of such policies on the argument that they implied taking rights away from Brazilians to give them to “strangers”. From this perspective, immigrants do not deserve to enjoy the same rights as “good” citizens. The nationalist conception understands that a certain territory belongs to national citizens, representing immigrants as a threat, presupposing the opposition between “us” and “others”. In addition, the attitude against public policies is also related to the concept of a minimal state, from a neoliberal perspective. The latter argues that state intervention should only occur in cases where it is necessary to regulate and stabilize market situations and free competition, leaving social protection and the guarantee of basic rights in the lurch. This neoliberal perspective contributes to the reduction of social rights, increasing inequalities and spreading the perception of immigrants as problems/costs for society. However, it should be noted that this position is a minority in the sample investigated.

In general, economic perception is the predominant factor in attitudes against immigration. Although many participants gave neutral answers about the competition for jobs and the number of immigrants, most believe that the population associates immigrants with competition for jobs and public services, seeing their increase as worrying. This is in line with studies that identify SR that characterize immigrants as unwanted and as competitive threats. However, this concern with the volume of immigration has proved to be disproportionate: in 2019 immigrants represented only 0.4% of the Brazilian population, which was overestimated by 75 times by the local population. This phenomenon corroborates the thesis of Z. Bauman [2017] that immigrants are converted into elements of “discharge” of social tensions, functioning as scapegoats that divert the focus from structural problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the polarizations around this issue in the data collected. While some advocated more immigrant-friendly policies, others advocated closing borders and focusing government efforts on the locals. This data reflects the idea of intergroup differentiation. According to H. Tajfel [1983], in contact with the threat of the different, the ingroup tends to strengthen itself by rejecting the outgroup, through its exclusion. Exclusion translates into estrangement, keeping the individual apart from a group, closing off access to goods, resources, roles or status [Jodelet, 2011]. In addition, nationalist discourses defend the exclusion of the “other” and have contributed negatively to the guarantee of immigrant rights. In this direction, the nationalist conception represents immigrants as a threat to the national territory, presupposing the opposition between “us” and “others”, thus defending the closing of borders and that public policies should prioritize the locals.

It was also possible to see that one of the variables with the greatest influence on the participants’ responses was having some proximity to an immigrant. In addition, proximity to immigrants contributes to their humanization, as they can speak, demonstrate and help construct information for their own SR – which corresponds to one of the dimensions of SRT. The distance from the immigrant reality reported by the research participants portrays the isolation and social exclusion of this population, in line with what has been pointed out in other studies.

In line with this, we can mention the case of participants who have lived in other countries and are closer to immigrants, resulting in more favourable responses to immigration. Participants who said they had a religion also generally knew an immigrant, possibly due to the presence of religious organizations helping to integrate immigrants. For example, the Pastoral do Migrante, Cáritas, Ação Social Arquidiocesana, among other charitable institutions, offer guidance and assistance in the most immediate situations [Silva, Bousfield, Leandro, Silva & Bousfield, 2021].

Although many of the participants indicated that they would study, work and be friends with immigrants, the closer the relationship, the less the desire to form ties. This number is even lower when nationality is taken into account, with Chinese, Venezuelans and Haitians having the lowest rates. These results illustrate manifest discrimination, characterized by the distancing of groups affected by prejudice. It describes that social prejudice is made up of beliefs, affections and attitudes of a negative, aversive and excluding nature, such as distancing oneself from the people targeted by prejudice and opposing contact with these groups. In addition, the importance of intersectionality in the formation of prejudice is highlighted, given that the participants articulate different social markers of race and nationality for the construction of distance and social exclusion.

Among the sample analysed, it was found that most participants have beliefs, attitudes and SR against violence directed at immigrants. In addition, a significant number of participants believe that immigrants should be treated with respect. However, some nuances were observed, which will be discussed in the following text.

Most participants disagreed that immigrants were a threat, but the Chinese were rated as slightly more “threatening”. This may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was taking place at the time the questionnaire was administered. The pandemic generated a sense of threat, fear and anxiety, which, coupled with a lack of information, fake news about the disease and political decisions, led to an increase in xenophobia.

Another finding is that most participants do not think that immigrants contribute to the increase in violence, but Venezuelans were considered to be the biggest contributors. The increase in the number of Venezuelan immigrants in the country, the political and economic crisis in Venezuela and the way they are portrayed in the media all contribute to the circulation of pejorative SRs about Venezuelan immigrants. Studies indicate that Venezuelans are received in Brazil as potential aggressors and that the spread of fake news contributes to this, as illustrated by the attacks that became known in 2018 as “Bota Fogo!” (Put Fire), due to the images of people setting fire to Venezuelan immigrants’ accommodation after a fake news story about a Venezuelan stabbing a Brazilian shopkeeper.

One of the participants reported the institutional violence of fellow doctors in their care of immigrants, who, according to her, do not give importance to the care of this population and make no effort to establish a dialog. There are many barriers involved in providing quality care in health policies. It is necessary to adapt the practices of public servants when dealing

with immigrants, as the encounter between two different cultural logics can generate unease. In addition, professionals need to take an ethical-political stance in their institutional work, considering the multiplicity of contexts, cultures and languages, taking care not to base their practices on the Western biomedical model, reproducing a colonial logic.

On the other hand, some participants say they don't believe there is violence against immigrants, using the idea of Brazilians as a hospitable nation as a justification. For them, the person is not discriminated against because they are an immigrant, but for other reasons, such as racism or their own actions. In this way, the social marker of nationality and the very identity of being an immigrant are minimized, as well as individualizing and blaming the individual who is victimized. Thus, in the participants' speeches, the idea of Brazilians as cordial and welcoming returns and is presented in gradations: among the participants who believe that violence does not occur; at another level, those who believe that "only" symbolic and psychological violence occurs; and at another gradation, those who mention that there are various forms of violence against immigrants in Brazilian society.

Elements about the lack of opportunities, discriminatory and exclusionary relationships in work and education spaces were also presented. D. M. Faustino and L. M. Oliveira [2021] state that xenophobia occurs within a construct of structural discrimination, for example, despite qualifications and experience, immigrants do not have the same job opportunities as locals. It is pointed out that despite legal provisions for labour rights, in practice, many immigrants work informally, are poorly paid and work in precarious conditions. There are also barriers in the educational context. Although laws guarantee the inclusion of immigrant students, in practice there is no support for welcoming them, contributing to social exclusion. Studies also point out the need to pay attention to microaggressions against immigrant students in the school environment. Thus, work and education are considered essential factors for integration, social emancipation and reconfiguring the immigrant's life project.

It is also noteworthy that some of the participants made comparisons between the South and North regions, indicating a perception of greater severity of violence in the North. Since 2017, there has been a growing influx of Venezuelans seeking refuge in Roraima. However, the public policies adopted – marked by a securitized approach with measures such as the installation of fences in public squares and the negligent actions of the police forces – ended up aggravating the vulnerability of these immigrants, leaving many in a situation of social risk. Studies also point out that it has become routine for locals to attack immigrants in Roraima. However, studies show that violence against immigrants does not only occur in the North. For example, situations experienced in the Greater region of Florianópolis include mockery related to difficulties in understanding the language and humiliation in the workplace, among others. Studies also present the marginalization of Haitians in Curitiba / PR, based on expressions such as "South is my Country" and "Republic of Curitiba", which denote the regionalism present. In this way, it is understood that despite the SRs present that violence is more explicit and intense in the North, this phenomenon also occurs in the South, but not as publicized, debated and explicit, and still associated with the idea of the welcoming Brazilian.

Regarding the participants' positions, although the majority were in favour of the presence of immigrants, some had opposing attitudes and statements permeated by xenophobia. In this sense, it can be seen that the SR about immigrants is controversial [de Rosa, Bocci, Nubola & Salvati, 2020; de Rosa, Bocci, Bonito & Salvati, 2021; Giacomozzi, DeRosa, Silva Gizzi & Moraes, 2023; Moscovici, 1988; Silva, Tribees, & Bousfield, 2024]. The progression of conflicts involving controversial SRs generates polarization around a phenomenon. Thus, there is a current opposition of ideas: immigrants perceived as potential resources or as victims; versus immigrants perceived as a threat, with stigmatizing beliefs [Giacomozzi, DeRosa, Silva Gizzi & Moraes, 2023; Silva, Tribees, & Bousfield, 2024].

It was also possible to identify the effects of political positioning on the construction of SRs, attitudes and social practices in relation to the phenomenon of violence against immigrants. Participants who considered themselves to be extreme left-wing were more likely to agree with the factor "aspects favourable to immigration" and those who considered themselves to be extreme right-wing were more likely to agree with the factor "aspects unfavourable to immigration". In the research by A.I. Giacomozzi and M.M. Vitali [2022], the authors show that

the speeches of political leaders are sources of information and contribute to the formation of opinions, beliefs and SR about immigration for the Brazilian population.

Finally, it should be noted that, in general, most of the participants said they believed that violence against immigrants exists, even though they were against it. In this sense, the factor of social desirability stands out and it is worth considering that most participants have a high level of education and a political position that is either left-wing or centre, which is more favourable to immigrants. In addition, almost half of the respondents said they had never thought about the phenomenon or had no knowledge of the subject, believing that the topic should be addressed more in society. It is therefore important to reflect on the fact that this is possibly a little-known subject, which could illustrate the processes of anchoring and objectification of an SR under construction [Moscovici, 2012]. In addition, the lack of interest from public sectors, the media and the population in general on the subject has repercussions on the lack of information – an essential dimension in SRs – which influences the emptying of content and the reproduction of stereotypes. As Z. Bauman [2017] points out, the population in general considers immigrants to be strangers about whom they know too little to come up with appropriate responses.

The participants attribute the causes of violence to factors such as ignorance, intolerance and disrespect, terms that carry a negative connotation and reflect a position against violent acts. They point out that misinformation and a lack of tolerance for what is different contribute to the occurrence of violence, in line with studies such as those by D. Jodelet [2017] and others. According to the latter, misinformation can generate anxiety, fear and a perception of threat, impairing the capacity for reflection and fostering intolerance, which in turn leads to discriminatory and violent practices against immigrants. However, when explaining violence, participants tend to emphasize moral values – such as the lack of respect – while minimizing social, cultural and structural aspects. Thus, they emphasize that racism and xenophobia are the result of “evil”, reducing a structural problem to individual and affective issues.

In the SRs of violence against immigrants, macro-social aspects were also present, such as explanations, beliefs and opinions about rights, government actions and actions that could reduce violence. These were brought up mainly by respondents with a high level of education and who have some proximity to immigrants. The statements criticize the marginalization and exclusion of the immigrant population, pointing out the need for public policies

We also highlight the role of emotions and affections as important dimensions in the study of SRs. In the process of creating new meanings, emotions are fundamental, as they help to interpret and judge social situations and objects. Among the feelings associated with violence against immigrants, fear and sadness stood out, reflecting the psychological consequences of these experiences. This evidence is consistent with academic production on the subject, which describes that situations of violence can lead to greater psychological vulnerability, directly affecting the mental health of immigrants. In addition, terms such as “hatred” and “cruelty” appear as moral reactions, expressing indignation at these acts. These emotions not only reveal a stance against violence but also play a fundamental role in the construction of SRs.

Finally, regarding the profile of the sample, we highlight the predominance of participants with a high level of education and income, a factor that may have influenced the results obtained. Research indicates that the higher the level of education and income, the less opposition there is to immigration, as citizens with low qualifications may feel more vulnerable to unemployment, and people with higher levels of education tend to view cultural exchange positively. In this research, a qualitative assessment shows that many participants had a degree in the humanities and the few participants who had more unfavourable responses to immigration had a high level of education and income. In addition, it is necessary to weigh up the answers provided due to the possibility that the results are linked to social desirability (one of the foundations of the mute zone of an SR) which relates to the conscious attempt to show a positive image of oneself, hiding negative judgments and against social norms in relation to violence against immigrants.

Limitations of the study. This study has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. The sample is predominantly composed of participants with higher levels of education and income, which may have influenced the generally favourable attitudes toward immigrants. In addition, the use of self-report instruments may be subject to social desirability bias, especially given the normative nature of the topic of violence. The

regional focus on the southern part of Brazil also limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future studies should consider more diverse samples and include different regions to deepen the understanding of social representations of immigrants and violence against them.

Conclusions. The analysis of the SRs of immigration and violence against immigrants for locals in the southern region of Brazil made it possible to highlight the complexity of these phenomena. The term “immigrant” is polysemic and strongly linked to the search for better opportunities. The participants generally recognized the various difficulties involved in immigration, such as language and cultural barriers, which are reflected in precarious jobs, low socioeconomic status and suffering. They also highlighted hope and courage as common motivators for immigrating. The sample was in favour of immigrant rights, highlighting the need to guarantee a more effective welcome through public policies. However, some opposed this, stressing that the government’s priority should be local people.

Despite claiming to be in favour of immigrants, many of the participants don’t have a close relationship with any of them. This makes it difficult to take a complex and sensitive look at their experiences and can also lead to ignorance about violent acts against this population. Most believe that violence occurs, attributing it to prejudice, xenophobia and racism. These motivations, however, tend to be dealt with individually, claiming to be the result of individual rejection, rather than a consequence of the country’s structural problems. Even though most of the respondents reported not having committed violent acts against immigrants and were unaware of examples of violent acts, those who did share mainly reported structural, institutional and psychological violence. It was also possible to verify the belief that in the South prejudice, and consequently violence, against immigrants would be lower than in the North of the country. This data, however, does not corroborate the findings of scientific literature. It should be noted that violence is a strongly normative issue, and social desirability may have played a role in the answers given in this study.

The advances of this study include capturing elements of the SR of immigrants and violence against them in the southern region of Brazil, contributing to greater specificity in knowledge. In addition, the use of multiple data collection methods allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, revealing the meanings attributed by the participants in a complex and contextualized way. As a central finding, we highlight not only the variations in positions according to the respondents’ political identification, but also the determining influence of the degree of contact and proximity they have with immigrants – two analytical axes that proved fundamental to understanding the different SRs identified.

For future research, we suggest looking more closely at the differences already identified in the SR about immigrants among the locals of southern Brazil, with a particular focus on the dynamics related to political identification. It is important to maintain the diversity of the sample, incorporating participants from different social strata, levels of education and racial belonging, which will allow us to verify how these factors are articulated with the political differences already observed. Finally, we recommend investigating the SR of violence against immigrants from the perspective of the immigrants themselves, allowing them to relate their experiences and interpretations. This approach could reveal essential nuances for developing more effective strategies for combating violence and welcoming immigrants, based on the reality experienced by this group.

Adherence to Ethical Standards. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (Report No. 4.593.281) and conducted in accordance with Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council for research involving human beings in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were fully ensured, and the data were used exclusively for scientific purposes.

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SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF IMMIGRANTS AND VIOLENCE: PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL POPULATION IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL

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Immigration represents a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon that significantly transforms individual trajectories, collective identities, and patterns of social interaction. It encompasses both voluntary and involuntary movements, shaped by economic, political, and humanitarian factors. In the Brazilian context, despite the officially proclaimed discourse of openness and hospitality, contradictions persist due to the insufficiency of public policies and the presence of polarized social representations

regarding immigrants and their integration into society. The issue of violence against immigrants, including structural and institutional forms, further complicates this scenario. Social representations play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of immigrants and legitimizing or challenging discriminatory practices. Therefore, analysing how local populations perceive immigrants and violence against them is essential for understanding broader processes of social inclusion and exclusion.

The study **aims** to analyse social representations of immigrants and perceptions of violence against them among the local population in southern Brazil. The objectives include identifying dominant symbolic meanings associated with immigrants, examining attitudes toward immigration and violence, and determining the influence of socio-demographic and ideological factors on these representations.

Methods. The study used a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected through an online survey ($n = 189$) and semi-structured interviews ($n = 20$) with adults born and residing in southern Brazil. The survey included free associations with the stimuli “immigrants” and “violence against immigrants” and Likert-scale items. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS and JASP using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlations, MANOVA, linear regression, and network analysis. Qualitative data were processed through content analysis and DHC in IRaMuTeQ.

Results. The findings demonstrate the ambivalent and internally contradictory nature of social representations of immigrants. On the one hand, immigrants are associated with positive meanings such as cultural diversity, opportunity, and social enrichment. On the other hand, negative perceptions related to threat, prejudice, and xenophobia remain evident. Although the majority of respondents expressed support for immigrant reception, manifestations of structural and institutional violence persist. The results reveal significant relationships between perceived threat and xenophobic attitudes, while direct social contact with immigrants and progressive political orientations are associated with more inclusive and supportive positions. Qualitative analysis confirms this duality, showing that social representations vary depending on education level, gender, political stance, and prior experience of interaction with immigrants.

The study also identifies a discrepancy between declared tolerant attitudes and actual social perceptions, as well as a tendency to minimize or overlook the presence of violence against immigrants. Particular attention is drawn to the persistence of stereotypes related to specific groups, especially in the context of economic and epidemiological challenges.

Conclusions. The coexistence of inclusive and exclusionary discourses reflects the complexity and polarization of social representations of immigrants in contemporary Brazilian society. Addressing these contradictions requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that includes the development of effective public policies, promotion of social dialogue, and enhancement of critical awareness regarding migration processes. The findings highlight the importance of fostering inclusive attitudes, reducing prejudice, and strengthening institutional mechanisms for the protection and integration of immigrant populations. Prospects for further research include the expansion of empirical studies in diverse regional contexts, deeper analysis of factors shaping social representations, and evaluation of interventions aimed at reducing xenophobia and promoting social cohesion.

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