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Hate Speech and the Campaigns for the 2019 Election

A Campaign Advisory

HATE SPEECH AND THE CAMPAIGNS FOR THE 2019 ELECTIONS

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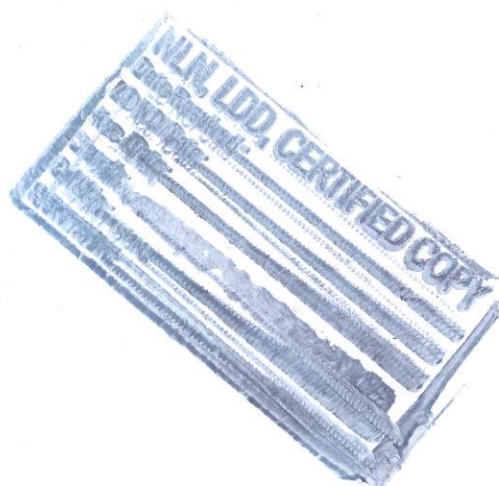
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INTRODUCTION

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria will be conducted against a background of a complex web of issues that have left the country divided along various cleavages. There are issues thrown up by the Farmer-Herdsman conflict, which has found an outlet not only in hate speech but also in the spread of fake news and images as well as the invention of fake organizations. The tension spurred by the Biafran agitation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has generated toxic hate speech on both sides of the divide. The handling of the conflict between members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria and the government has not only raised serious concerns about respect for human rights and respect for rule of law by the government but has also fueled a deluge of intra-religious hate speech among the Muslim faithful. There is also the acrimony created by the perception of the prosecution of the corruption agenda of the government. There is so much bitterness across the country. All these issues have fed into a complex narrative in which politicians from all sides seem prepared to deploy hate speech with a view to profiting politically by mobilizing sentiments around specific grievances unmindful of the consequences that such hate-laden campaign have to the conduct of the election.

As we continue to monitor hate speech, we see an increase in not only in its volume but also in its incendiary nature. In particular, there is the convergence of religious and ethnic-based hate speech within the context of political contestation. The explosive nature of this is that it is capable of triggering violence across the country. However, as experience in the 2015 has shown, Nigerians have a choice. We can, in spite of the bitterness and the complexity of the situation, act to avert violence. This advice is being issued with the hope of contributing to that process of making the election peaceful by ensuring that we not only drastically reduce the incidence of hate speech in our communication realms, but also raise the resilience and tolerance level of citizens, such that they will not be provoked by the hate speech that will still find expression in spite of our efforts. The advisory aspect is addressed to politicians and other critical stakeholders that have a responsibility or commitment to peace-building. They include the media, security agencies, religious and community leaders, youth groups and indeed the general public.

Hate Speech

The term "hate speech" has been variously defined by different scholars and researchers at different places and times. Definitions take dimensions and angles and try to cast readers' minds into viewing what really is hateful communication.

The United Nations International Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination defines hate speech as a "form of other directed speech which rejects the core human rights principles of human dignity and equality and seeks to degrade the standing of individuals and groups in the estimation of society." Similarly, criminal codes in various countries generally refer to hate speech as speech that "incite[s] any group of persons to commit an offense against any other group" or that "creates enmity between groups."

Article 20 of the ICCPR identifies three grounds for the prohibition of incitement to hatred, including national, racial and religious grounds. Other international instruments, domestic legislation and legal interpretations have clarified and elaborated a wider range of justifications for prohibiting incitement. In addition to national, racial, and religious grounds, these include:

- ✎ Language
- ✎ Ethnicity
- ✎ Social origin
- ✎ Migrant or refugee status
- ✎ Birth status
- ✎ Indigenous origin or identity
- ✎ Gender/Sex
- ✎ Gender identify
- ✎ Sexual orientation
- ✎ Political or other opinion
- ✎ Property ownership
- ✎ Mental or physical disability

Similarly, at the Center for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), we operationalized hate speech as any speech act that:

- Insults people on the basis of their religion
- Abuses people for their ethnic or linguistic affiliation
- Expresses contempt for people because of their place of origin
- Disparages or intimidates women or girls because of their gender
- Condone discriminatory assertions against people living with disability
- Abuses or desecrates symbols of cultural or religious practice
- Denigrates or otherwise ridicules traditional or cultural institutions of other people
- Deliberately spreads falsehood or rumours that demean, malign or otherwise ostracize other people on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or place of origin or for the accident of one form of disability or the other
- Dehumanizes people because of their political affiliation, accent or dialect

The above insights have provided a somewhat elaborate discourse on what hate speech is. However, the major hindrance remains the proliferation of hateful and sometimes dangerous speech, especially on social media.

The Recent Pattern of Hate Speech

In our observatory at the Center Information Technology and Development (CITAD), we captured a total number of six hundred and seven (607) hate speeches in the last three months, i.e September, October and November. The observatory documented one hundred and seventy four (174) hate speeches in September, two hundred and fifty two (252) in October and one hundred and ninety one (191) in November 2018.

The speeches were made by both male and female Nigerians spread across the six geopolitical zones of the country. Two social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, websites of conventional and online newspapers and blogspots, were the mediums on which the hate speeches were generated.

As can be seen in Fig, although the total number of hate speech captured in the social media shows a slight decrease between October and November, however there has been a steady increase in the number of hate speech due to ethnicity. The number of religious-based hate speech also increased from September to October and, although it slightly decreased in November, it was still more than the number for September.

This shows that, as we approach the 2019 general elections, there is increased polarization in the country along ethnic and religious lines and increasing deployment of hate speech to express this polarization. Indeed, the sharp rise observed in October was associated with party primaries, which were acrimonious and in some places even violent. If the party primaries would generate such an increase in the number of hate speech in the social media, it stands to reason that, if nothing is done as we near the elections we are likely to have a sharp increase in the number of hate.

It is pertinent to note that, apart from the fact that moderate inflammatory hate speech was majority across the three month period, when we look at the call to action, we found a significant number of hate speech items with messages urging their audiences to kill their targets. This is particularly so for September and October. We also observed a significant number of gender-related hate speech. These clearly were targeted at female opponents before and during the party primaries, a factor that might have contributed to the elimination of the majority of women aspirants. As a result, very few women ended up getting the ticket of their parties to contest the elections they had aspired to.

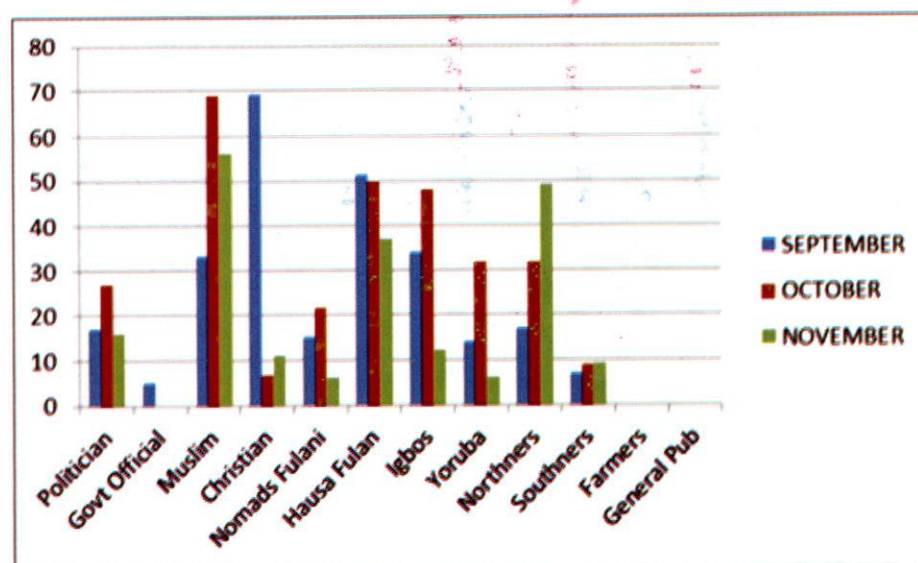


Fig 1: Character of Hate Speech

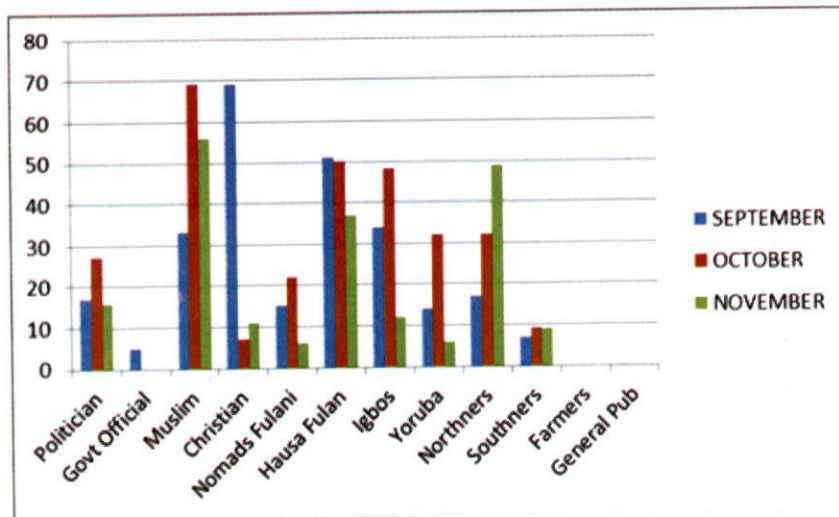


Fig 2: Target of hate speech

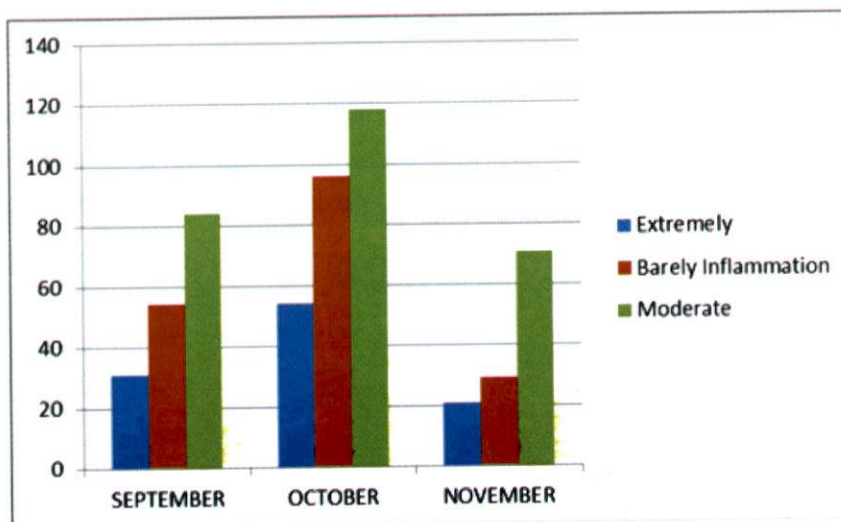
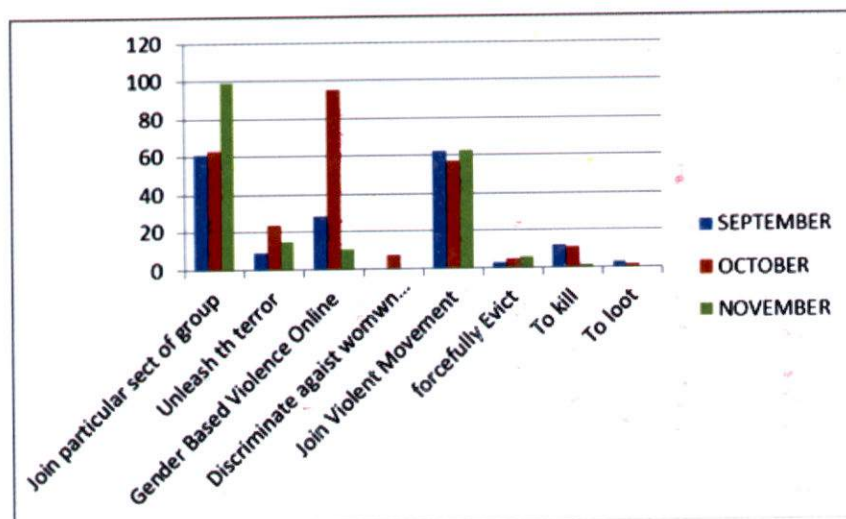


Fig 3: Level of inflammation of hate speech



The nature of the hate speech can further be seen by looking at targets of the speakers illustrated in Fig 3. As can be seen the majority of the targets are religious and ethnic groups.

Hate Speech and Election

The election period is a critical moment for any democratic society. In the last election in Nigeria, instances of hate speeches were seen on conventional and social media. Largely on conventional media, the speeches were broadcast on certain television stations and published in some newspapers as well. Hate speeches made at campaign grounds at different campaign gatherings captured little or no attention at all, although people got toxicated by just receiving the speeches via other media. Political parties must clearly understand that making or allowing hate speech during campaigns or any political address or gathering is threatening to the peaceful conduct of elections. As such, they must be seen to vehemently reject and condemn any hateful or dangerous speech before, during and after the 2019 elections. As a composition of bona fide citizens, members of political parties ought to be interested in avoiding utterances that will jeopardize the entire electoral process.

Electioneering, which is supposed to be a safe and a fair ground for politicians and their supporters to market themselves to the electorate in a manner that is not offensive, hateful, divisive or dangerous, is abused and mishandled. In most cases, politicians and their supporters, religious leaders and people in authority, are at the front of spewing hate speech. Radio and television stations and websites of conventional and online newspapers also give ground for hate speech to flourish. Another category of people and mediums through which a considerable volume of hate speech is seen are youth and the pages and groups on Facebook. Many political parties have pages and groups; aspirants and party stalwarts also have forums. Religious, regional and traditional associations equally manage pages and groups; on Facebook. Hate speeches are common in these platforms, especially during elections.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The campaigns for the 2015 general elections like those for 2019 too, off on a hateful note, with politicians freely exchanging and deploying hate speech with the hope of profiting from it. Consequently, conscientious and well-meaning Nigerians and many civil society organizations saw the danger that this type of campaign could pose to the lives of ordinary citizens and to the corporate existence of the country, and hence decided to mount a concerted effort to ensure that politicians not only understood the need for peaceful elections, but they committed themselves to peaceful campaign and accept the verdict of election without violence. Thus, in the end, in spite of the bitterness of the campaign, Nigeria recorded relatively its most peaceful and credible election in recent history. Indeed, as the campaign for peace elections deepened.

This illustrates that citizens have the capacity to influence events in the country. As we have seen, the campaigns have shown all the signs that hate speech

is a tool that politicians are using without regard to the possible consequences. We must wake up to the situation and do the needful to ensure that they commit themselves to not use hate speech during the party primaries period of the campaign. It is with this hope that the following recommendations are offered here.

Government

1. Must be open to legitimate criticism by citizens and political parties and not use concern about hate speech to stifle freedom of expression.
2. Must address both the triggers and drivers of hate speech in the society.
3. Direct all MDAs to respect and comply to the donor policy by the Freedom of Information Act as a key mechanism against the spread of rumors and fake news in the country.
4. Should ensure that law enforcement and security agencies and their personnel remain neutral and non-partisan in their relationship with all political actors.

Political Parties and Candidates

1. Support the pledge of a no to hate speech campaign.
2. Denounce and dissociate themselves from any of their candidates or supporters who indulge in hate speech during campaign.
3. Focus on issue-based campaign rather than the personality or identity of opponents.
4. Encourage their members and supporters to keep to the dictum of "don't indulge in hate speech and not be provoked by it".
5. Do not allow their candidates to use places of worship for campaign purposes.

Law enforcement and Security Agencies

1. Be willing to proactively use results of hate speech monitoring as input to their early warning systems to preempt the possible use of hate speech catalyzing violence.
2. Prosecute known habitual hate speech makers using existing laws to serve as a deterrent.
3. Educate their staff and officers to understand and appreciate the difference between legitimate criticism and hate speech, so as not stifle freedom of expression.
4. Must remain non-partial and non-partisan in handling the issues of hate speech.
5. Monitor the observation of the hate speech provisions in the Guidelines for Campaigns by political parties.

Religious and Community Leaders

1. Preach to their followers to appreciate our diversity as a source of strength.
2. Denounce any follower or cleric using hate speech.
3. Not allowed places of worship to be used for political campaigns.
4. Should sensitize their followers on hate speech.
5. Publicly condemn and shun hate speech irrespective of where it comes from.

Media Regulatory Agencies

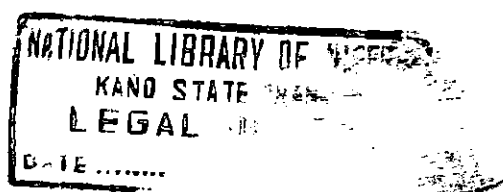
1. Ensure the enforcement of the relative media regulation against hate speech.
2. Monitor and enforce sanctions against media organizations that provide space and airtime for the propagation of hate speech.
3. Empower their monitoring and compliance departments to strictly monitor and enforce compliance with existing laws and regulations governing media operations.

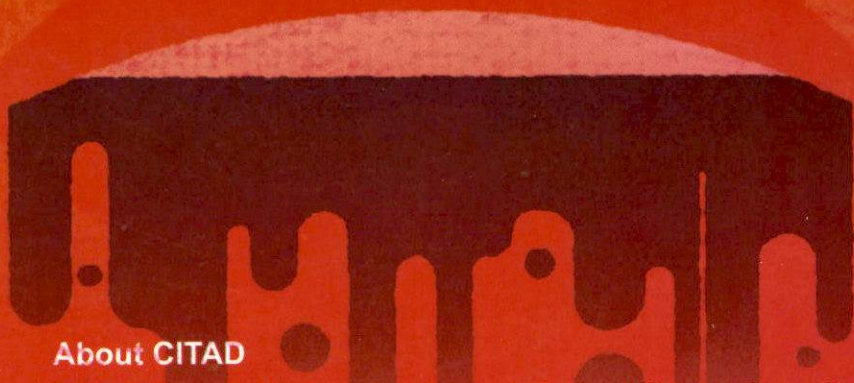
Online newspapers

1. Should avoid provoking their readers to engage in hate speech through publishing sensitive pieces.
2. Should verify the authenticity of news and stories to avoid publishing fake news and hateful contents.
3. Should not allow hateful and dangerous comments made by readers on their comments sections.
4. Endorse and operationalize the Nigerian Media Code for Election Coverage (as revised in 2018).
5. Should ensure that cartoons, images or any content they publish does not contain hate speech.

Radio and TV Stations:

1. Should comply with all the relevant laws and regulations and not allow hate speech the space to propagate
2. Should adhere to all the campaign regulations and treat all parties and candidates fairly and equally.
3. Should as a matter of principle, caution all the guests of live programmes about their commitment to no tolerance of hate and be ready to cut off any guest who violates this.
4. Endorse and operationalize the Nigerian Media Code for Election Coverage (as revised in 2018).
5. Ensure that all their staff observe and respect the provisions of the Nigerian Media Code for Election Coverage (as revised in 2018).





About CITAD

CITAD (www.citad.org) is a capacity building civil society organization whose activities covers research, advocacy, training and publicity in all areas of ICTs. Its vision is; a knowledge-based democratic society free of hunger while its mission is; using ICTs to empower citizens for a just and knowledge-based society that is anchored on sustainable and balanced development.

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