



## Hate Speech And Ethno-Religious Conflicts In Nigeria: Implications For Political Stability

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### Abstract:

While freedom of expression or free speech is a fundamental human right of all, hate speech heralds danger for a country. Using a qualitative research approach, this study examines the connection between hate speech, ethno-religious conflicts, and political stability in Nigeria. This study argues that the threat to internal security in Nigeria is a resultant effect of social injustice in the country. In Nigeria, hate speech has been on the increase instigating ethnic and religious sentiment, mistrust, and conflicts. The study suggests that peace, social justice and political inclusion should be adopted in running the affairs of the nation.

### Article History:

Received: 7 November 2020

Accepted: 30 July 2021

### Keywords:

*hate speech;  
national stability;  
religion;  
free speech;  
ethnicity;  
violence.*

## Introduction

Before the coming of the British to Nigeria, people lived in separate entities in form of ethnic groups. The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria are: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups. Each of these ethnic groups speaks a different language and shares different cultural affiliations with each other.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the three major ethnic groups, Igala, Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Modakeke, Nupe, Kanuri, Ogoni, Kataf, Tiv, Gwari, Jukar, Edo, Efik, Idoma, Jukun, Biron, Aguna and have significant population in Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> Each of the ethnic groups in Nigeria has its own language, dressing pattern, type of food, religion etc. The different ethnic groups in Nigeria had their own different systems of political administration. While the Fulani and the Yoruba people have centralized system of administration headed by an Emir and Oba respectively, the Igbo people had participatory democracy which is government by the elders called gerontocracy.<sup>3</sup>

The British ruled Nigeria until 1960 when Nigeria got her independence. At the start of Nigeria's political independence in 1960, the struggle for state power and struggle for scarce resources intensified the level of hatred between the major ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> Since then,

<sup>1</sup>F.O. Enem, C.C. Mba, M.C. Obeta, and M.C. Ezema. *New perspective on the Social Sciences*. (Enugu: Calvaryside Printing and Publishing Co, 1995), 87.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. Enem, C.C. Mba, M.C. Obeta, and M.C. Ezema. *New perspective on the Social Sciences*.

<sup>3</sup>A.O. Ojo. *Political Science and Government of Nigeria*. (Nigeria: Ilesanmi Press & Sons, 1973), 92-94.

<sup>4</sup>C. Ezeibe. "Hate Speech and Election Violence in Nigeria." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2020): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620951208>.

Nigeria has witnessed series of conflicts and prominent among them was the civil war between 1967 and 1970 orchestrated by 1966 coup and counter-coup leading to the declaration of the sovereign state of Biafra on 30 May 1967 and the eruption of the civil war.<sup>5</sup> Other major conflicts have also taken place in the country. For example, Maitatsine uprising of 1980 in Kano, Jimeta Maitatsine crisis of 1984, Kafanchan riot of March 1987, Zangon-Kataf riot of 1992, Futua crisis 1993, Kano crisis in December 1994, Kaduna riot, 2000, and Jos crisis in September 2001. While scholars have attributed ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria to ethnic and religious bigotry, intolerance, mutual suspicion, tribalism and discrimination,<sup>6</sup> how hate speech contributes to the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts have been understudied. This research explores how hate speech drives ethno-religious conflicts and its implications for national stability in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Clarification of Hate Speech

Hate speech is an abusive and provocative word or expression against a person, group of persons, an organization, ethnic group, state or country. According to Obijiofor,<sup>7</sup> hate speech is defined as “Speech that attacks, threatens or insults a person or group on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, colour, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability.” Neisser<sup>8</sup> notes that hate speech is “all communications (whether verbal, written, symbolic) that insults a racial, ethnic and political group, whether by suggesting that they are inferior in some respect or by indicating that they are despised or not welcome for any other reasons”.

Merriam Webster explains that hate speech is “a speech expressing hatred on a particular group of people.”<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Committee on the elimination of racial discrimination<sup>10</sup> noted that hate speech comprises:

- (a) all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred by whatever means; (b) incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin; (c) threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above; (d) expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b)

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<sup>5</sup>C. Ezeibe. “Hate Speech and Election Violence in Nigeria.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2020): 1-17.

<sup>6</sup>Usifo 2017; Opeyemi and Haldun 2016; Onah 2014; Onah 2017, Ray 2012; Fawole and Bello 2011.

<sup>7</sup>Obijiofor, 2018.

<sup>8</sup>Neisser, 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Merriam Webster. *Hate speech*. Available at: <https://www.merriamwebster.com/hat>. Accessed 5 May 2018.

<sup>10</sup>The United Nations Committee on the elimination of racial discrimination, 2013, 4.

above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; (e) participation in organizations and activities which promote and incite racial discrimination.

However, every insulting language does not essentially translate to hate speech. Hate speech can be “identified by the severity of what is said, the intensity of the harm advocated, the content of the communication and the public nature of the speech.”<sup>11</sup>

Hate speech is now a political weapon for not only attacking one’s political opponent but also crosses both ethnic and religious boundaries in Nigeria. For example, hate speech, ethnicity and religion were very significant to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria causing bloodshed, demolition, and weakened the capacity for stable governance and national unity.<sup>12</sup>

The hate speech regulation has proven to be challenging in Nigeria. The lawful frameworks intended to control hate speech, such as the 1999 constitution, the 2010 Electoral Act and the Guidelines for the Registration of New Political Parties, are used only parsimoniously in the prosecution of hatemongers.<sup>13</sup> In 2019 the Nigerian government tried to introduce the hate speech and social media bills but the bills were rejected by the citizens. According to the proposed hate speech bill, people could face life imprisonment or death penalty. The bills were rejected because of the clash with the freedom of speech and expression as contained in the country’s constitution.

## Causes of Hate Speech in Nigeria

The following factors could underlie hate speeches in Nigeria:

### Marginalization

Marginalization is often defined as “the process of making a group or class of people less important or relegated to a secondary position, (e.g., when one class of people is grouped together as second class citizens).”<sup>14</sup> Marginalization here entails imbalance in power by our leaders. It is a situation whereby some sections of the country are favoured more than the others. For example, in the case of President Buhari’s first appointment of the Army service chiefs, it was blatantly parochial. This is because the appointments did not reflect federal

<sup>11</sup>P.O. Mbah, Nwangwu C, Ugwu S.C. and Simons G. “Contentious elections, political exclusion, and challenges of national integration in Nigeria.” *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5:1 (2019): 10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1565615>.

<sup>12</sup>P.O. Mbah, Nwangwu C, Ugwu S.C. and Simons G. “Contentious elections, political exclusion, and challenges of national integration in Nigeria.”

<sup>13</sup>Ikeanyibe et al., 2018.

<sup>14</sup>Granger, 2013, n.p.

character as contained in the constitution of Nigeria. None of the five army service chiefs appointed by President Buhari was from the South East. This political exclusion and economic marginalization emasculate the legitimacy of democracy. In multi-ethnic and plural societies such as Nigeria, appointments into major political positions are critical rudiments of politics.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1 shows the five Army service chiefs appointed by Buhari<sup>16</sup>

S/N	POSITION	NAME	STATE OF ORIGIN
1	Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)	General Abayomi Gabriel Olanishakin	Ekiti
2	Chief of Army Staff (COAS)	Lt. Gen. TukurBurati	Borno
3	Chief of Air Staff (CAS)	Air marshal Sadique Abubakar	Bauchi
4	Chief of Naval Staff (CNS)	Vice Admiral Ibok-EteEkweIbas	Cross River
5	Chief of Defence Intelligence (CDI)	Air Marshal Monday Riku Morgan	Benue

The appointment depicts ethnic sentiment and nepotism. On the issue of state creation, five out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria have six or seven states except South Eastern Nigeria which has only five states. This means that the Igbo people that constitute the South Eastern Nigeria play second fiddle in a country that belongs to all. Consequently, this felt marginalization by the Igbo people of South east has led to utterance that seems harmful and or inciting. It has amplified hate speech and bigotry in the country. This continuous marginalization of Igbo ethnic group triggered the reemergence of Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) who are agitating for a separate state. It is worthy of note that "Biafra is a social formation constructed from class considerations which emerged in 1967, but its resurrection in 1999 explains the reinvention of old prejudices that characterize the Nigerian state."<sup>17</sup>

Table 2 shows the number of states in each of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

S/N	POLITICAL ZONE	STATES	NO OF STATES
1	North East	Bauchi, Borno, Taraba, Adamawa, Gombe, Yobe	6
2	North West	Kaduna, Kano, Kastina, Kebbi, Sokoto,	7

<sup>15</sup>P.O. Mbah, Nzeadibe C.N., Nwangwu C, et.al. "Separatist threat, militarization and voter turnout: exploring the dynamics of the 2017 governorship election in Anambra state, Nigeria." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol.55, No.8 (2020): 1093–1107.

<sup>16</sup>Source: Adomi Ochuko and Joseph Adomi, 2017, 34.

<sup>17</sup>P.O. Mbah, Nzeadibe C.N., Nwangwu C, et.al. "Separatist threat, militarization and voter turnout: exploring the dynamics of the 2017 governorship election in Anambra state, Nigeria": 1097.

<sup>18</sup>Ibenegbu, 2017.

		Zamfara, Jigawa	
3	North Central	Niger, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kwara, FCT	7
4	South West	Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Lagos and Ekiti	6
5	South South	Akwaibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Rivers, Edo and Delta	6
6	South East	Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia	5

### Religious Fanaticism

Religious fanaticism is the extreme love of one's religion against another person's own religion. It is the belief that one's own religion is better than any other religion. Danfulani cited in<sup>19</sup> asserts that "religious fanaticism is essentially a negative and vicious attitude to religion, characterized by exaggeration and immoderation, manipulation and exploitation, excesses and violence". Religious fanaticism leads to religious intolerance which is the inability to recognize or accommodate another person's own religion. Principally ruled by the prejudices and biases for another's religion, one can make utterances highly demeaning of other religions. In the religious scenery of Nigeria, religious conflicts are rife. Nigeria is a country with people of diverse culture and religion with Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Hate speech is used to prepare the ground for religious conflicts in the country. Nigeria is a secular state and therefore for any religious sect to come out and pronounce its own religion as paramount is unlawful in Nigeria. Hence, religious fanaticism, with its disruptive and negative inclinations coupled with hateful comments has the potential to cause instability in the country.

### Quest for Power

Human beings are political beings in need of power and material possessions. This is because man cannot be separated from power and affluence. During elections in Nigeria, use of hate speeches are intensified. In Nigeria elections to political positions are aggressively contested leading to hate speech and political violence during elections. Hate speech is typically aimed at raising sentiments among members of particular ethnic or religious groups and political parties before, during and after elections mainly to win political support and sympathy along divisive lines. For example, during the 2015 presidential election, leaders and supporters of the PDP and the APC used hate speech expressively to slight, discredit and defame members of the opposition groups.<sup>20</sup> Hate speech is not only inciting, derogatory,

<sup>19</sup>Ushe 2012, 142.

<sup>20</sup>C. Ezeibe. "Hate Speech and Election Violence in Nigeria": 11.

divisive, but leads to instability and militarization of elections.<sup>21</sup> For quest for power, hate speech is sometimes used to give wrong information to citizens during election campaign.

Some of the documented hate speeches in Nigeria are shown in Tables 3 and 4 .

Table 3: Hate speeches in Northern Nigeria, 2010 – 2015<sup>22</sup>

S/N	Year	Hate speaker	Hate speech
1	2010	The former Governor of the old Kaduna State, Alhaji Lawan Kaita <sup>23</sup>	The North Would Make the Country Ungovernable If President Goodluck Jonathan wins the 2011 polls... Anything short of a Northern President is tantamount to stealing our presidency.
2	2010	Shehu Sani, a Kaduna- based civil rights activist <sup>24</sup>	President Goodluck Jonathan should not contemplate contesting the 2011 presidential election, any attempt by him to contest amounts to incitement and a recipe for political instability.
3	2010	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed <sup>25</sup>	It must be a Northerner or no Nigeria ... if GoodluckJonathan wins the PDP's endorsement to contest the 2011 presidential election, there would be violence.
4	2012	Presidential candidate of Congress for Progressive Change, General Muhammadu Buhari <sup>26</sup>	God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood.
5	2012	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed <sup>27</sup>	Unless efforts are made to ensure that the 2015 general election are free and fair, it may turn out to be the last election in the history of the nation
6	2013	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed <sup>28</sup>	There will be bloodshed. Those who feel short-changed may take the war path and the country may not be the same again.
7	2013	Abu King Shuluwa <sup>29</sup>	Nigeria will disintegrate if Jonathan contests in 2015.

<sup>21</sup>Mbah et.al, 2020.

<sup>22</sup>Source: Ezeibe, 2015:15-18; Ezeibe & Ikeanyibe, 2017:75-76; Ikeanyibe et al, 2018:102-106; Ezeibe, 2020:7-8.

<sup>23</sup>Jason, 2011.

<sup>24</sup>Victor Anya. Daily Independent, June 22, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://dailyindependentnig.com/2012/06/making-nigeriaungovernable-forpresident-jonathan>

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Guardian Newspaper, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2010.

<sup>26</sup>Reported by LikaBinniyat in vanguard Newspaper on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>27</sup>Leadership March 29, 2012.

<sup>28</sup>Reported by KemuOguns in Osun Defender. 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2013

<sup>29</sup>Daily independent Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup> 2013

8	2013	Former Chairman of PDP, Colonel Ahmadu Ali (rtd) <sup>30</sup>	The Yorubas are ungrateful kind of people, who do not appreciate what others have done for them.
9	2013	General Muhammadu Buhari <sup>31</sup>	The military offensives against the Boko Haram insurgents are anti-north.
10	2014	Vice Admiral Murtala Nyako (rtd.), former governor of Adamawa State <sup>32</sup>	The Jonathan's administration counter-terror operation against Boko Haram insurgents is tantamount to a "full-fledged genocide" against the North.
11	2014	Governor Shema Ibrahim of Kastina State <sup>33</sup>	You should not be bordered with cockroaches of politics. Cockroaches are only found in the toilet even at homes, if you see cockroach in your house, crush them
12	2014	An Islamic Cleric, Ima Sadiq <sup>34</sup>	Muslims, vote for Buhari. It is a sin to support a non-Muslim
13	2014	Northern Elder Forum <sup>35</sup>	Those who vote for Jonathan and the PDP in 2015 will be considered an enemy of the North

Table 4: Hate Speeches in Southern Nigeria, 2010 – 2015<sup>36</sup>

S/N	Year	Hate speaker	Hate speech
1	2012	Chinua Achebe, a foremost Nigerian writer <sup>37</sup>	The Igbo culture being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive gave the Igbo man an unquestionable advantage... Unlike the Hausa/Fulani, he was unhindered by a wary religion and unlike the Yoruba, he was unhampered by traditional hierarchies.
2	2013	Femi Fani-Kayode, a former Aviation Minister <sup>38</sup>	The Igbos are collectively unlettered, uncouth, uncultured, unrestrained and crude in all their ways ... Money and the acquisition of wealth is their sole objective and purpose in life.
3	2013	The leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Force (NDPSF), Alhaji	There will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta, but everywhere if Goodluck Jonathan is not president by 2015, except God takes his life,

<sup>30</sup>Sun Newspaper, March 16, 2013<sup>31</sup>This Day, Jun 03, 2013.<sup>32</sup>Odunsi, Wale (2014) "Full text of Nyako's letter", Daily Post Newsletter, [Online] 19 April. Retrieved from: <http://dailypost.ng/2014/04/19/><sup>33</sup>Reported by Premium Times on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2014<sup>34</sup>Twitter handle, Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2014.<sup>35</sup>Vanguard, 15 October 2014.<sup>36</sup>Source: Ezeibe, 2015:15-18; Ezeibe&Ikeanyibe, 2017:75-76; Ikeanyibe et al, 2018:102-106, Ezeibe, 2020:7-8<sup>37</sup>Achebe, Chinua, 2012, 74.<sup>38</sup>Daily Post, August 8, 2013

		Mujahid Dokubo-Asari <sup>39</sup>	which we do not pray for.
4	2013	Chief Arthur Eze PDP Chieftain <sup>40</sup>	That short man called Ngige, we gave him power and he joined the Awolowo people; the people that killed Igbos
5	2014	Asiwaju Bola Tinubu <sup>41</sup>	It is going to be rig and roast. We are prepared not to go to court but drive them out
6	2014	Former Governor of Akwalbom State, Godswill Akpabio <sup>42</sup>	Those who want to take power through the back door will die. They will die
7	2014	South East Self Determination Coalition (SESD) <sup>43</sup>	We assure those cold blooded murderers that this time, their blood thirsty campaign will not go un-replied
8	2014	Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari <sup>44</sup>	2015 is more than do-or-die. You are a man and I am a man, we are going to meet at the battlefield
9	2014	Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari <sup>45</sup>	If they contest (Northerners) they are wasting their time. He who pays the piper will dictate the tune. We own them. We are feeding them. They are parasites. A beggar has no choice ... they are beggars and parasites
10	2014	River State Governor, Rotimi Amechi <sup>46</sup>	The challenge of the Nigerian Military is not funding but corruption. Now they want to kill some 50 officers for their own failure to equip them properly to fight terrorism. The soldiers have the right to protest for the federal government's failure to fully equip them
11	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	<i>Wetin him dey find again? Him dey drag with him pikin mate, old man wey no get brain, him brain don die patapata</i> – what is Buhari looking for? Old man that does not know his age. Your brain is dead.
12	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	Our people do not give birth to uncountable children. Our men don't give birth to children that they dump in streets. We are not like

<sup>39</sup>Vanguard Newspaper, May 5, 2013

<sup>40</sup>Premium Times, November 13, 2013.

<sup>41</sup>Tell, 7 July 2014.

<sup>42</sup>Punch Newspaper, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.

<sup>43</sup>Reported by Clifford Ndujihe in Vanguard.

<sup>44</sup>Newspaper, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2014.

<sup>45</sup><http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/12/north-ungratefull-parasites-asari-dokubo>.

<sup>46</sup>This day and Nations, Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2014



			people from that part of the country (apparently the Northern Nigeria)
13	2015	Wife of former President Patience Jonathan	Anybody that come and tell you changes, stone that person... What you did not do in 1985, is it now that old age has caught up with you that you want to come and change... you cannot change rather you will turn back to a baby
14	2015	The Governor of Ekiti State, Peter AyodeleFayose	Buhari would likely die in office if elected, recall that Murtala Muhammed, Sani Abacha and Umaru Yar'Adua, all former heads of state from the North West like Buhari, had died in office
15	2015	Oba Akiolu of Lagos	On Saturday, if anyone of you, I swear in the name of God, goes against my wish that Ambode will be the next governor of Lagos state, the person is going to die inside this water... for the Igbos and others in Lagos, they should go where the Oba of Lagos heads to ...
16	2015	Dr. Abraham Ariyo, U.S based Nigerian Doctor	You see how they (Igbos) are being slaughtered in South Africa. That is what is going to happen to them in Lagos... When are they (Igbos) going to be slaughtered in Abuja? We will continue to bus them to Onitsha

### Implications of Hate Speech for Political Stability in Nigeria

No doubt, hate speech is a major threat to democratic values, social stability and peace.<sup>47</sup> Hate speech incites violence and threatens national unity. Hate speech has led to conflicts and genocide in Nigeria and other African countries.<sup>48</sup> Although freedom of speech aids the exchange of diverse opinions and relevant for installing sustainable democracy; failure to control hate speech portends danger for sustaining the gains of democracy, especially in emerging democracies.<sup>49</sup> Hate speech instigates vexation, discernment, conflicts and insecurity in the society. It is a catalyst to turmoil in any democratic government. Going by happenings in Nigeria, there have been series of hate speeches (see Tables 3 and 4) and these have precipitated violence and instability in the country. The 2011, 2015 and 2019 presidential elections attest to this. In 2011, northern states witnessed pandemonium after Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was announced the winner of the presidential election. At least 800

<sup>47</sup>United Nations, 2019.

<sup>48</sup>C.C. Ezeibe. "Hate Speech and Post Electoral Violence in Africa." *African Renaissance*, 10 no.2 & 4 (2013): 75-87.

<sup>49</sup>N. Asogwa and C.C. Ezeibe. "The state, hate speech regulation and sustainable democracy in Africa: a study of Nigeria and Kenya." *African Identities*. (2020) DOI: 10.1080/14725843.2020.1813548.

people were killed, properties destroyed and 65,000 people were displaced due to electoral violence. The three days of rioting began when supporters of Muhammadu Buhari started burning electoral commission offices and police stations following results that showed President Goodluck Jonathan winning the vote. This later deteriorated into violence between Muslims and Christians in the north.<sup>50</sup> There were killings in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara.<sup>51</sup> In 2015, at least 58 Nigerians were killed in 2015 pre-election violence.<sup>52</sup> An estimated 626 persons were killed during 2019 election.<sup>53</sup> An increased number compared to 2015 election in the country. All these conflicts contribute to low voter turnout in elections in Nigeria. Observably, turnout during presidential election was 54% in 2011, 44% in 2015 and 35% in 2019.<sup>54</sup>

Hate speech breeds acrimony among different ethnic and religious groups and intensifies division in the country. It undermines security, peaceful existence, and socio-economic development of the nation. In Nigeria there has always been confrontation between the Christians and Muslims. The comment attributed to, ImaSadiq, an Islamic Cleric – ‘Muslims, vote for Buhari. It is a sin to support a non-Muslim’ and another comment attributed to Mohammed Buhari – ‘The military offensives against the Boko Haram insurgents are anti-north’ as examples, are recipes for conflict and further deepen religious polarization in the country. For about a decade now, the Boko haram group has been terrorizing Nigeria. Boko Haram, is a fundamental Islamist group in the north-east whose goal is to overthrow the secular government in Nigeria and enforce an Islamic state.<sup>55</sup> As aforementioned, Nigeria is a secular state therefore, for one or group of persons talking about spreading one type of religion is inciting violence in Nigeria. The intention of Boko Haram to establish Islamic caliphate in Nigeria has led to conflicts, genocide and human right abuse in the country. Boko Haram was founded in Nigeria by Muhammed Yusuf in the year 2002 in

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<sup>50</sup>Human Rights Watch, 2011.

<sup>51</sup>Human Rights Watch, 2011.

<sup>52</sup>N. Ibeh. “58 Nigerians killed in 2015 pre-election violence so far – Rights Commission.” *Premium Times*, February 13, 2015. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/176802-58-nigerians-killed-2015-pre-election-violence-far-rights-commission.html>. Accessed 18 October 2020.

<sup>53</sup>K. Sanni. “626 killed during 2019 Nigeria elections.” Report. *Premium Times*, July 30, 2019. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/343971-626-killed-during-2019-nigeria-elections-report.html>. Accessed 18 October 2020.

<sup>54</sup>Adekoya. *Democracy has failed in Nigeria when voters no longer care who wins*. 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/01/democracy-failed-nigeria-turnout-presidential-election>. Accessed 18 October 2020; P.O. Mbah, C. Nwangwu, S.C. Ugwu, and G. Simons. “Contentious elections, political exclusion, and challenges of national integration in Nigeria.”

<sup>55</sup>Agbiboa, D E. Peace at dagger’s drawn? Boko Haram and the state of emergency in Nigeria. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.37, No.1 (2013): 41–67.

Maiduguri, Borno state. Boko Haram started in form of Islamic religious school and later transformed into violence in 2009.<sup>56</sup> On July 26, 2009, Boko Haram launched an attack on police station in Bauchi state. Many people died in the attack including two police officers and one soldier.<sup>57</sup> On December 24 and 27, 2010, Boko Haram attacked central city of Jos and Maiduguri. Eighty-six people were killed in the attack.<sup>58</sup>

On 25th December, 2011, Boko Haram bombed St. Theresa's church, Madalla in Suleja, Niger state. A total of thirty-five people died in the attack.<sup>59</sup> In 2012, Boko Haram bombed a police outpost at Sheka in Kano state. The attack led to fierce shooting between security forces and members of Boko Haram sect leaving more than two hundred persons dead.<sup>60</sup> In 2013, Boko Haram killed two Nigerian soldiers and wounded five of them in a bomb attack in central Kogi state.<sup>61</sup>

On 25 May, 2014, Boko Haram attacked and killed fifty-four people while several others were injured in Yobe state.<sup>62</sup> On December, 2015, Boko Haram shot and killed nine people in two villages (Tadagara and Dunbulwa) in Yobe state. They set many houses on fire. They also shot and killed nine fishermen in Maiduguri.<sup>63</sup> In 2016, Boko Haram militants attacked and killed at least thirty people in two villages in Borno state. They also kidnapped women and children.<sup>64</sup> They attacked and killed eight people outside a church in Kwamjilari village in Chibok, Borno state. Many people ran into the bush with gunshot wounds.<sup>65</sup> In 2017, Boko Haram attacked University of Maiduguri and some local government areas in Borno state. During the attack, many people died and properties worth millions of naira destroyed.<sup>66</sup> Records show that between 2009 and 2017, Boko Haram has been unleashing serious attacks on the Northern parts of the country especially the North-east. They attack religious groups, police stations, banks, schools, markets and government installations.

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<sup>56</sup>J O. Ajayi. "The Boko haram insurgence in Nigeria and the threat to national security." *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol.2, No.2 S/No6 (2013): 1-20.

<sup>57</sup>Vanguard, 2011

<sup>58</sup>Vanguard, 2012

<sup>59</sup>Vanguard, 2011.

<sup>60</sup>Mamah, K E. Boko Haram bombs Kano Afresh – *Vanguard News*, January 24, 2012. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/01/boko-haram-bombs-kano-afresh/>. Accessed 12 July 2018).

<sup>61</sup>Irin news, 2013.

<sup>62</sup>The Nation Newspaper, 2014.

<sup>63</sup>O.T. Kamal. "Chronology of Boko Haram attacks." *The Guardian Nigeria*, 13 December 2015. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/news/chronology-of-boko-haram-attacks>. Accessed 15 April 2018.

<sup>64</sup>Abubakar. *Boko haram attacks kill at least 30 locals say*. 2016. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/13/africa/boko-haram-attack-nigeria/index.html>. Accessed 14 October, 2020.

<sup>65</sup>S. Opejobi. *Boko Haram attacks church in Borno, eight people killed*, 2016. Available at: <https://dailypost.ng/2016/09/19/breaking-boko-haram-attacks-church-borno-eight-people-killed>. Accessed 16 July 2018.

<sup>66</sup>N. Marama. *Timeline of Boko Haram attacks in Borno since May, 2017*, 2017. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/08/timeline-boko-haram-attacks-borno-since-may-2017>. Accessed 12 July 2018.

Boko Haram kidnapped two hundred and seventy-six (276) female students from Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno state on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2014.<sup>67</sup> Many of the kidnapped students who were not Moslems were forced to convert to Islam. They were equally forced to marry the Boko Haram members against their wishes. Chibok is a Christian village which means that majority of the kidnapped students were Christians. After the kidnap of the Chibok girls, the leader of the Boko-Haram called Abukakar Shekau said, "Allah instructed me to sell them, I will carry out his instructions. Slavery is allowed in my religion and I shall capture people and make them slaves".<sup>68</sup>

On 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2018, Boko Haram kidnapped over one hundred female students from Federal Government Science and Technical College, Dapchi in Yobe state (BBC News, 2018, February 26). According to the BBC News, there was disagreement over the actual number of the students kidnapped. This is because a group of parents said that the total number of the missing girls were hundred and five (105) while government said that the total number of the missing girls were hundred and ten (110). Although the kidnapped female students were later released by the Boko Haram, the only Christian student among them (Leah Sharibu) was not released.<sup>69</sup> The father of Leah Sharibu called Nata Sharibu said that the Boko Haram insurgents decided not to release his daughter because she refused to denounce Christ. He said that the insurgents gave his daughter the option of converting to Islam but she rejected it. The girl has not returned to her parents till date (News Agency of Nigeria, 2018).

Apart from kidnapping of students in order to paralyze school activities, the Boko Haram members have been causing mayhem in the country. Boko Haram insurgencies have led to the death and displacement of thousands of people and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. The terrifying activities of the Boko Haram made the Federal Government under President Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan to give the Nigerian military order to flush out the Boko Haram terrorists from their occupied areas in the north east. Fight against Boko haram has continued even in the present leadership. There is over 2.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in north-east Nigeria.<sup>70</sup> The activities of Boko haram group have led

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<sup>67</sup>S. Nasir. Nigerian girl talks about her escape from Boko Haram, 2017. <https://m.khaleejtimes.com>general>ni> Retrieved on 7/4/2018.

<sup>68</sup>Nasir, 2017.

<sup>69</sup>New Agency of Nigeria, 2018.

<sup>70</sup>UNHCR, 2020.

to food insecurity, severe malnutrition, severe violations of human rights, and widespread sexual and gender-based violence in the region.<sup>71</sup>

Another point worth mentioning is the quit notice given to the Igbo people living in the north. On 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 2017, 16 Northern Youth groups gave Igbo people living in Northern states up to October 1, 2017 to vacate the region.<sup>72</sup> The quit notice caused row and tension in all parts of the country especially in Igbo land. Such utterances endanger the unity of Nigeria as a country. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in their own reaction warned that if any Igbo is killed in the North as a result of the quit notice issued by Arewa Youths, “Hausa-Fulanis will get a dose of their senseless attacks. IPOB warned the North that “Biafrans of today are not the same breed as those they massacred between 1967 and 1970 at will, without retaliation.”<sup>73</sup> The quit notice against the Igbo people created more ill-feelings and hatred between the Igbo people and the northerners. It only took the intervention of the government through security agents and well meaning Nigerians quelling the ugly situation.

The quit notice given to the Igbo people residing in the North by the Northern youth groups caused more agitation from other parts of the country. According to Odebode,<sup>74</sup> a group known as the coalition of Niger delta agitators in a reaction to the quit notice given to the Igbo people in the north threatened to resume attack on oil installations in the region. The group also said that the Northerners and the Yoruba in the Niger delta should leave the region before October 1, 2017. The group further stated that “we demand independence and sovereign republic of Niger Delta, all the companies and businesses owned by the Northerners/Yorubas in Niger Delta should be vacated before October 1, 2017.”

Fulani herdsmen continuous attack on farmers and villages in almost all parts of the country could also be ascribed to ethnic and religious sentiment and acrimony between different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The comment attributed to the national president of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, Bello Abdullahi Bodejo, that Fulani own Nigeria and will rule the country forever<sup>75</sup> is inflammatory and disrespectful to other ethnic groups in the country. It could be recalled that on April 25, 2016, the armed Fulani herdsmen numbering about five hundred (500) attacked and killed many people in seven villages in Nimbo in Uzo-uwani local government area of Enugu state.<sup>76</sup> The disreputable activities of the Fulani herdsmen

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<sup>71</sup>UNHCR, 2020.

<sup>72</sup>Akhaine et al, 2017.

<sup>73</sup>Opejobi, 2017.

<sup>74</sup>N. Odebode, A. Adepogbe, and O. Aliko. *Niger Delta Agitators give Northerners, Yorubas Quit Notice*, 2017. Available at: <https://punchng.com/ndelta-agitators-give-northerners-yoruba-quit-notice>. Accessed 26 July 2018.

<sup>75</sup>Dailypost, 2020.

<sup>76</sup>Thisday 2016,

ranging from rape, killing, and destruction of farm crops and displacement of farmers have drastically affected agricultural production in Nigeria. This menace purports serious threat to food security and socio-economic development of the country.

In Benue state many communities have been attacked by the Fulani herdsmen. On February 7 2016, there was Herdsmen-Farmers clash at Tombu in Buruku Local Government Area, Benue State. The community was raided leading to the death of 10 persons.<sup>77</sup> On March 7, 8, 13 & 17 2016, there were another clash between the herdsmen and farmers at Mbaya-Tombo, Benue state leading to destruction of farm crops, over 35 people died and properties were damaged.<sup>78</sup> On February 29, the Fulani herdsmen invaded several Agatu villages and farm settlements killing children, women, men and the elderly. Over 500 villagers were said to be killed and above 7000 displaced in 10 villages including Aila, Okokolo, Akwu, Adagbo, Odugbehon and Odejo.<sup>79</sup> The Paramount Ruler of Logo Local Government Area, Jimmy Memme stated that between July 1 and 16 the herdsmen murdered over 85 persons, including women and children, from six out of the 10 wards in the area.<sup>80</sup> The conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farming communities have mostly affected different areas across Middle Belt namely, Plateau, Kaduna, Taraba, Nasarawa, Adamawa, and Benue states.<sup>81</sup>

The Benue state government signed the anti-open grazing bill into law on Monday 22nd of May, 2017. The anti-open grazing law came into effect on November 1, 2017. Governor Ortom has lamented the loss of over N95 billion owing to continuous destruction mounting from clashes between herders and farmers.<sup>82</sup> However, a group of cattle breeders, known as Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, disagreed to the anti-open grazing law describing it as obnoxious and a recipe for anarchy.<sup>83</sup>

Bishop David Oyedepo, the General overseer of the Living Faith Church/Winner's chapel has condemned the killings by Fulani herdsmen in the country. In a threatening letter issued by the Fulani herdsmen, they declared war against Bishop David Oyedepo and Nigerians.<sup>84</sup> According to Oyedepo,<sup>85</sup> insulting comments by the Fulani herdsmen include:

(a) "The country will have no peace."

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<sup>77</sup>Okoro, 2018.

<sup>78</sup>Okoro, 2018

<sup>79</sup>Premium Times, 2016.

<sup>80</sup>Premium Times, 2016.

<sup>81</sup>Vanguard, 2016

<sup>82</sup>Daniel, 2017

<sup>83</sup>Ameh 2017

<sup>84</sup>Oyedepo, 2018.

<sup>85</sup>Oyedepo, 2018.

- (b) “God has given them this land and that they have right to live anywhere, and until the colony is established, there will be no rest in Nigeria.”
- (c) “The cattle colony is the only solution to the crisis, whether the government or state government accept or not.”

On April, 2018, suspected Fulani herdsmen killed two catholic priests and eleven (11) parishioners during attack on a church in Benue state.<sup>86</sup> The two priests killed were: Rev. Fr. Joseph Gor and Rev. Fr. Felix Tyolaha of St. Ignatius Quasi Catholic Parish, Ukpok, Mbalom, Gwer East local government area of Benue state. The action of the killer herdsmen generated ill-feelings in the minds of all concerned Christians in Nigeria. On Tuesday, 22nd May, 2018, Christian faithful in Nigeria organized a peaceful protest in all the local government areas in Nigeria including the Federal capital territory (FCT) against the killing of the two Catholic Priests and 11 of their parishioners.

The effects of hate speech on Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. For example, the economy of the country is being affected. Wealth is power. A nation is capable of feeding her citizens only if her economy is vibrant. No country thrives in an atmosphere of insecurity and instability.<sup>87</sup> It is obvious that hate speech and its resultant conflicts have contributed to pooreconomic growth of Nigeria. As at 2018 Nigerian GDP was 2.11% but presently it has dropped drastically to -6.1%.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

Hate speeches abound in Nigeria which poses a threat to the security of human lives and properties, national unity, peaceful co-existence and socio-economic development of the country. The effects of hate speech in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. This paper has explained the concept of hate speech, and discussed its likely causes and implications for the country. The main cause of hate speech in Nigeria has been attributed to imbalance of power among different ethnic groups that make up the country. For example, the federal government has failed to address the problem of marginalization in the country. Some sections of the country such as the Igbo people feel marginalized. Hate speech incites violence and has led to conflicts in Nigeria which have claimed many lives and properties destroyed. This study noted some incidences of hate speeches which are tearing the country apart. For example, the Northern Youth groups gave the Igbo people ultimatum to leave the

<sup>86</sup>Uja, 2018.

<sup>87</sup>Onah and Okwuosa, 2016

<sup>88</sup>National Bureau of statistics, Nigeria, 2020.

region on October 1, 2017. This statement generated more agitations from other parts of the country. The coalition of the Niger Delta Avengers gave the Hausa and Yoruba people an ultimatum to leave Niger Delta region on October 1, 2017. Consequently, the coalition of the Niger Delta Avengers demanded for the independence of the Niger Delta leading to clashes between them and Nigerian security agents of which many people were killed and properties destroyed.

The Fulani herdsmen noted that there will be no peace in the country unless cattle colony is established. They destroy farm crops with their cattle leading to their clash with farmers and villagers especially in the Middle Belt. Boko Haram declared their intention to establish Islamic caliphate in Nigeria. They put their intention into action by unleashing attack on government, religious groups, kidnapping of students and destruction of businesses consequently paralyzing socio-economic activities in the region. Their actions led to the death and displacement of many people in North-eastern region of Nigeria. The study therefore, suggests that for peace and stability, social justice, equity and political inclusion should be adopted in the affairs of the nation. Thus, attention should be directed towards a detribalized and participatory governance. The study also suggest that intensive effort should be made to control the use of hate speech in political campaign in Nigeria as this undermines peace, stability and sustainable development of the nation.

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