# Hate Speech, Intergroup Relations and National Security in Nigeria

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**Abstract**

*Hate speech as a social phenomenon inundates the social, economic and political life of many nations of the world. Evidence from the literature points to its negative impacts on intergroup relations and national security. In recent times, incidents of hate speeches are on the increase in Nigeria. This paper examines the evolution and development of hate speech, the causal factors and the implications on intergroup relations and national security in Nigeria. The study is hinged on the social identity theory of intergroup relations. The author researched various literature on the subject matter and employed participant observation to arrive at the set conclusion. The paper posits that hate speech in Nigeria is traceable to illiteracy, poor social orientation, ethnicity, religious cleavage and activities of the political class. Hate speech encourages hatred, promotes disunity, violence, a threat to national integration and poses serious security challenges. The paper suggests among others social re-orientation of the citizens, the need for the political class and the traditional institutions to be alive to their social responsibility, promotion of ethnic and religious tolerance and enactment of strict laws prohibiting hate speech in the country.*

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Hate speech, Insecurity, National integration, Religious Intolerance.

**Introduction**
The issue of hate speech is a social phenomenon that has been experienced in different parts of the world. It dominates race and ethnic relations in different areas of human endeavour such as social, economic and political life. In most advanced democracies like the United States and Britain, hate speech is common between the so-called majority and minority in order to reduce or relegate the importance of those considered inferior. In those circumstances, conflict or counter-reactions are minimal as it is often seen as normal and given.

However, in developing economies, particularly among African nations, the use of hate speech has continued to generate much concern because of the spread and devastating effects on those nations where the incidents have occurred. For the past two decades, countries like Kenya and Rwanda had been enmeshed in violence emanating from hate speech. In Kenya, there was widespread violence in 2007 and 2008 post-election, particularly between cattle-raising Kalenjin and the agricultural Kikuyu due to hate speech that preceded the election among these ethnic groups. Similarly, in Rwanda, hate speech triggered genocide between the Hutu and the Tutsi in 1994 which led to the death of over 800, 000 people (Viljoen, 2005).

In Nigeria, the use of hate speech has subterranean ally been in place in the early independence period of which one of the aftermaths was the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) but went into extinction so to say for some time. However, hate speech resurrected and reached a crescendo in the country in the Fourth Republic, particularly during the 2015 general elections through the activities of some unscrupulous, unpatriotic Nigerians and politicians. In the 21st century Nigeria, hate speech is now disturbing among the people, politicians, and the mass media that the government is struggling to curb. Thus, in 2019, a bill was brought before the National Assembly, which proposed the death penalty for culprits. The National Assembly conceived hate speech as using, publishing, presenting, producing any materials, written or visual which threatens, abuses or insults or use of words or behaviour that cause hatred and it includes ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, ethnic harassment (Eke, 2020).

The National Assembly also proposed to establish the Independent National Commission for Prohibition of Hate Speech. But since hate speech has been criminalized in the country, no persons or organizations have been prosecuted. The best so far is fine to mass media that promote hate speech, which the Minister for Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed announced has increased from five hundred thousand Naira (N500,000) to five million Naira (N5million) (Olasupo, 2020). It is against this background that this paper examines the evolution and development of hate speech in Nigeria, the causal factors and manifestations in our social, economic and political life and its implications on intergroup relations and national security in Nigeria.

**Objectives of the study**
The main objectives of the paper are to:
1. Highlight the manifestations of hate Speech.
2. Identify the predisposing factors of hate speech  in the country and

3. Examine the implications of hate speech on intergroup relations and national security in Nigeria

**Conceptual Clarification**
The tripartite concepts of Hate speech, intergroup relations and national security that underpin this paper need some explanations in order to adequately address the issue at stake.

**Hate Speech**
Different scholars have different views on what constitutes hate speech. Hate speech is any speech that is aimed at attacking a person or group of persons on the basis of certain attributes such as ethnic origin, religion, race, gender, disability or sexual orientation. According to Ezeibe (2013), hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. In law, hate speech is any speech, gesture or conduct, writing or display which is forbidden because it may incite violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group or because it disparages or intimidates a protected individual or group (Ukueze and Uche, 2015). Fasakin et al (2017) view hate speech as utterances, typed documents, advertorials, musicals or any form of literature that are used to attack an individual, a group- religious, social, political, business-gender or race. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013) pointed out that hate speech includes all sorts of discrimination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred by whatever means; incitement to hatred, contempt, or against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin; threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the basis of the identified factors above. These include expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups. According to the United Nation Strategy and Plan of Action (2019) on Hate Speech, hate speech is any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, that is, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factors. Hate speech is a communication that employs intolerant appellation to insult and denounce others either on the basis of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual and other forms of group membership (Bagdikian, 1997). Enahoro (2017) refers to hate speech as polluted statements, especially by Nigerians attacking each other on the basis of ethnicity or religion. In the same vein, Onanuga (2018) conceptualizes hate speech as any online or offline communications that express hatred for some groups in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation and other defining attributes of mankind. Thus, whatever forms it takes, hate speech incites people into developing a hatred

for others; plant a seed of violence and social discrimination in people as well as fan embers of disunity, racial/ ethnic prejudice and religious intolerance.

## Intergroup Relations

Intergroup relations connote relationships that exist between two or more people or among different groups in society. This relationship cut across ethnic, racial, religious groups or nationalities and ideologies. To Sheriff (1966), a pioneer scholar in this field perceives intergroup relations as relations between two or more people and their respective members. He explained further that whatever individuals belong to one group interacting collectively or individually with another or its members in terms of their group identification, intergroup relations occur. To Afigbo (1980) intergroup relations presupposes contact and interaction between groups, each of which has an identity to make some inputs into the relationship, each of which has some scope area of autonomous action. However, Hogg and Abrams (2001) argue that intergroup relations frame the way we define ourselves and others, the way we behave and the way in which we treat and think about others and how they treat and think about us.

## National Security

The concept of national security is quite encompassing as it is viewed from different perspectives. National security entails the process of providing protection and ensuring the safety of individuals, groups, property and territorial integrity of a country. UNDP (1996) describes national security as protection from the threat of diseases, hunger, unemployment, crime social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards. Okene (2011) view national security as the ability of a country to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished interest, legitimate values and enhances the standard of living and wellbeing of its people, guests and visitors. In a similar vein, Babangida (2011) contend that national security involves the physical protection and defence of our citizens and our territorial integrity and also the promotion of the economic well-being and prosperity of Nigerians in a safe and secure environment that promotes the attainment of our national interest and those of foreign partners. Maxwell (2012) posits that national security covers all issues bordering on a country's defence as well as all activities involved in the protection of a nation against attacks, protection of lives and property. It can be deduced from the above that national security encompasses many areas of human endeavour such as food security, social security, labour security, environmental protection, promotion of peace and the likes. Security in whatever forms is vital for sustainable development in a country.

## Theoretical Framework

The paper is hinged on the Social identity theory propounded by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. Social identity is the consciousness of an individual or group belonging to a group on the basis of age, race or ethnic group, religion, social class, language or sex. It is that portion of an individual concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant group. As put by Tajfel and Turner (1979) social identity theory introduced the concept of a social identity as a way in which to explain intergroup behaviour.

The theory focuses on the relationship between self-concept and group behaviour. It explains that different aspects of an individual's personality motivate them at different times and that the identity component and behaviour will be determined by the specific situation that the person is in.

The theory predicts that certain intergroup behaviours on the basis of perceived group differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences and the perceived ability to move from one group to another (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Identity played important role in the Nigerian process during the colonial and post-colonial era which is manifested in ethnicity, religious extremism or violence (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). The social identity theory is thus apposite in analyzing intergroup relations vis-à-vis the hate speech phenomenon in the country. Many Nigerians are attached to their ethnic groups, language, religion and geographic regions. This consciousness on part of Nigerians are reflected in the way they interact with various ethnic groups and in the process hate speech are consciously and unconsciously developed to downgrade groups that they do not belong to.

## Methodology

The paper is mainly based on secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, newspapers and the internet. This is complemented by personal observations by the author on the happenings in the political and social-cultural environment in the country as it affects interactions and hates speech tendencies among various ethnic groups in the country.

## Intergroup Relations in Nigeria

The issue of intergroup relations in Nigeria is best understood by looking at its interplay in relation to the evolution of the Nigerian state. Nigeria came into being with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by Lord Lugard with British political and economic interests in consideration. Before the creation of modern-day Nigeria, intergroup relations among the various ethnic groups, kingdoms, empires, emirates, clans or chiefdoms was very cordial,

harmonious despite occasional disagreement, wars and conflict among some of them (Okpeh, 2007; Erhagbe, 2002). There were various cultural exchange, exchange of trade items and maintenance of friendly relations. The factors that promoted intergroup relations before colonialism include trade, trading routes, migration among the people, religious, social and cultural institutions like festivals, intermarriage, Islamic religion; diplomacy and wars (Falola et al, 1999).

However, during the colonial period, the harmonious pattern was tampered with. The colonialist through its divide and rule policy dominated the political and economic sphere of life and the intergroup relations between the white minority and Nigerian majority were that of subjugation, racial discrimination and subjection like the creation of Government Reservation Area (GRA) for the exclusive rights of the whites, which is still perpetuated today by the political and economic class. The British administration distorted the harmonious living of the people through the creation of stranger's settlements in urban centres like Sabon Gari, Tundun Wada in the North while in the South, settlements titled Sabo and Hausa Quarters were established, which still exist today. Nnoli (1978) noted that the colonialists separated the natives from one another because the colonialist was embarrassed seeing them living together contrary to the official view that is the only conflict that characterized contact among the various tribes.

To a very large extent, the British created the problem of ethnic identity in Nigerian polity which affected intergroup relations. The Richards Constitution of 1946 divided Nigeria into three regions, namely; Northern, Western and Eastern regions; which coincided with the three dominant ethnic groups, Hausa- Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo respectively. It is instructive to note that the formation of early political parties in Nigeria during the colonial era was ethnically based as a result of this division by the colonial administration. In the North was the Nigerian People's Congress (NPC); in the West was the Action Group (AG) while in the East was the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and voting pattern followed regionalism as the aforementioned political parties formed the government in the regions.

The action of the government of the day during the colonial period also promoted bitterness in intergroup relations. For instance, the Western Region government of Action Group led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo changed the traditional title of Olu of Itsekiri to Olu of Warri in 1952 to punish the Urhobo for voting for the NCNC whereas Warri city is dominated by three ethnic groups, namely; the Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri. This singular act by the Action Group government gave the ownership of Warri to the Itsekiri and this has been the source of

acrimony and strain relationships between the Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri in Warri in the Niger Delta till date (Odivwri, 2015).

Nevertheless, in post-independence, the twin monster of ethnicity and religion continue to play dominant roles in intergroup relations in the country. Political party formation and voting patterns followed ethnic and religious lines in the First, Second Republic except in the truncate Third Republic when Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) were formed by the then military president, General Ibrahim Babangida and unfortunately the problem become more pronounced in the Fourth Republic. Thus, ethnic and religious identity, as well as identity politics, have undermined intergroup relations among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria since independence. The relationships among the people of Nigeria has become more tenuous and tied to the activities of the political class that emerged since independence by the 20th and 21st century Nigeria and has masqueraded as religious, political, ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts (Oyeniyi, 2006).

**Manifestations of Hate Speech in Nigeria**
The issue of hate speech in the country can be clearly seen and observable in our utterances, gestures, religious beliefs and behaviour among the over four hundred sub-ethnic groups in the country. However, the dominant ethnic groups- Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo- are common culprits of hate speech. These aforementioned ethnic groups use derogatory words such as *"Aboki", "Bayaribe", "Yamere"* and *"Ndi-ofemmanu"* which impute different meanings of denouncement. Among ethnic groups in the country, different appellations are in use to refer to certain ethnic groups. For instance, the Fulani are regarded as stingy and aggressive people, the Hausa as lazy people, the Igbo as dubious and money mongers; the Yoruba as betrayals and the Urhobo people as cunning hence the appellation "*Urhobo wayo*".

In the realm of religion, hate speech is indirectly imputed and all religious groups in the country are guilty of it. Religious symbols are being sacrilegiously referred to as in the case of use of the cross symbol by Christians which people equate with Red Cross society and being rejected or akin to fire and blood while the Islamic symbols are regarded as a symbol of war, not peace as purported by adherents. Even among the same religious faith, whether Christians or Muslims we have different sects or denominations. We spitefully refer to groups we do not belong to as non-believers or not serving God in the proper way like the use of the word 'infidels'. In May 2018, a pastor in Lagos was arrested by the police for hate speech against the Catholic Church when he made a statement thus: "Beware

of Catholic Women Organization and Knights of the catholic church for they are occult" (Punch, 2018).

Hate speech dominates the political arena in Nigeria. It is manifested in our political life, particularly during political campaigns to downgrade political opponent's vis-à-vis ethnic and regional background. When carried to an extreme, it prepares fertile ground for violence, ethnic and regional hatred with its attendant evils.

## Causal Factors of Hate Speech in Nigeria

Hate speech did not emerge in Nigeria out of the blues. Certain factors operating individually and collectively contributed to its use in the country today. One of the factors is the socialization process of the various ethnic groups that make up the polity Socialization is the process by which a man acquires his social behaviour patterns ( Otite and Ogionwu, 2001) and this entails learning the values, norms, attitudes, mores and standard of society to which an individual belongs. In many Nigerian communities, we consciously and unconsciously teach or inculcate certain negative values into our children as they grow up on the basis of religion and ethnic affiliation, which in turn affect their perception and orientation at adulthood. This has an effect on their interaction with people around them in trade, social circles which in turn may lead to social discrimination, which forms the basis of hate speech. Thus, parents and family members have a share of the blame because they lay the foundation for poor intergroup relations and hence hate speech.

The issue of ethnicity is germane in understanding intergroup relations and hate speech syndrome in Nigeria. Ethnicity according to Nnoli (1978) is a social phenomenon associated with communal competition among members of different groups. Ethnicity is a phenomenon that applies to the consciousness of belonging to, identifying with and being loyal to a social group distinguished by share culture, traditions, a common language, in-group sentiment and self-identity (Otite, 1999). Ethnicity can promote hatred and cause disharmony and crises if practised to the extreme in a country. It can also lead to the marginalization of the minority groups within a state or country. In Nigeria, this has created identity syndrome and reflected in whom we do business with, urban residence location as in the case of Jos, Kaduna and Lagos due to lack of trust and safety perception of individuals and groups. The various ethnic groups in the country have ways of referring to other ethnic groups in derogatory manners, which if not taken seriously can promote hatred. These have earlier been referred to in this paper, which does not augur well for a plural society like ours.

Religious factor and or cleavage is another factor responsible for the development of hate speech among Nigerians. Nigerians claim to be religious but they are not religious for if they are truly religious, there would be no religious crises. Nigeria has witnessed series of religious crises, particularly in the north. Some of these crises arose from denigration, abuses, a mere quarrel between a Muslim and a Christian, introduction of Shariah law, events in Afghanistan that do not concern us here in Nigeria, perceived beauty contest event, political differences, provocative teachings, utterances and actions of religious leaders ( Kukah,1993; Alubo, 2005, Odivwri, 2015). The religious factor is constantly reflected in our interaction with fellow Nigerians and politicians use religion as a tool of the campaign, which in turn promote hatred and unconsciously implant hate speech in the process.

Politics is a major factor that promotes hate speech. It is usually used for the purpose of political campaigns. Whillock and Slayden (1995) noted that hate speech is intentional persuasion when public prejudice and stereotypes become motive to action. He argues that that hate speech is used to consciously inflame the emotions of followers, denigrate the out-class, inflict permanent and irreparable harm on the opposition and ultimately conquer. In Nigeria, many politicians result to the use of hate speech to wipe up sentiments in order to garner support from the electorate. This is quite evidenced during electoral campaigns in the Fourth Republic. During a political campaign, many politicians and enthusiasts were seen on different television programmes attacking their political opponents with derogatory speeches in political rallies and interview (Fasakin, et al, 2017). Reactions emanating from provocative statements during such events often incite people or supporters of personality or ethnic groups attacked into violence.

The mass media has contributed to the escalation of hate speech in Nigeria. Many advertorials, comments, interviews, articles in newspapers, music in radio and television stations documentaries aired on television as well as social media are ready avenues for sentiment and hatred building. Typical examples are the documentary against Ahmed Tinubu on African Independent Television and advertorials against current president Mohammed Buhari in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election. In 2016, hate music aired by some radio and television stations in the North almost led to the country's disintegration as the northern youths issued quit notice to Igbos in the north.

## Implications of Hate Speech on Intergroup Relations and National Security

Hate speech has a serious impact on race and ethnic relations as well as the security of a country. Experience from countries where hate speech had caused problems to point to this assertion.

For example, Viljoen (2005) noted that hate speech or hate propaganda played a significant part in Rwanda genocide in 1994 as the Hutu extremists prepared the people of Rwanda for genocide by demonizing the Tutsi and encouraging hatred. This they did through radio and television. The Nigerian radio and television in the North 2017 almost brought a similar scenario which culminated issuance of quit notices by different groups to different ethnic nationalities across the country. This created anxiety, fear and threat to the nation's disintegration as some people started relocating to their home states before the intervention of the federal government through series of dialogue with various groups, including traditional rulers.

Hate speech of large magnitude can lead to violence. This is because it incites or instigates people into spontaneous action. The aggrieved targeted group of hate speech usually fight back by engaging in mass violence. Hate speech was responsible for post-electoral violence in 2011 and we almost experience the same in 2015 were not for the then incumbent president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan who quickly conceded defeat, which douses tension in the country. Ezeibe (2013) noted the role hate speech played in electoral violence in Africa and concluded that countries like Kenya suffered from it in 2007 and Nigeria in 2011.

The phenomenon of hate speech constitutes a threat to the internal security of this country. It is a threat to the peaceful co-existence, unity and stability of our nation. As a result of hate speech through some radio and television, Arewa youth issued quit notice to all Igbo residing in the north. In counter-reaction, the Ndigbo asked their sons and daughters to leave the North for safety and in the Niger Delta, all Northerners and Yoruba were also given quit notice. This scenario set up confusion and waves of migration of affected citizens back home. This is a setback to national growth and development as no geographical area can develop without other people from other parts of a country or foreigners. A noted by Eke (2020) hate speech threatens a country's unity, peace and efforts of the government in nation-building and widens the social gap between Nigerians.

Closely allied to this, is the threat of disintegration of the country. With quit notice issued by the Arewa youths, the fertile ground was then being prepared for other regions to seize the opportunity to declare self-government. During the tense

atmosphere in 2017, agitation by IPOB to declare the Republic of Biafra, the Niger Delta militants to declare the Republic of Niger Delta and the South West to declare the Oduduwa Republic heightened. The confusion created almost tore the country apart. Therefore, the stability of the country is affected by incidences of hate speech.

## Recommendations / Policy implications

From the analysis so far, it is crystal clear that hate speech constitutes a serious threat to national security. Therefore, it is necessary to take precautionary measures to avoid the experiences of countries like Rwanda, Somalia and Kenya where hate speech create internal security problems.

1.  The government should engage in social re-orientation of the citizenry. As observed in the paper, our socialization process is faulty. We as parents and Nigerians as a family need to change the way we train our children along the religious and ethnic line and having hatred for others who do not belong to our group. Once this is achieved, there will be a high level of commitment and love to our country rather than ethnic, regional or religious cleavage that affect intergroup relations.

2.  Strict laws should be enacted and enshrined in the constitution stipulating the penalties for various acts of hate speech. Now that the National Assembly is already working on it, the process should speed up and passed into law soonest. A separate court should be established to try culprits of hate speech and the National Orientation Agency should be mandated to monitor the people or group who engage in hate speech, arrest and prosecute the same. Many countries have done a similar thing and Nigeria can do the same, particularly as hate speech is championed by the current Minister for information. The death penalty being proposed by the National Assembly may not serve the purpose well. This is because of our experiences with a similar phenomenon like armed robbery death law which has no effect today. Rather life imprisonment, forfeiture of certain privileges like denial of political rights may serve better options; freezing of the account of culprits could reduce the incidence(s).

3.  Promotion of ethnic and religious tolerance is a sine qua non for the harmonious living among the various ethnic nationalities in the country. Nigerians are too sentimentally attached to religion and their ethnic groups. We need to divorce religion and ethnicity from our interaction with fellow Nigerians. Why, for instance, foreigners can move freely in

the country and Nigerians are suspicious of one another and cannot move nor interact freely. If Nigerians are cleared of these monsters, the basis of making hate speech will not be there. The citizens should know that Nigeria is a plural society and this should be upheld by everybody.

4. The political class is the most promoters of hate speech in this country. The activities of this group need to be monitored by the government, particularly during the election period. Any politician found culpable should be jailed for life and deprived of further participation in the political process of the country. Our traditional rulers have important proactive roles to play here by ensuring that their subjects live peacefully with non-indigenes in their areas irrespective of an ethnic group or religious background as well constantly cautioning them against making provocative statements, deploying negative gestures or attitude towards one another.

5. The mass media must be well-guided. Most hate speech is promoted via the mass media such as newspapers, radio and television stations and social media. Government must be harsh on any mass media outfit used to promote hate speech by sanctioning the proprietor of such organizations by closing it down and paying huge fines to the government to serve as a deterrent to others.

6. Government should acquire the entire property owned by the identified organization. But the government needs the political will and commitment to implement all these strategies suggested because since 2017 when the hate speech episode reached the crescendo government has not indicted any persons or groups and no action taken further.

## Conclusion

Hate speech has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian social, economic and political life. This social phenomenon emanates from our social orientation right from childhood by family and community; promoted by ethnicity and religious colouration as well as political motives. Hate speech has affected negatively intergroup relations, promotes hatred, religious intolerance and constitute a threat to our nascent democracy. In many African countries like Kenya, Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda, it has created internal security problems, loss of lives and property and set waves of migration while increasing refugee cases. Nigerians need to avoid these ugly situations by being conscious of their utterances, especially by the political class. Strick policy on hate speech should be enacted and such policy should be monitored and executed.

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