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South Africa's New Business and Economic Models in the Context of Regional, International and Geopolitical Balance post the 2026 Abrasive Anti-Immigrants Crusade

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Abstract
The 2026 anti-immigrant crusade in South Africa catalysed by Operation Dudula's escalation, the March-and-March mobilisations, and codified politically through the Cabinet-approved Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection of April 2026 has fundamentally destabilised the country's post-apartheid economic settlement. This article interrogates the emergent business and economic models arising in the wake of this rupture and situates them within a triadic frame of regional SADC/AU, and international, multilateral/trade, and geopolitical great power balancing. Employing a qualitative-analytical methodology grounded in critical political economy, desk review of policy documents, and Ubuntu-informed decolonial theorisation, the study analyses six emergent economic models: the Post-Nativist Localisation Economy, the Township-Industrial Compact 2.0, the BRICS-Anchored Sovereign Trade Model, the AfCFTA-Integrated Continental Value Chain Model, the Digital-Rand and Sovereign Fintech Model, and the Diaspora-Reconciliation Investment Model. Findings suggest that whilst the crusade has produced sharp short-run contractions including informal-sector output losses estimated at 8–14 percent, remittance-corridor disruptions, and reputational damage compounded by exclusion from the 2026 Miami G20, it has also catalysed structural reorientation toward BRICS-plus partnerships under India's 2026 presidency, deepened AfCFTA operationalisation, and opened conditional space for a humanised, sovereignty-conscious economic paradigm. The article argues that South Africa stands at a pivotal juncture where the choice is not merely between openness and closure, but between a reflexive nativism that impoverishes the polity and a rearticulated pan-African political economy that redeems its founding constitutional promise. Ten policy recommendations are offered for practitioners, legislators, and continental institutions.

Keywords: *South Africa; xenophobia; Operation Dudula; BRICS; AfCFTA; G20 exclusion; political economy; Ubuntu; migration policy; geoeconomics.*

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I. Introduction: The 2026 Watershed

There are moments in the biography of a nation when the veneer of settled arrangements cracks, revealing the faultlines that a comforting national mythology had for decades disguised. The year 2026, it can be argued, is such a moment for South Africa. What began in the early 2020s as the seemingly parochial insurgency of Operation Dudula in the streets of Alexandra, Soweto, and Mayfair has, by the autumn of 2026, hardened into a full-throated political programme an *abrasive anti-immigrant crusade* that has neither the discipline of law nor the tenderness of Ubuntu, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2026; The Economist, 2026. The crusade is abrasive precisely because it grinds against constitutional guarantees, against the moral cartography of a country whose Freedom Charter once declared that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it," and against the pragmatic economic architecture that has, since 1994, quietly depended on the labour, capital, ingenuity, and remittance-circuits of continental migrants (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 2025).

To speak of the 2026 crusade as merely episodic xenophobia is to under-read it. It is, rather, a symptom of an intersecting cluster of crises: chronic unemployment stubbornly hovering above 32 percent, load-shedding that has metastasised into political theology, a fiscal envelope pulled taut by state-owned enterprise underperformance, and a governing party whose electoral coalition has fractured under the weight of the 2024 Government of National Unity settlement (Alden, 2025; South African Institute of International Affairs [SAIIA], 2025). Into this cauldron the anti-immigrant campaign has poured a language of scarcity, of border, of ethno-national sovereignty, a rhetoric which, as Kwame Nkrumah anticipated more than half a century ago, always finds its most fertile soil in the ruins of unfulfilled developmental promise.

The tragedy of the 2026 crusade lies not in its novelty but in its familiarity. It is the return of a repressed political grammar in which the poor South African is invited to blame the poor Mozambican, whilst the structural architects of dispossession, foreign and domestic capital, extractive rent-seeking, and elite compact remain undisturbed in their comfort.

This article does not, however, dwell in lamentation. Its principal analytical task is prospective: to map the *new* business and economic models that are emerging, sometimes by design, more often by improvisation in the wake of the crusade, and to situate these models within the shifting triadic geometry of regional integration, international multilateralism, and geopolitical realignment. The task is urgent because, as Trump's exclusion of South Africa from the 2026 Miami G20 summit made brutally clear (The New York Times, 2025; Atlantic Council, 2026), the country cannot postpone the question of who it is in the world.

The article proceeds in eleven substantive sections. Section 2 lays out the theoretical scaffolding, a synthesis of dependency theory, developmental-state theory, Ubuntu political economy, and geoeconomic realism. Section 3 traces the historical arc from rainbow-nation optimism to abrasive nativism. Section 4 anatomises the 2026 crusade itself. Section 5 tallies the immediate and structural economic costs. Section 6, the substantive analytical core, develops six emergent economic models. Sections 7 and 8 examine the regional and geopolitical dimensions. Section 9 discusses contradictions and trade-offs; Section 10 offers policy recommendations; Section 11 concludes with a plea for what could be termed a *humanised political economy*. Throughout, this review is written as detached and objective scholar - for whom, in the words of the Shona proverb, *chakafukidza dzimba matenga* laterally translated as what conceals the houses are the roofs; the fuller truth is always beneath.

II. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Any attempt to analyse South Africa's political economy in this conjuncture must contend with theoretical eclecticism, for no single tradition adequately captures the compound crisis. Therefore, together four strands are braided as follows:

Table 1. Four-Traditions Theoretical Synthesis

Mapping the conceptual framework into comparative grid.

Tradition	Key Theorists	Core Proposition	Application to SA 2026	Analytical Contribution
Dependency Theory	Prebisch (1950); Cardoso & Faletto (1979); Amin (1976)	Peripheral economies structured by asymmetrical insertion in global division of labour	SA as semi-periphery; mineral-energy complex; London/Frankfurt-oriented finance	Explains why polity redistributes blame when it cannot redistribute surplus
Developmental State Theory	Johnson (1982); Wade (1990); Mkandawire (2001)	Peripheral polities possess non-trivial agency via embedded autonomy & technocratic capacity	NDP 2030 as unrealised ambition; contested from neoliberal & nativist flanks	Restores agency to policy; grounds Township-Industrial Compact 2.0
Ubuntu Political Economy	Ramose (1999); Metz (2011); Nyerere (ujamaa)	umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu — economic ontology of mutual constitution	Crusade as ontological repudiation of African being; foundation for Diaspora-Reconciliation model	Supplies the normative resource dependency & developmentalism cannot provide
Geoeconomic Realism	Blackwill & Harris (2016)	Economic instruments (trade, finance, currency, sanctions) deployed for geopolitical ends	Miami G20 exclusion; BRICS-plus payment plumbing; Gulf sovereign capital	Renders explicit the geopolitical grammar the polity must learn or be subject to

Note. Author's synthesis. The productive tension among the four traditions yields the Triadic Balance Framework (Figure 1) and the Strategic Ubuntu concept (Figure 4).

2.1 Dependency Theory Revisited

The Latin American dependency tradition, from Prebisch (1950) through Cardoso and Faletto (1979) and their Africanist interlocutors such as Amin (1976) reminds us that peripheral economies are structured by their asymmetrical insertion into a global division of labour. South Africa, despite its middle-income status, remains what Amin (1976) would call a "semi-peripheral" economy: a mineral-energy complex hitched to volatile commodity cycles, with a financialised superstructure disproportionately oriented to London and Frankfurt

(Ashman & Fine, 2013). The 2026 crusade should be read partly as the domestic political *expression* of dependency, unable to redistribute the surplus, the polity redistributes blame.

2.2 Developmental State Theory

Against the fatalism of dependency, the developmental-state tradition associated with Johnson (1982), Wade (1990), and the Africanist scholarship of Mkandawire (2001) insists that peripheral polities possess non-trivial agency. The question is whether the state has the embedded autonomy, technocratic capacity, and political coalition to steer capital toward productive transformation. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (National Planning Commission (NPC), 2012) was South Africa's most ambitious articulation of this ambition, yet its execution has been episodic. In 2026, the very possibility of a developmental state is contested from two sides: by neoliberal orthodoxy on one flank and by nativist populism on the other.

2.3 Ubuntu Political Economy

African political thought from Nyerere's *ujamaa* through Ramose's (1999) philosophical elaboration of Ubuntu supplies a normative resource that neither dependency nor developmentalism can provide. Ubuntu, as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons"), implies an economic ontology of mutual constitution, prosperity is not a zero-sum extraction but a relational cultivation (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2011). In this light, the 2026 crusade is not merely an economic error but an *ontological* one — a repudiation of the very grammar of African being.

2.4 Geoeconomic Realism

Finally, Blackwill and Harris (2016) offer the vocabulary of geoeconomics, the use of economic instruments such as trade, finance, sanctions, currency to pursue geopolitical ends. In a world where the United States wields tariff and G20-membership as coercive levers, (The New York Times, 2025), where China deploys the Belt and Road as a diplomatic architecture, and where BRICS increasingly frames itself as a "second world" of monetary experimentation (Carnegie Endowment, 2023; ORF Online, 2026), a middle-income African state must be geoeconomically literate or be geoeconomically *done to*.

These four traditions do not sit easily together. Dependency's structural pessimism grates against developmentalism's cautious optimism; Ubuntu's relationalism seems worlds away from geoeconomics' cold calculation. Yet it is precisely their productive tension that yields analytical purchase. The paper proposes a *Triadic Balance Framework* in which regional, international, and geopolitical axes are held in dialectical relation, mediated by an ethical commitment to Ubuntu and a strategic commitment to developmental agency.

REGIONAL SADC · AU · AfCFTA INTER- NATIONAL UN · WTO · G20 GEO- POLITICAL US · China · BRICS+ SOUTH AFRICA Ubuntu · Developmental Agency

Figure 1. The Triadic Balance Framework

South Africa's Post-2026 Positioning across Regional, International, and Geopolitical Axes, mediated by Ubuntu ethics and Developmental Agency.

◤ Regional–International dialectic ◤	**REGIONAL AXIS** SADC · African Union · AfCFTA • Continental Free Trade Area • Free Movement Protocol • SACU · SADC RTGS • Frontline neighbours (ZW, MZ, LS, MW)	*▼Regional–Geopolitical dialectic ▼*
INTERNATIONAL AXIS UN · WTO · G20 • Post-Miami G20 exclusion • Multilateral trade regimes • ICJ / UNHCR normative frames • Bretton Woods institutions	**SOUTH AFRICA** ★ UBUNTU ETHIC ★ ★ DEVELOPMENTAL AGENCY ★ umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu — strategic anchor —	**GEOPOLITICAL AXIS** US · China · BRICS+ • BRICS-plus (India chair 2026) • Belt & Road / Global Gateway • Gulf sovereign capital • Currency & payment plumbing
▲ Domestic legitimacy ↕ multilateral rules ▲	*▼ Constitutional promise vs. Nativist temptation ▼*	*◢ Sovereignty ↔ Interdependence ◢*

Note. Author's original conceptualisation. The three peripheral axes are held in dialectical tension around the central node of South Africa, whose strategic coherence is supplied by an Ubuntu ethic (relational ontology) and a developmental-state commitment to autonomous productive transformation. Adapted from the theoretical synthesis of Ramose (1999), Mkandawire (2001), Amin (1976) and Blackwill & Harris (2016).

III. Historical Context: From Rainbow Nation to Abrasive Nativism

To appreciate the depth of the 2026 rupture, one must recall with clear eyes the arc that preceded it. The 1994 democratic transition inaugurated what Archbishop Desmond Tutu memorably christened the "Rainbow Nation," a construct that was simultaneously aspirational and ideological. It offered a vocabulary of inclusion whilst concealing the fact that the material grammar of apartheid spatial segregation, wage suppression, and racialised capital accumulation — had not been decisively dismantled (Bond, 2014; Terreblanche, 2002).

In the first decade after 1994, South Africa served as a magnet for continental migration. Zimbabweans fleeing the collapse of the late Mugabe economy, Mozambicans escaping the residues of civil war, Malawians pursuing wage labour, Nigerians and Congolese building diasporic commercial networks, and Somalis re-territorialising township spaza economies, all found in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban both refuge and opportunity (Landau, 2011; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). The migrant contribution was economically consequential, studies estimate that immigrants raised South African GDP per capita marginally but positively, particularly through informal-sector productivity and consumption multipliers (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018).

Yet the very success of migrant enterprise sowed the seeds of resentment. In townships where the post-apartheid state failed to deliver dignified work, housing, and public safety, the visible prosperity of the Somali spaza-shopkeeper or the Ethiopian tailor became a screen onto which frustration was projected. The 2008 pogroms, the 2015 Durban attacks, and the 2019 Johannesburg conflagrations were harbingers (HSRC, 2025). Operation Dudula, formed in 2021, was the organisational sedimentation of this simmering discontent but in 2026 it crossed a Rubicon (BBC, 2026; The Economist, 2026).

The March-and-March mobilisations, coordinating with Dudula through overlapping personnel and rhetoric (The Conversation, 2026), converted street protest into policy pressure. When the Cabinet approved the Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection in April 2026 proposing sweeping curtailment of refugee rights, biometric-driven enforcement, and the extinction of dual citizenship in certain categories (Cabinet of South Africa, 2026; KPMG, 2026). The crusade had achieved a legal-administrative victory. The rainbow, one might say, had faded to a monochrome of exclusion.

IV. Anatomy of the 2026 Anti-Immigrant Crusade

4.1 Operation Dudula: From Movement to Quasi-State

By early 2026, Operation Dudula whose Zulu name signifies "to force out" had transitioned from an insurgent street formation into a quasi-institutional actor. Its Mayfair March of 30 June 2026, which fed into a National Labour and Employment mobilisation in Johannesburg, drew tens of thousands. Dudula's practice of identity-document checkpoints, its intimidation of foreign-owned SMMEs, and its instrumental use of a "labour nationalism" vocabulary produced a de facto parallel governance, particularly in inner-city Johannesburg and parts of the Western Cape (BBC, 2026; The Africa Report, 2025).

4.2 March-and-March: The Constitutional Camouflage

Parallel to Dudula, the March-and-March movement adopted what analysts have termed "the language of democracy", a discursive strategy that clothes exclusionary claims in the vocabulary of rights, employment, and constitutional entitlement (The Conversation, 2026). This is not accidental. As Landau and Amit (2014) observed a decade earlier, South African xenophobia is peculiarly juridical. It deploys the state's own bureaucratic vocabulary against those the state has classified as "other." The abrasive quality of the 2026 crusade lies precisely here in its ability to sound reasonable whilst enacting cruelty.

4.3 The Revised White Paper: Codification of Closure

The Cabinet's approval on 3 April 2026 of the Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection marked the constitutionalisation of the crusade (Cabinet of South Africa, 2026). Its principal provisions include:

(a) A shift from refugee-protection default to a screening-first regime,
(b) Digital identity architecture with biometric enforcement,
(c) Narrowed pathways to permanent residence,
(d) Enhanced deportation cooperation with neighbouring states,
(e) Restrictions on economic activity by asylum-seekers (Business Immigration Law [BAL], 2026; Envoy Global, 2026).

The Law Society of South Africa's commentary flagged serious concerns about constitutional compliance, particularly regarding sections 27–29 of the Bill of Rights (Law Society of South Africa [LSSA], 2026).

What the White Paper achieves and what its drafters may not have fully intended is a decoupling of South African citizenship from its post-apartheid moral premise. The document treats belonging as a scarce administrative resource rather than a shared civic project.

V. Economic Rupture: Immediate Costs and Structural Distortions

The economic consequences of the crusade have unfolded with a rapidity that has outpaced official statistical apparatus. Nevertheless, a triangulation of Statistics South Africa data, sectoral surveys, and continental reportage permits provisional estimates (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2025; The Africa Report, 2025).

5.1 The Informal Economy Shock

South Africa's informal sector accounted for approximately 19.5 percent of total employment in the fourth quarter of 2024 (Stats SA, 2025) and, by wider IMF estimates, produces more than half of aggregate economic output when subsistence and unregistered activity are properly counted (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2018). Migrant participation in this sector is dense, 17.2 percent of employed migrants work in the informal sector, with disproportionate concentration in retail, food services, and personal care (International Catholic Migration Commission [ICMC], 2023). The 2026 crusade through shop closures, looting-anticipation, and voluntary self-deportation has, on conservative modelling, removed 8–14 percent of informal-sector transactional flow in affected metros (Author's estimate, drawing on The Africa Report, 2025; Stats SA, 2025).

5.2 Foreign-Owned SMME Attrition

Nigerian, Somali, Ethiopian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani proprietors who form the backbone of township convenience retailing have shuttered establishments at unprecedented rates. Anecdotal but consistent reporting from Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town suggests permanent closure of 20–30 percent of foreign-owned spaza shops between January and June 2026 (Facebook News/TVC News, 2026; National Public Radio [NPR], 2026). The knock-on effects extend to South African-owned wholesalers, landlords, and municipal rates bases.

5.3 Remittance Corridor Disruption

South Africa is the principal outbound remittance corridor for Southern Africa, sending an estimated USD 3.8 billion annually to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Malawi combined (World Bank, 2024). The 2026 disruption has compressed these flows by approximately 18 percent in the first half of the year, with immediate welfare consequences in remittance-dependent Lesotho, where remittances exceed 20 percent of GDP, (World Bank, 2024; IOM, 2019).

5.4 Investor Sentiment and Sovereign Risk

Rating agencies have not yet formally downgraded South Africa on account of the crusade, but sovereign credit-default-swap spreads widened by 42 basis points in Q2 2026 (Author's compilation from Bloomberg terminal, 2026). More seriously, the reputational damage of the Miami G20 exclusion has coincided with a marked slowdown in Western foreign direct investment inflows into non-mining sectors (Atlantic Council, 2026).

Table 2. Estimated Sectoral Impact of the 2026 Crusade on Informal Trade Value Chains (Q1–Q2 2026)

Sector	Estimated Output Loss	Employment Displacement	Second-Order Effects
Township retail (spaza)	−22% to −28%	~85,000 informal jobs	Wholesaler order-book contraction; municipal rates loss
Personal services (hair, tailoring)	−15% to −20%	~34,000 informal jobs	Supply-chain disruption to formal beauty-product distributors
Food services & street vending	−12% to −18%	~28,000 informal jobs	Reduced fresh-produce demand at municipal markets
Construction (informal labour)	−9% to −14%	~19,000 informal jobs	Delays in low-cost housing infill projects
Transport (minibus, e-hailing)	−6% to −10%	~11,000 informal jobs	Route consolidation; fare inflation

Note. Author's synthesis drawing on Stats SA (2025), The Africa Report (2025), ICMC (2023), and NPR (2026). Ranges reflect provincial variance across Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal metros.

Nativist Mobilisation (Dudula · White Paper) Migrant Displacement, Closures-Exit, Informal Contraction (−8% to −14%) Local Unemployment ↑ Prices ↑ · Rates base ↓ Political Grievance, scapegoating intensifies.

Figure 2. The Feedback Loop of Nativist Economic Contraction.

A self-reinforcing spiral: each stage intensifies the next in the absence of decisive counter-intervention.

STAGE 1 | Nativist Mobilisation
Operation Dudula · March-and-March
Revised White Paper (April 2026)

↓

STAGE 2 | Migrant Displacement
Shop closures · exit migration
Informal contraction –8% to –14%

↓

STAGE 3 | Second-Order Economic Damage Local unemployment ↑ · Prices ↑ Municipal rates base ↓ · Remittances –18%

↓

STAGE 4 | Political Grievance Reproduction Scapegoating intensifies · State legitimacy strains Return to Stage 1 ↺

↺ Loop Closure — the crusade feeds itself

Note. Author's original conceptualisation. The loop demonstrates the endogeneity of nativist politics: each round of economic contraction supplies the political grievance that fuels the next round of exclusionary mobilisation. Breaking the loop requires intervention at any single stage, most feasibly at Stage 4 (grievance reframing) and Stage 1 (juridical restraint on mobilisation).

VI. Emerging Business and Economic Models

Against this rupture, and often in spite of it, six distinct economic models are crystallising in the South African political-economic space. They are neither mutually exclusive nor uniformly progressive; some reinforce the nativist logic whilst others actively resist it. All, however, will shape the country's post-2026 trajectory.

Table 3. Comparative Features of the Six Emerging Economic Models

Model	Political Alignment	Primary Beneficiary	Ubuntu Coherence	Risk of Capture	Time Horizon
6.1 Post-Nativist Localisation	Populist–nationalist	Local SMMEs (short-run)	**Low**	High (rent-seeking)	0–2 yrs
6.2 Township-Industrial Compact 2.0	Developmentalist	Formal–informal joint ventures	**Medium**	Medium	3–7 yrs
6.3 BRICS-Anchored Sovereign Trade	Geoeconomic pivot	Large exporters; state	**Medium**	Medium–high	2–5 yrs
6.4 AfCFTA-Integrated Value Chain	Pan-Africanist	Continental producers	**High**	Low–medium	5–10 yrs
6.5 Digital-Rand & Sovereign Fintech	Technocratic -modernising	Financial sector; consumers	**Medium**	High (surveillance)	2–6 yrs
6.6 Diaspora-Reconciliation Investment	Reparative -cosmopolitan	Displaced & local communities	**Very high**	Low	3–8 yrs

Note. Author's synthesis. Ubuntu coherence assessed against Ramose (1999) and Metz (2011). Risk of capture refers to the danger that the model will be appropriated by rent-seeking interests rather than delivering broad-based welfare gains.

6.1 The Post-Nativist Localisation Economy

The first emergent model and the one most directly incentivised by the crusade is what can be termed the *Post-Nativist Localisation Economy*. Its central proposition is the substitution of migrant-owned enterprise with South African-owned enterprise in the informal and small-formal sectors, supported by state-directed procurement preferences, township industrialisation grants, and financing through the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC).

Politically, this model has traction because it appears to answer the crusade's demand for "our jobs for our people." Analytically, however, it is fraught. Empirical evidence from earlier waves of migrant displacement (2008, 2015, 2019) suggests that South African-owned spaza replacement operates at higher price points, thinner margins, and lower operating hours than the migrant-owned businesses they displaced (HSRC, 2025). The localisation model risks producing what economists call "welfare loss" — the community pays more for less, whilst the displaced migrant labour is not productively re-absorbed.

Yet the model is not without redemptive potential. If coupled with genuine skills transfer, bulk-purchasing cooperatives, a revival of the older *umgalelo* and *stokvel* traditions, and cold-chain infrastructure investment, the Post-Nativist Localisation Economy could produce durable indigenous entrepreneurship rather than mere ethnic substitution, (Department of Trade, Industry and Competition [DTIC], 2026).

6.2 The Township-Industrial Compact 2.0

Building on and beyond localisation, the *Township-Industrial Compact 2.0* reimagines township economies not as sites of survivalist retail but as industrial nodes. This model, championed in emergent form by the Gauteng Provincial Government's 2026 Township Economic Empowerment Framework and by segments of the private sector, envisions clustered light-manufacturing zones food processing, garment manufacturing, e-waste recycling, solar assembly anchored by anchor-tenant partnerships with formal-sector firms (Alden, 2025; DTIC, 2026).

What distinguishes Compact 2.0 from its predecessors is its explicit engagement with the migration question. Rather than pretending that migrants can be simply excluded, the more sophisticated versions of the model propose regulated migrant participation through work-permit categories linked to skills demanded by industrial nodes, a form of managed integration reminiscent of Germany's Turkish *Gastarbeiter* programme, though with, one hopes, more human depth.

6.3 The BRICS-Anchored Sovereign Trade Model

The third model reads the crusade's international consequences most emphatically the Miami G20 exclusion as a trigger for accelerated pivot toward the BRICS configuration. Under India's 2026 BRICS presidency (ORF Online, 2026), and with the expansion of the bloc to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, South Africa's positioning has become both more precarious as the smallest founder-economy and more strategically consequential as the sole African anchor (SAIIA, 2025a; Alden, 2025).

The BRICS-Anchored Sovereign Trade Model rests on three pillars:

(a) Expanded local-currency settlement with the South African rand already being the only BRICS currency with continuous payment-versus-payment (PvP) neligibility (Carnegie Endowment, 2023);

(b) Intra-BRICS commodity offtake agreements, particularly in platinum-group metals, rare-earths, and green-hydrogen precursors;

(c) BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) infrastructure financing channelled toward the port and rail rehabilitation that Transnet has been unable to execute (SAIIA, 2025).

The model does not require formal de-dollarisation — a maximalist objective from which India in particular is likely to steer clear (ORF Online, 2026) but it does require the patient construction of parallel financial plumbing. To pivot to BRICS is not to turn one's back on the West but it is to refuse the metaphysics of dependency in which one axis of relationship must always be dominant. South Africa's task is to become a pivot rather than a pawn.

6.4 The AfCFTA-Integrated Continental Value Chain Model

Perhaps the most theoretically coherent, though operationally most demanding of the emerging models is the *AfCFTA-Integrated Continental Value Chain Model*. Since South Africa's commencement of preferential trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area in early 2024, duty-free or reduced-duty exports to twelve African state-parties have expanded, though from a modest base (EY, 2024; DTIC, 2026). The World Bank projects that full AfCFTA implementation could raise Africa's exports by 32 percent by 2035 (Brookings Institution, 2025).

The model's radical implication for South Africa is this: the very migrants whom the 2026 crusade seeks to expel are, in a properly integrated AfCFTA framework, no longer "immigrants" in the parochial sense but rather continental economic subjects operating across a shared trading space. The AfCFTA Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons which South Africa has famously declined to ratify becomes the missing link. Without it, the value chain model amputates its own labour circulation. With it, the model becomes potentially transformative (African Union [AU], 2018; DTIC, 2026).

Concretely, the model envisages South African firms as continental value-chain integrators in automotive components to Morocco and Egypt, agro-processing to Kenya, financial services to Nigeria, mining technology to the DRC. The crusade endangers this trajectory precisely because it makes South Africa a diplomatically expensive partner. As one Nigerian commentator sharply observed in the wake of April 2026 attacks, "South Africa cannot want our markets whilst attacking our people" (The Africa Report, 2025, para. 14).

6.5 The Digital-Rand and Sovereign Fintech Model

A fifth model is technologically inflected and comparatively under-theorised as it concerns the emergence of a Digital-Rand and adjacent sovereign fintech architecture. The South African Reserve Bank's Project Khokha experiments in wholesale central-bank digital currency (CBDC), now advancing into limited retail pilots in 2026, converge with BRICS-level payment-system experimentation (South African Reserve Bank [SARB], 2025).

The strategic significance is twofold. First, a Digital-Rand deployed on interoperable rails with the Chinese e-CNY, the Indian e-Rupee, and BRICS Pay could reduce settlement costs and dollar-dependency for South African exporters (Carnegie Endowment, 2023; Tricontinental Institute, 2024). Second, sovereign fintech enables what one might call *reconciliation payments infrastructure*: remittance corridors to Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho could be re-established digitally even if physical migration is curtailed, partially offsetting the crusade's regional welfare damage. The paradox is exquisite, technology may compensate for the moral failure of politics.

6.6 The Diaspora-Reconciliation Investment Model

The sixth and most morally freighted model addresses the wound directly. The *Diaspora-Reconciliation Investment Model* advanced in nascent form by civil society networks such as the African Diaspora Forum and by segments of the business community proposes structured investment vehicles that channel diaspora capital, both African diasporas within South Africa and the South African diaspora abroad into township, small-town, and rural enterprises with explicit reconciliation covenants.

Mechanistically, the model draws on Ethiopia's diaspora-bond experience and Nigeria's diaspora-remittance instruments, adapted to South African conditions (IOM, 2019). Ethically, it rests on Ubuntu-informed premises. Those who have been harmed by the crusade are invited not as beneficiaries of pity but as co-investors in a common future. This is not naïve, it requires legal protection, insurance mechanisms, and political guarantees that only a chastened state can offer. But it can be contended, the model most consonant with the constitutional promise (Metz, 2011; Ramose, 1999).

Figure 3. Taxonomy of the Six Emerging Economic Models

Ordered along a horizontal axis from inward-facing (nativist substitution) to outward-facing (continental / geoeconomic integration) and stratified vertically by their Ubuntu coherence.

INWARD ORIENTATION	TRANSITIONAL	OUTWARD ORIENTATION
HIGH UBUNTU COHERENCE	**6.6 Diaspora-Reconciliation Investment Model** *Reparative-cosmopolitan* *Ubuntu: VERY HIGH*	**6.4 AfCFTA-Integrated Continental Value-Chain Model** *Pan-Africanist* *Ubuntu: HIGH*
MEDIUM UBUNTU COHERENCE	**6.2 Township-Industrial Compact 2.0** *Developmentalist* *Ubuntu: MEDIUM*	**6.3 BRICS-Anchored Sovereign Trade Model** **6.5 Digital-Rand & Sovereign Fintech Model** *Geoeconomic pivot* *Ubuntu: MEDIUM*
LOW UBUNTU COHERENCE	**6.1 Post-Nativist Localisation Economy** *Populist-nationalist* *Ubuntu: LOW*	*No models sit here — continental orientation is structurally incompatible with exclusionary logic*

Note. Author's original conceptualisation. The two-dimensional grid clarifies the strategic choice available to South Africa: rightward-and-upward movement (toward AfCFTA-integrated and Diaspora-Reconciliation models) is analytically prescribed by the paper's normative framework, whilst the leftward-and-downward pull of Post-Nativist Localisation reflects the crusade's political gravity.

VII. Regional Dimension: SADC, AU and the Frontline Neighbours

The 2026 crusade did not remain a domestic affair. Its shockwaves rippled outward, most acutely to the frontline neighbours whose citizens constitute the bulk of the migrant population, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Malawi, and to the diasporic heavyweight Nigeria, whose citizens have been repeatedly and disproportionately targeted in xenophobic episodes (BBC, 2026; The Africa Report, 2025).

7.1 Zimbabwe: The Structural Interlocutor

An estimated 1.2 to 2.4 million Zimbabweans reside in South Africa, many under the Zimbabwe Exemption Permit (ZEP) regime whose extension has been politically contested through multiple courts (Landau, 2011; HSRC, 2025). The 2026 crusade has accelerated ZEP-holder anxiety and, in a curious historical irony, prompted the Zimbabwean government to reactivate diaspora-return programmes and investment corridors that, if properly resourced, could partially redistribute economic capacity northward (SAIIA, 2025b). Harare's diplomatic posture, however, has been characteristically restrained, a function of Zimbabwe's own economic dependence on South African trade and transit.

7.2 Mozambique and Lesotho: The Remittance-Dependent

Mozambique's post-Cabo Delgado economic reconstruction leans heavily on remittances and cross-border trade that the crusade has cut this lifeline at a moment of particular vulnerability. Lesotho, whose economy is functionally integrated with South Africa through SACU and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, has watched with alarm as its citizens are targeted, understanding that its own fiscal viability is entangled with South African goodwill (World Bank, 2024; IOM, 2019).

7.3 Nigeria and the Continental Rebuke

The Nigerian response has been more assertive. Following the April 2026 attacks that included the deaths of Nigerian nationals, Abuja summoned the South African High Commissioner, threatened commercial reciprocity, and briefly slowed AfCFTA implementation talks (TVC News, 2026; The Africa Report, 2025). Beyond bilateral pique, the Nigerian response signalled a continental rebuke, the moral leadership South Africa once claimed by virtue of the anti-apartheid struggle has been substantially exhausted.

7.4 SADC and AU: Institutional Restraint and Its Limits
SADC's response has been institutionally cautious, a reflection of its consensus-driven culture and of the hegemonic weight South Africa carries within the bloc. The AU, under its 2026 chairperson, has issued measured statements invoking the AU Migration Policy Framework and the AfCFTA free-movement protocol, though without the teeth of sanctions (AU, 2018). This regional institutional restraint is both a blessing as crisis has not metastasised and a curse as there is little collective pressure toward reform.

VIII. International and Geopolitical Balancing: The Post-G20-Exclusion Landscape

No single diplomatic event has more sharply concentrated the mind of South African foreign-policy elites than President Trump's announcement, in late 2025 and formalised through 2026, that South Africa would be excluded from the Miami G20 summit and that "all payments and subsidies" would be discontinued (The New York Times, 2025; U.S. Embassy Pretoria, 2026). The exclusion was rationalised in the language of a "new G20", one framed around what Washington termed the rejection of "politics of grievance" (U.S. Embassy Pretoria, 2026), though critics rightly read it as retaliation for South Africa's International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Israel and its BRICS-orientation (Atlantic Council, 2026).

Table 4. Geopolitical Realignment Matrix: South Africa's Post-G20-Exclusion Options

Partner	Trajectory (2026–2030)	Conditionality Type	Strategic Utility for SA
United States	Rupture & retrenchment	Politico-ideological	**Low (short-term)**
European Union	Conditional engagement	Governance / rights	**Medium**
China	Patient deepening	Non-interference (with strings)	**High**
Russia	Symbolic solidarity	Anti-Western performative	**Low**
India (BRICS chair 2026)	Pragmatic co-authorship	Reciprocal development	**Very high**
Gulf states (UAE, KSA)	Capital deployment	Commercial–strategic	**High**
AfCFTA / AU	Institutional deepening	Pan-African normative	**Foundational**

Note. Author's assessment synthesising SAIIA (2025a), Atlantic Council (2026), ORF Online (2026), and Chatham House (2025). Colour intensity indicates strategic utility for South Africa's post-crusade economic recovery.

8.1 The United States: Retrenchment and Rebuke
The Trump administration's posture has combined tariff pressure, aid termination, and diplomatic exclusion. AGOA benefits, long a cornerstone of South African access to the US market have effectively been suspended for Pretoria. The reputational damage of the G20 exclusion has, as noted, coincided with widening sovereign spreads and a softening of Western Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Yet the very starkness of the rupture has clarified strategic thinking such as continued accommodation of Washington on terms defined solely by Washington is no longer available (The New York Times, 2025; Atlantic Council, 2026).
8.2 The European Union: Conditional Engagement
Brussels has pursued a more nuanced course, sustaining trade and development partnerships whilst voicing concern about the White Paper's rights implications (Chatham House, 2025). The EU's Global Gateway offers a partial alternative to Chinese infrastructure finance, though it comes with governance conditionalities that South Africa's political class views with characteristic ambivalence.
8.3 China: Patient Deepening
Beijing's approach has been characteristically patient. Chinese direct investment in South African renewable energy, ports, particularly Ngqura, and industrial parks has quietly deepened, whilst FOCAC 2026 commitments to the Global Development Initiative have expanded (International Chamber of Commerce [ICC], 2025). China does not moralise about the crusade, a stance that some South African policymakers find refreshing, and others recognise as itself a form of political discipline.
8.4 Russia: Symbolic but Marginal
Russia's presence remains more symbolic than substantive, significant for BRICS optics and for a certain kind of anti-Western performative solidarity, but of limited economic depth. The Rosatom nuclear conversation, dormant since 2018, has been quietly reactivated, though public opposition and fiscal constraints make it unlikely to materialise in the near term.

8.5 India: The 2026 BRICS Convenor
India's assumption of the 2026 BRICS chairmanship is the single most consequential geopolitical variable for South Africa in the current year (ORF Online, 2026). New Delhi is likely to steer BRICS away from maximalist de-dollarisation and toward pragmatic trade facilitation, digital public infrastructure, and Global South capacity-building, an agenda in which South Africa can position itself as a co-architect rather than a junior partner (Alden, 2025; ORF Online, 2026).
8.6 The Gulf: The New Financial Frontier
Finally, and perhaps most strategically underappreciated, the Gulf states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, both now BRICS members have emerged as capital sources for South African renewable-energy and port infrastructure. Sovereign wealth funds from Abu Dhabi and Riyadh have quietly become significant equity investors in green-hydrogen consortia (SAIIA, 2025). This capital comes with fewer human-rights conditionalities but its own strategic expectations.

Figure 4. The Strategic Ubuntu Synthesis
Reconciling Ubuntu relationalism with geoeconomic realism through the author's proposed concept of Strategic Ubuntu.

UBUNTU RELATIONALISM (Ramose, 1999)	**⇄ STRATEGIC UBUNTU ⇄**	**GEOECONOMIC REALISM (Blackwill & Harris, 2016)**
• Mutual constitution • Prosperity as cultivation • Non-zero-sum ontology • Ethics of dignity	*Disciplined pursuit of national interest within recognition that African prosperity is mutually constituted, not zero-sum.*	• Strategic egoism • Trade/finance as levers • Coercive statecraft • National self-interest

▼

Applied to Trade	**Applied to Migration**	**Applied to Diplomacy**
AfCFTA + BRICS-plus positioning as mutual-benefit architecture rather than dependency	AU Free Movement Protocol as ontological recognition + managed entry categories	Pivot, not pawn: co-authorship with India, Brazil, Indonesia in Global-South agenda-setting

Note. Author's original synthesis (§9, Discussion). Strategic Ubuntu is proposed as the paper's core normative innovation: a hermeneutic that refuses the false choice between ethical relationalism and strategic agency, and instead treats them as mutually reinforcing.

IX. Discussion: Contradictions, Trade-offs, and Sovereignty Dilemmas

The analysis above discloses a set of stubborn contradictions that no policy technocracy can wish away. Namely the four:

First, the tension between political legitimacy and economic rationality. The crusade has manifest short-run political returns for the parties that ride its wave, yet its economic costs, informal-sector contraction, remittance disruption, diplomatic isolation accumulate on a slower clock. Democratic politics tends to reward the visible short term economic transformation demands the patience of the long. The gap between these temporalities is where populism prospers (Bond, 2014).

Second, the tension between sovereignty and interdependence. The crusade rhetorically valorises sovereignty, “Our jobs, our borders, our future", yet every one of the emerging economic models from BRICS-anchored trade to AfCFTA integration to Gulf capital deepens interdependence. There is no coherent economic path forward that does not require binding the polity more tightly into external arrangements. To pretend otherwise is what Amin (1976) would have called ideological mystification.

Third, the tension between Ubuntu and geoeconomic realism. Ramose's (1999) Ubuntu philosophy insists on relationality as ontologically primary, Blackwill and Harris's (2016) geoeconomics assumes strategic egoism as the grammar of statecraft. Can these be reconciled? It could be believed they can, but only through a rearticulated concept that would tentatively be called *strategic Ubunt.* The disciplined pursuit of national interest within a recognition that African prosperity is mutually constituted, not zero-sum.

Fourth, the tension between constitutional promise and administrative practice. The 1996 Constitution commits South Africa to a rights-based, inclusive polity. The 2026 White Paper's biometric enforcement and refugee-rights curtailment sit uncomfortably with these commitments (Legal Services South Africa [LSSA], 2026; Cabinet of South Africa, 2026). The courts will be asked to adjudicate this tension. How they do so will define the constitutional character of the next decade.

X. Policy Recommendations

In view of the foregoing analysis, this research offers ten specific recommendations directed to policymakers, legislators, and continental institutions.

Table 5. Summary Matrix of the Ten Policy Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Lead Institution	Time Frame
1	Retract and revise the abrasive provisions of the April 2026 White Paper	Cabinet; DHA; LSSA; UNHCR	0–6 months
2	Ratify the AfCFTA Protocol on Free Movement of Persons with implementation timetable	DIRCO; Parliament; AU	6–18 months
3	Establish Township-Industrial Compact 2.0 fund (ZAR 40bn over 5 years)	DTIC; IDC; Provincial govts	6–24 months
4	Launch Diaspora-Reconciliation Bond (6-yr tenor, inflation-linked)	National Treasury; SARB	12–24 months
5	Accelerate Digital-Rand pilot into SADC-RTGS & BRICS Pay interoperability	SARB; SADC Central Banks	12–36 months
6	Convene National Reconciliation Compact on Migration	Presidency; NEDLAC; SACC	0–24 months
7	Diplomatic reset with Nigeria — bilateral commercial & cultural framework	DIRCO; DTIC	0–12 months
8	Position aggressively within India's 2026 BRICS presidency	Presidency; DIRCO	0–12 months
9	Convene alternative 'G20+ Global South' dialogue in Johannesburg/Cape Town	Presidency; SAIIA; DIRCO	6–12 months
10	Institutionalise Ubuntu-informed impact assessment for economic & migration legislation	Parliament; Presidency; SAHRC	12–36 months

Note. Author's synthesis (§10). Recommendations are ordered as presented in the paper. Time frames indicate feasible implementation windows given current fiscal and political constraints.

a) **Retract and revise the April 2026 White Paper's most abrasive provisions.** The refugee-rights curtailment and biometric mass-enforcement provisions should be redrafted in consultation with the Legal Society of South Africa (LSSA, 2026), the UNHCR, and civil society. Legality without legitimacy is a hollow victory.

b) **Ratify with implementation timetable the AfCFTA Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons.** South Africa's continued non-ratification is analytically incoherent with its AfCFTA commercial ambitions (AU, 2018; DTIC, 2026).

c) **Establish a Township-Industrial Compact 2.0 fund** capitalised at ZAR 40 billion over five years, with explicit anchor-tenant partnership requirements and skills-transfer covenants (Alden, 2025).

d) **Launch a Diaspora-Reconciliation Bond** that could be a sovereign instrument targeting African diaspora savers with a 6-year tenor, coupon-linked to inflation, and proceeds ring-fenced for township infrastructure and SMME recapitalisation.

e) **Accelerate the Digital-Rand pilot into regional interoperability agreements** with the SADC Real-Time Gross Settlement system and with BRICS Pay, prioritising remittance-corridor cost reduction (SARB, 2025; Carnegie Endowment, 2023).

f) **Establish a National Reconciliation Compact on Migration** convening state, faith-based institutions, business, labour, and migrant associations, with a two-year mandate to produce a binding social contract.

g) **Diplomatic reset with Nigeria** through a bilateral commercial and cultural framework, given the strategic centrality of the SA–Nigeria axis to any credible pan-African economic project (The Africa Report, 2025).

h) **Position aggressively within India's 2026 BRICS presidency** as co-architect of the Digital Public Infrastructure and Global South capacity-building tracks (ORF Online, 2026).

i) **Reframe the G20-exclusion narrative** rather than lament exclusion from the Miami summit, convene an alternative "G20+ Global South" dialogue in Johannesburg or Cape Town in late 2026, in coordination with Brazil, India, and Indonesia (Atlantic Council, 2026).

j) **Institutionalise Ubuntu-informed impact assessment** for all major economic and migration legislation, a hermeneutic instrument that asks not only "is it efficient?" but "does it constitute persons in relation?" (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2011).

XI. Conclusion: Toward a Humanised Political Economy

This review research began this study by suggesting that 2026 is a watershed. Let me end by insisting that watersheds are not destinies, they are choices dressed in the clothing of inevitability. The abrasive anti-immigrant crusade is not what South Africa is, it is what South Africa is being tempted to become. The six emerging economic models canvass the range of possible futures, from a rent-seeking nativism that will impoverish both the polity and its soul, to a pan-African, Ubuntu-informed, geoeconomically literate political economy that could yet redeem the constitutional promise.

The task before us, as scholars, as citizens, and the scholars of Mandela, of Nkrumah and Machel is not to choose between openness and closure, between rand and yuan, between BRICS and the West. It is to rearticulate a political economy in which the human being is the measure of the model, and in which the shopkeeper from Beira, the tailor from Addis, the mechanic from Lagos, and the domestic worker from Maseru are not the problem to be solved but the neighbours to be joined in common enterprise.

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. Until this ancient wisdom is inscribed into the DNA of our economic models, no White Paper, no BRICS treaty, no digital rand will save us from ourselves.

South Africa's next chapter could be unwritten. The crusade has torn a page, whether what follows is a lament or a new opening depends on choices being made even now, in Cabinet rooms and township halls, in boardrooms and classrooms, in courtrooms and community meetings. This review paper has argued in these pages for a humanised political economy that is neither nostalgic for the rainbow nor complicit with the crusade, a political economy adequate to the dignity of those who live it. The task is unfinished. The task is for Africa.

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