
HATE SPEECH AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Hate speech was the start of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Recently, no issue has generated widespread public comment in Nigeria other than the issue of hate speech and ethnic-religious violence that has rocked the country and its dire consequences for national integration. Whereas, on the issue of hate speech, the provisions of the Nigerian constitution and the Nigerian Election Law are clear but the question is where to draw the line between political statements and hate speech. Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of hate speech on ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. A descriptive method was adopted for this study and data was collected through a survey of 600 respondents consisting of Indigenous Leaders, Christian Leaders, Muslim Leaders, Leaders of civil society groups and Youth Leaders in the South-South, Southwest, Southeast, Northwest, North-central and Northeastern geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The collected data were analyzed using correlation and linear regression analysis with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21. This study found that there is a significant relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. The study concludes that hate speech in Nigeria is mostly directed towards political leaders and supporters of their ethnicity, religion or region.

KEYWORDS Hate Speech, Ethno-Religious Violence, National Integration



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INTRODUCTION

Every nation on earth desires national integration. National integration remains one of the cardinal objectives of every multi-ethnic nation (Egbefo, 2015). Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country that provides a perfect country-case study for ethno-religious violence

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(Olojo, 2016). Nigeria remains the most populous nation in Africa endowed with rich natural resources. Despite this, Nigeria is faced with many problems and challenges among others hate speech and ethno-religious violence seems to top the list. Hate speech and ethno-religious violence have created instability and remained a constant threat to peaceful co-existence in the Nigeria society (Onah, Diara, & Uroko, 2017).

Observably, hate speech and ethno-religious violence has rooten deep into the bone marrows of Nigerians and it has continued unabated. The hatred between the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria has intensified as the use of hate speech continues unregulated. Since 1960 when the country attained independence, ethno-religious violence has left the country comatose. Inter-ethnic rivalry, mutual distrust, bigotry, ethnic cynicism and religious intolerance have invariably and seriously undermined Nigeria's quest for national integration due to its leadership pattern and quality (Egbefo, 2015). Political leaders in Nigeria use hate speech to divide and rule the people already divided along ethnic and religious lines. To put it simply, political leaders in Nigeria employed hate speeches in politic and this incites coexisting ethnic and religious groups, thereby generating all forms of violence especially election related ones (Idike & Eme, 2015).

Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversities coincide with the North and South divide, with Muslims and Christians dominating each part respectively. These have created geo-religious identities; a situation where religion and its concomitant tension generation enthroned a threat to security of the country (Ukandu, 2011). Historically, religious extremists have tried to legalize violence behaviour and bloodshed in the name of God. This is apparent in the violence terrorist attacks that are justified by people who believe that they are involved in a form of holy warfare. In this context, Juergensmeyer's concept of 'cosmic war' provides a useful theoretical structure for investigating the violence that religious extremists indulge in today. This framework refers to the encounter between the forces of evil and good that highlights religious humility, yet induces violence (Nwankwo, 2015). Killing in the name of God is therefore one of the major motors of religious violence today (Juergensmeyer, 2005).

In addition, under the current democratic transition, competitive partisan political activities are being used as avenue through which groups are mobilized, identities rigidly reinforced, often infused with excessive religiosity, violent youth gangs and militants are formed and armed, and ethnic tensions and conflicts thereby facilitated. As the elite pursue zero-sum political engagements, all means, including violent ones, are used to achieve selfishly and narrowly defined ends (Idike & Okechukwu, 2015). Therefore, the character of the Nigerian state is responsible for the country's deepening ethno-religious violence that are presently threatening the fabric of the country, and which has become a clog in Nigeria's attempt to develop her economy (Mohammed, 2013). Hate speech and ethno-religious violence are rising and the country is daily challenged by these forces. This study therefore seeks to look at the challenges posed by hate speech and ethno-religious violence on Nigeria's match towards national integration. Examined the relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria and highlight what is required to be done, policy-wise as well as practically, by both the government and all the other stakeholders, so as to find a way out of the heavy cost of potentially violent ethno-religious and communal crisis, which characterize present day Nigeria.

In developing countries, the phenomenon of ethnic, religious and political related violence seems to be recurrent. Numerous studies have been conducted about the pre, during and post-election violence but little has been devoted in recent time at analyzing the principal cause of this violence in relation to hate speech. According to Adibe (2015) hate speech employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership. Fasakin,

Oyero, Oyesomi, & Okorie (2017) added that hate speech is often the gateway to discrimination, harassment and violence as well as a precursor to serious harmful criminal acts. This supports the assertion of (Ezeibe, 2015) who posits that hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity. In Nigeria, the quest for power and control, and the desire of politicians to win elections at all cost has engendered political and ethno-religious violence. The problem this paper intends to study therefore includes the challenges posed by hate speech and ethno-religious violence on Nigeria's march towards national integration and to examine the relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in present day Nigeria. This study specifically identified the following objectives: 1) to examine the factors that motivates hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria, 2) to examine the consequences of hate speech and ethno-religious violence on national integration, 3) to examine the relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Ascertain the extent to which hate speech impact on ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study assessed the impact of hate speech on ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. The descriptive approach was adopted and data was collected via a survey of 600 respondents comprises of Traditional leaders, Christian Leaders, Muslim leaders, Leaders of Civil Society groups and Youth leaders randomly selected in each geopolitical zones as shown below.

Table 1: Population of the Study

Geopoliti cal Zones	Traditional Leaders	Christian Leaders	Muslim Leaders	Civil Society	Youth Leaders	Total
South- South	Delta (20)	Bayelsa(20)	Edo (20)	River (20)	Akwa- Ibom (20)	100
South- West	Lagos (20)	Osun (20)	Oyo (20)	Ekiti (20)	Ogun (20)	100
South- East	Anambra (20)	Enugu (20)	Imo (20)	Abia (20)	Ebonyi (20)	100
North- West	Kaduna (20)	Kano (20)	Sokoto (20)	Zamfara (20)	Kebbi (20)	100
North- Central	Kwara (20)	Kigo (20)	Plateau (20)	FCT (20)	Niger (20)	100
North- East	Taraba (20)	Bauchi (20)	Borno (20)	Adamawa (20)	Yobe (20)	100
Total	120	120	120	120	120	600

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2018)

Sampling Technique

The purposive, non-probabilistic method was adopted to target respondents with knowledge about the specific issues capture in the study. Sample was drawn from the six geopolitical zones to elicit views on the relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Structure questionnaire were designed to elicit needed information. The reliability was established through a trial test conducted on 100 respondents in South-South who also took part in the study. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the internal consistency of the instrument as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics of Variable

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Hate speech	12	0.817
Ethno-religious violence	15	0.792

The results yielded a coefficient of 0.817 and 0.792, which satisfied the general recommended level of 0.70 for the research indicators (Cronbach, 1951). Experts also judged the face and content validity of the questionnaire as adequate. Hence, researchers satisfied both reliability and validity of the scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Distribution of Questionnaire and Response Rate

This study examined the relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. To achieve this, six hundred (600) questionnaires were administered across the six (6) geopolitical zones. Of the six hundred questionnaires distributed out of which three hundred and ninety eight (398) questionnaires representing 66.3% were retrieved as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Distribution of Questionnaire and Response Rate

S/N	Geopolitical Zone	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage %
1	South-South	100	83	13.8
2	South-West	100	71	11.8
3	South-East	100	78	13.0
4	North-West	100	46	7.7
5	North-Central	100	51	8.5
6	North-East	100	69	11.5
	Total	600	398	66.3

Source: Researchers' fieldwork (2018)

Table 4: Respondents Responses on Whether Hate Speech is the Precursor to Ethno-Religious Violence in Nigeria

Category	Percentage (%)
Strongly agreed	57.5
Agreed	33.8
Neither agreed nor disagree	8.7

Source: Field Survey (2018)

The table 4 above shows that hate speech is the precursor to ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Out of the total respondents, it was observed that 57.5% strongly agreed and 33.8% agreed while only 8.7% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix

Variables		Hate Speech	Ethno-Religious Violence
Hate Speech	Pearson Correlation	1	.865**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.000
	N		398
Ethno-Religious Violence	Pearson Correlation	.865**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	398	

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 Level (2-tailed). Source Field survey (2018)
Source: Field Survey(2018)

Table 8 above shows the correlation between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. There exists a significant positive high correlation between hate speech and ethno-religious violence ($r = .865$, $n=398$, $p, <0.01$). This implies that hate speech has a strong and positive relationship with ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. This is widely supported by the previous findings of Okafor (2007); (Adebayo, 2010); (Joseph & Rothfuß, 2012); Nwankwo (2015); Fasakin *et al.* (2017); and Rasaan *et al.* 2017).

B. Regression Analysis

Table 6: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.0813 ^a	.782	.710		.374

a. Predictors: (Constant), hate speech

b. Dependent variable: ethno religious violence

Source: Field survey (2018)

Table 7: ANOVA^a

	Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean	F	Sig
1	Regression	3.745	1	3.823	23.533	.000
	Residual	4.671	183	0.38		
	Total	8.362	184			

a. Dependent variable: ethno-religious violence

b. Predictors: (constant) hate speech

Source: Field survey (2018)

The simple linear regression shows (R^2) value of 0.782 which reveals that hate speech independently accounts for 78.2% of the variation in ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. The F. statistics of 23.533 reveals that the model is statistically significant at 0.05 significant levels. To this end, the study concludes that ethno-religious violence in Nigeria is a function of hate speeches.

C. Discussion

The effects of political activities in Nigeria have shown that hate speech has become more vivid in the successive democratic dispensation that the previous ones thereby keeping the citizens more divided. Nigeria's background of intolerance provides ample grounds for the use of hate speech. Directly, it was hate speech and indirectly it was ethnic and religious intolerance that led to the surge in electoral violence in Nigeria from

2011 to 2020. Many lives have been lost and properties worth billions destroyed leaving people destitute and homeless. This has affected sustainable human development and national integration. The use of ethnicity, religious and politics should rather unite us as Nigerians in order to promote peace, harmonious peaceful coexistence and unity. Based on the empirical and theoretical findings of this study, the following recommendations were made: political actors that engage in the use of hate speeches during electioneering should be punished according to the electoral laws of the country. Stringent punitive measures should be meted to media outlets, especially the native language radio stations that use hate speech to fan the ember of ethnic division or outlets that publish or broadcast hate speeches as a form of deterrent for the growth of democracy in Nigeria.

Religion should be used to promote peace not abused. Adherents of different religions should imbibe the moral teachings of religions such as love for one another, honesty, tolerance, unity, justice, and sanctity of human life. This fosters peaceful coexistence. The media as the watchdog of society should take up the responsibility by bringing to the forefront the fiercely devastating effect of hate speech. Also, political actors should be told in clear and unambiguous terms that hate speech does not win election; good governance and good manifesto do.

Convocation of regular national dialogue is recommended here because this will facilitate the mobilization of those who are divided along ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious lines in the task of national unity and nation building. Corruption in all forms must be eradicated and the imposition of political leaders by political godfathers must be discouraged. This will help to entrench leadership integrity, values, tolerance, selflessness, and accountability. Once the leadership is a reflection of the wishes of the people, then the dream of national integration and nation building is largely achieved.

The use of traditional institutions and religious leaders as peace-makers with the adoption of a strategy of openness and sincerity is the key to peaceful ethno-religious, cohabitation and national prosperity. The provision of employment for the country's teeming youths is highly recommended. This is because, if these youths are gainfully employed, it becomes difficult for anybody to recruit them and use them to cause ethno-religious problems and other disintegrative activities.

The issue of Christian-Muslim dialogue should be taken seriously by parties involved. During such dialogue, the issue of freedom of worship as stipulated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should be emphasized. This brings a lasting peace in the country. The National Orientation Agency, in collaboration, with civil society groups, political parties and traditional or community leaders should embark on a campaign against the use of hate speech in Nigeria.

Political leaders should aim at operating a true federalism, cultivate a suitable political culture, out-grow ethnic rancor and stop blaming ethnicity for any social policy that affects any group unintentionally. There is a need for governments, ethno-regional, and religious groups to adopt preventive diplomacy and early weaning system as mechanisms for attaining peace. To attain this objective, courses pertaining to conflict, and conflict management should be included in the curriculum of all tiers of education where Nigeria's diversities should be emphasized.

CONCLUSION

The study has showed through its findings that hate speech have a strong and positive impact on ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Also, the relationship between hate speech and ethno-religious violence in Nigeria's fourth republic was confirmed. Based on the empirical and theoretical findings of this study, we conclude that hate speech is the precursor of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria and that the problem posed by ethnic and religious violence is a threat to Nigerians corporate existence and its desire to engender national integration.

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