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## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF HATE SPEECH IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents a sociological analysis of hate speech in Nigeria. Specifically, it examines the causes and consequences of hate speech and sociological perspectives on hate speech without necessarily tampering with freedom of expression and inhibiting peace and unity in the country. Hate speech is a negative way of interacting among people in different societies. Hate speech is present in all known human societies; no society is hate speech-free. In Nigerian, hate speech has generated intense debate, especially as it is popularized by political developments. The debate has focused extensively on the meaning of hate speech and measures of combating it in a manner that will continue to cement the unity of Nigerians. Despite the reality of hate speech in Nigeria, the phenomenon has received little or low scholarly attention. Academics, scholars, interested organisations, agencies, and the general public owe society a great deal in engagingly discussing issues of hate speech in Nigeria, especially from different disciplines and perspectives.

**Keywords:** hate speech, debate, society, freedom of expression

### INTRODUCTION

Human beings are unique because of their acquisition or development of language, communication technology (ICT), and the capacity to live together consciously in society. Thus, humans are higher or superior animals. Speech, utterance, and spoken language are used to communicate or interact with other members of society. Interestingly, society is made possible by human interaction and culture. As intelligently articulated by Mute (2008), language becomes hate speech when an individual or group uses it to degrade another group or engender discrimination against it for political objectives (such as winning an election) or social objectives (such as entrenching male domination in the workplace). In other words, the defining characteristic of hate speech is its essential intent to incite prejudicial treatment or action against a group of people whose classification is prompted

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by common discriminatory criteria. Sociologists, specifically, study human relationships and interactions and devote their research to contemporary issues and social problems. They also attempt to develop concepts, principles, theories, and methods that lead to an increasingly precise understanding of social processes or issues (Ekpenyong, 2003). Sociologists apply sociological perspectives in studying or explaining contemporary social issues and problems. Thus, they study hate speech as a collective phenomenon of society. Though hate speech is as old as human society itself, it is a negative way of interacting found in varying degrees in all known societies, irrespective of how developed or developing the societies are. The Nigerian State has several societies or communities. Fondly called “the giant of Africa” because of its large population, Nigeria is one of the world’s most ethnically diverse nations. It comprises multi-ethnic nationalities or ethnic groups between 250 and 500 (Olutayo and Akanle, 2007). The Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo, and the Yoruba are the dominant ethnic groups based on their demographic, political, and economic strengths. The minority ethnic groups include Kanuri, Tiv, Bini, Isoko, Nupe, Efik/Ibibio, Yako, Ijaw, Igala, Jukun, Gwari, and Igbira. Most Nigerians became fully aware of hate speech during the 2015 general election, as politicians flooded the media with vituperative statements against others based on political party, ethnic and religious affiliations. Hate speech orchestrated the 2007 post-election violence that led to the death of over 1000 people; the displacement of about 600,000 people in Kenya, and an estimated death of 800,000 to 1 million people in Rwanda (Danning, 2018). Professor Chidi Odinkalu, the Chairman, the Governing Council of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), warned Nigerians to avoid overheating the system with hate speech to avoid the Kenyan experience (The Nigerian Observer, 2015). Given its currency in Nigeria’s modern political development, Kayode Robert Idowu (2017) exclaimed in THE NATION on Monday, July 17, 2017: “This is one kingdom where hate speech thrives even in the hallowed corridors of power, never mind a subsisting advocacy to rein it in for (our) safety”. Hate speech has generated intense debate in Nigeria, especially as being popularized by political development. The debate has focused on the meaning of hate speech and measures for combating it. Despite the reality of hate speech in Nigeria, the phenomenon has received little or low scholarly attention. This study offers a sociological analysis of hate speech in Nigeria. Specifically, it examines the causes and consequences of hate speech and sociological perspectives on hate speech and offers viable suggestions to combat the menace in Nigeria.

### **Conceptualising Hate Speech**

Appreciable attempts have been made by scholars and organisations to define hate speech. Nockleby (2000) defined hate speech as speech that attacks a person or group based on attributes such as race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, or gender. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (2006) defines hate speech as any form of speech, publication, or broadcast inherently inferior or degrades, dehumanizes, and demeans others and promotes hatred and encourages violence against a group based on religion, race, colour or ethnicity sentiments. According to Dunja Mijatovic (cited in KNCHR, 2007), hate speech indicates the worst forms of verbal aggression towards those in minority, in terms of any criteria or who are different. Mute (2008) associates the term with speech or expression intended to hurt and intimidate a person or group because of their sexual orientation, disability, or other personal characteristics. Segun (2015) conceived hate speech to discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of group membership. Eziebe (2015) sees hate speech as any speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Kayambazinthu & Moyo (2002) referred to

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hate speech as verbal wars waged on others. The Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD, 2016) defined hate speech as any speech act that incite the audience to denigrate people based on ethnicity, religion, gender, geography, and other socially conceived parameters, to marginalize them or place them at some disadvantage contrary to the provisions of the universal declaration on human rights as well as the international covenants on rights of the people. Scholars extended hate speech to mean expressions that foster prejudice and intolerance, which may fuel targeted discrimination, hostility, and violent attacks against others (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2010). As presented by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (2015), the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1997 conceived hate speech as that which covers all forms of expressions which spread, incite, promote, or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin. Consequently, hate speech generates stigmas, stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices against those who differ with their positions (ICIR, 2015). Joel (2012) applauded this definition for covering broad areas of racism, minority and migrants' rights and other forms of hate speech based on intolerance. However, hate speech is rapidly spread or communicated through the mass media (online and offline), such as the Internet, newspaper, radio, and television (Adamu, 2013; Ring, 2013; Zhang, Robinson, & Tepper, 2018; Ogbonna & Okafo, 2020). People's easy access to the Internet/social media promotes the spread of hate speech especially given the emergence of social media hate groups that use social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, among others (Ben-David & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016). While hate speech is a legal term in some countries (see UK's Criminal Justice Act, 2003; Kinney, 2008), it is not a legal term in others but is constitutionally protected (Volokh, 2015). Pertinently, victims of hate speech may seek redress in the court of law for hate crimes committed against them in their countries. Mason (1993:1) has presented an unchallenged conventional definition of hate crime: Most commonly violence-motivated by prejudice, bias, or hatred towards a group, which a victim is presumed to be a member. As such, hate crime is directed towards a class of people; the individual victim is rarely significant to the perpetrator and is most commonly a stranger.

### **Sociological Perspectives on Hate Speech**

Hate speech is a social problem the world over. Thus, social scientists, especially sociologists, have unique ways of explaining hate speech. Sociologically speaking, the basis of society lies in human interaction. Also, human beings are referred to as unique beings and superior or higher animals because of their acquisition or development of language, development of communication technology (ICT), and the capacity to live together consciously in society. Man communicates or interacts symbolically with other members of society through verbal or non-verbal language. Society is made possible by human interaction and culture. As intelligently articulated by Mute (2008), language becomes hate speech when an individual or group uses it to degrade another group or engender discrimination against it for political objectives (such as winning an election) or social objectives (such as entrenching male domination in the workplace). Hate speech is a negative way of interacting. Based on the argumentativeness, aggressiveness, and verbal assertiveness theory (Jibril & Simon, 2017), highly argumentative individuals enjoy an argument and back it up with convincing points; verbally aggressive individuals tend to lack the interest and rationality to argue, and as result employ verbally aggressive words or expressions as their defense mechanism (Infante, Trebing, Shephard & Seeds, 1984; Jibril & Simon, 2017). Hate speech, therefore, becomes

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an instrument of verbally aggressive individuals with others. Hate Speech is culturally learned and transmitted. It is the central tenet of the cultural transmission theory. People learn to hate speech the way they learn how to speak their languages and perform other cultural activities. Society's mainstream culture, or subculture, transmits hate speech to children at home and throughout the community. It is a well-known fact that ethnic societies in Nigeria have derogatory names or languages for others. As the main argument of the cultural transmission theory, hate speech is learned and transmitted in Nigerian cultural settings from one generation to another as ethnic societies develop cultural traditions and values that tolerate or encourage stereotypes and prejudices, maybe in their quest to penetrate the national politics or maintain their acclaimed political superiority. Furthermore, hate speech can appear in song and folklore in our localities and be transmitted to the next generations through socialisation. Some of the songs and folklore in our localities promote hate and violence in sweeping and emotive language and describe members of other societies as oppressive, humiliating, and exploitative people. Hate speech is socially constructed and thus relative. In other words, what constitutes hate speech in Nigeria may be appreciated in other countries. The social construction of reality theory by Berger and Luckmann (1967) refers to a specific theoretical paradigm whose fundamental assumption is that the reality of everyday life is socially constructed. In other words, social reality does not fall from heaven but is constructed and reproduced by human agents through daily interactions and activities. Berger and Luckmann's principal thesis is that individuals in interactions create social worlds through their linguistic and symbolic activity to provide coherence and purpose to an essentially open-ended unformed human existence (Nyoni, 2008). The social construction theory seeks to explain that knowledge is created and assumed as reality. It contends that "meaning is created through social interactions regardless of the validity of a given meaning". Hate speech is developed, conveyed, and maintained in a social context. It strengthens the cultural transmission theory already employed in the sociological analysis of hate speech. People are born and influenced by culture and society. They become social beings by being socialised and coping with the everyday life of the societies. [Mute's](#) (2008) assertion that hate speech is constructed in the context of inter-group relations is not out of place. Some expressions termed hate speeches in multi-ethnic settings are completely innocuous in a monoethnic situation. For instance, if the Hausa-Fulani were the only ethnic group in Nigeria, the issue of using the term „aboki“ to refer to themselves as „friends“ would be acceptable to them. However, the term „aboki“ referred to the Hausa/Fulani by other ethnic groups raises suspicion and is derogatory. Hate speech is dysfunctional in any society. Functionalism advocates the positive outcomes of social phenomena. Marxist theory questions the functionality of such phenomena, raising questions about who defines or determines the functionality and who benefits from the social phenomena. Hate speech is dysfunctional to society or the social system because it usually advocates hatred and violence. The post-election violence caused by hate speech in northern parts of Nigeria in 2011 is evidence. Hate speech is determined by "powerful" individuals, groups, or institutions. It is the core of conflict analysis or critical theory. According to [the ritual model of communication](#), racist expressions allow minorities to be categorized with negative attributes tied to them and are directly harmful to them. Matsuda and Lawrence (1993) found that racist speech could cause direct, adverse physical and emotional changes. More so, the repeated use of such expressions causes and reinforces the subordination of these minorities (Calvert, 1997). In some instances, what is referred to as „hate speech“ by the „powerful“ is simply constructive criticism of bad governance and unpopular policies of the government or politicians by well-meaning citizens. Thus, it is important to distinguish between hate speech and

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freedom of expression or constructive criticism. The right to freedom of expression is an essential foundation of a democratic society and is one of the fundamental rights entrenched in the Bill of Rights. In Nigeria, everyone has the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and other media, freedom to receive or impart information or ideas, freedom of artistic creativity, academic freedom, and freedom of scientific research. However, the right to freedom of expression does not extend to propaganda for war, incitement of imminent violence, or advocacy of hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender, and religion that constitute incitement to cause harm. Freedom of speech does not extend to slander (van Wyk, 2002) and hate speech that incites violence. Freedom of expression is essential for embedding democratic values and progress in society. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its 2015 Annual Report posited that “hate speech lies in a complex nexus with freedom of expression; individual, group and minority rights; and concepts of dignity, equality, and safety of person”. There has been debate over freedom of speech, hate speech and hate speech legislation (Herz and Molnar, 2012). Critics have argued that “hate speech” is used to silence critics of poor social policies. The concept of hate speech is variously understood and defined by different people and in different contexts. Generally, hate speech offends, threatens, or insults groups based on race, colour, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other traits (Macmasters, 1999).

### **Hate Speech in Nigeria**

Hate speech has been brought to the fore through increasing political bifurcations and competitions in the Fourth Republic and the consequent characteristics of bad governance, insecurity, corruption, and inability to deliver the dividends of democracy to the Nigerians. Bad governance in Nigeria has attracted severe criticisms of the government or politicians and their policies from Nigerians. It does not go down well with politicians, who label these criticisms „hate speech“. The Sheikh Ahmed Lemu’s Investigative Panel constituted by President Goodluck Jonathan, to look into the causes of the post-election violence (PEV) in 2011 in northern parts of Nigeria found a pattern of “threats, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation” and concluded that a cause of the PEV was “inflammatory campaign utterances of politicians...reinforced by the preaching of divisive sermons of hate and hostility in mosques and churches across the country”. In its advisory on election violence in February 2015, the National Human Rights Commission complained of an election “characterised by bellicose rhetoric” and “a rise in hate speech”.

Hate speech in Nigeria has three main types - religion-based, ethnicity-based, and election-based. The rise in farmers/herders conflict has given rise to a new kind of hate speech referred to as farmers/herders-related hate speech. Corroborating this position, Ogbonna & Okafo (2020) reported that out of the 221 cases of hate speech and dangerous speeches reported in March 2018 to the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) in Nigeria, 39.9% was hate speech relating to ethnicity and religion, 3.1% was hate speech relating to farmers/herders clash, and 2.2% was election-related hate speech, and males (92.3%) engage in hate speeches than females. Earlier, the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) tracked and recorded 6,258 incidents of hate speech from June to December 2016. It accounted for a monthly average of 1,043 incidents. Among the 6258 incidents, 41.59% were religion-related, and 39.13% were ethnicity or tribe-related. In all, ethnoreligious hate speech accounted for 80.72% of the incidents of hate speech recorded within six months (Odinkalu, 2017). Joel (2012) had earlier submitted that the nature of hate speech in Nigeria is mainly ethno-religious. Hate speech is spread by Nigerians through social media (Adamu, 2013; Ogbonna & Okafo, 2020).



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NSRP 2017) reported that 76% of hate speech messages in Nigeria are circulated through social media, 45% call for discrimination, 38% call for war, and the remaining 10% call for killings. Adamu (2013) stressed that Nigerians' exploitation or use of the Internet for posting hate messages or speeches aggravates already tense insecurity situations. It informed Opusunju's (2017) description of hate speech as a „digital menace“ of social media. However, social media hold the prospect of monitoring and controlling the spread and immediacy of hate speech (Odinkalu (2017). Hate speech lives with us but is poorly reported by the newspapers and television stations in Nigeria. Content-analyzing the reportage of hate speech by The Punch and The Guardian newspapers in Nigeria, Ogbonna & Okafo (2020) found that Nigerian newspapers have always underreported issues of hate speech in the country, as only 23 issues of hate speech appeared in 360 published editions in the newspapers. The findings implicate the need for newspapers and other media (radio, television, and books or journals) to adequately sensitise Nigerians on the causal, consequential, and remedial issues of hate speech. Nigeria does not lack legal frameworks for hate speech, but there is a clamour for a new law that will tackle hate speech specifically. Nigeria's Terrorism (Prevention) Act of 2011, amended in 2013, prohibits, among many things, acts that "seriously intimidate a population". These include acts that "incite, promise or induce any other person by any means whatsoever to commit any act of terrorism". The Electoral Act prohibits "abusive language directly or indirectly likely to injure religious, ethnic, tribal or sectional feelings" as well as the use of "abusive, intemperate or slanderous or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reaction or emotions". Incitement to hate is a crime under both the Criminal and Penal Codes. The Hate Speech Bill has been introduced in Nigeria amidst applause and criticisms. Reviewing the Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill (Hate Speech Bill) in Nigeria, Eke (2019) submitted that though Bill's objective is to prohibit hate speech and promote national unity and peace, it is trailed by controversies because it includes a capital punishment (death by hanging) for the offender, seeming limitations on the freedom of expression of Nigerian citizens, and ambiguity or broad definition of keywords or phrases, among others. With time, if these controversies are resolved, hate speech laws and regulations, strengthened other strategic processes for the divisive functions of hate speech in Nigeria.

### **Causes and Consequences of Hate Speech in Nigeria**

The nature of Nigerian society is a driver of hate speech. Orji (2012) cited in Joel (2012) opined that the structure of Nigerian society triggers or promotes anger and hatred in the system and the hearts of Nigerians. Joel (2012) observed that Nigeria's diversity in ethnic orientations, affiliations, religious beliefs, language, and cultural practices has generated tensions even in the colonial era. These tensions continually divide the country into religious and ethnic cleavages. Thus, Joel used the term "ethnoreligious hate speech" to qualify the form of hate speech in Nigeria. Within the confines of ethnoreligious cleavages, certain events that have occurred in Nigeria have accentuated and enthroned hate speech in the country, including the Nigerian Civil War, the unbridled grip on political power by few ethnic groups (especially the HausaFulani), skewed distribution of political appointments (especially in President Buhari's administration), insecurity and killings (as orchestrated by the Boko Haram insurgents), high rate of unemployment and poverty, high profile corruption by public officers, and bad governance, among others. Hate speech is likely to present where all these enumerated evils abound and the government is reluctant or unable to deliver good governance and national unity to the citizens. Zvagulius (2010) asserts that the inability of legitimate political power to restore allegiance to the old collective identity leads to a

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search for a new one. Manifestations of hate speech in Nigeria are motivated by the search for ethnic identity and intolerance of groups considered as „outsiders“ (Joel, 2012). Ethnicity is another driver of hate speech and violence in Nigeria. While ethnicity ordinarily means ethnic affiliation or consciousness, it has deeper meanings. Ethnicity may be “the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain an advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation” (Osaghae 1995). Ukiwo (2005) submits that the definition is preferred because it identifies two issues central to discussions on ethnicity. The first is that ethnicity is neither natural nor accidental but is the product of a conscious effort by social actors. The second is that ethnicity is not manifest in conflictive or competitive relations but also in the contexts of cooperation. A corollary to the second point is that ethnic conflict manifests in various forms, including voting, community service, and violence. Thus, it needs not always have negative consequences. Ukiwo (2005) notes that ethnicity also encompasses the behaviour of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are groups with ascribed membership, usually but not always based on claims or myths of history, ancestry, language, race, religion, culture, and territory. While all these variables need not be present before a group is defined, such a group is classified or categorised as having a common identity that distinguishes it from others. It is this classification by powerful agencies such as the state, religious institutions, and the intelligentsia such as local ethnic historians that objectifies the ethnic group, often setting in motion processes of self-identification or affirmation and recognition by others. Thus, ethnicity is not a matter of „shared traits or cultural commonalities“, but the result of the interplay between external categorization and selfidentification (Brubaker, Loveman, & Stamatov 2004). There is nothing wrong with people celebrating pride in their ethnic and other cultural identities. It is not always a manifestation of ethnicity when someone proclaims, „I am a proud Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, or Efik“. Most ethnic groups feel that their way of life - their foods, dress, habits, beliefs, values, and so forth, are superior to those of other groups. It is only bad when one uses ethnic identity to gain an advantage over or disdain others. Ethnocentrism is another factor that is closely related to ethnicity. Ethnocentrism is the tendency or practice of viewing one’s culture as the best or only proper way to behave and judging other people by the contents or standards of one’s culture. There are small amounts of ethnocentrism everywhere in the world since most humans or societies believe that their culture is the best and only way to live and adapt. While small doses of ethnocentrism help to create a sense of cultural pride and to build strong, cohesive groups, its overt or extreme display creates conflicts in any given society. Informed by extreme ethnocentric disposition, individuals can make negative utterances against others to incite the public against them. Also, ethnocentrism is at the heart of colonization and genocide, as it usually manifests in the tendency to view other peoples’ way of life as inferior. However, cultural anthropologists have pushed for cultural relativism to promote harmony. The extent to which stereotypes and prejudice drive hate speech has been documented (citations needed). Ordinarily, stereotype means an oversimplified conception of persons, groups, or societies, and prejudice connotes unfavourable or illinformed opinions formed beforehand based on insufficient knowledge, irrational feelings, or inaccurate stereotypes. Prejudice also means irrational dislike of somebody or an unfounded hatred, fear, or mistrust of a person, group, or society, especially one of a particular religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual preference, or social status. Founded upon or rooted in ethnocentrism, certain stereotypical and prejudicial perceptions we hold about other people in Nigeria can promote hate speech. Almost all societies or ethnic groups in Nigeria have a way they conceive and address others who are not members of their culture. For instance, the Hausas call the Igbos „nyamiri“ and the Igbos, in turn, refer to the Hausas as

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„aboki“. Although these words, nyamiri, and aboki, literally denote „friendship“ or „familiarity“, they are derogatorily used to cast aspersions on the Igbos and Hausas. The same applies to other societies in Nigeria, which have derogatory names they call others and stereotypical/prejudicial opinions they hold about others. Thus, stereotypes and prejudice are factorial issues in hate speech in Nigeria. The culture or socialization process is a breeding ground for hate speech. As earlier explained, people learn hate speech as they learn to speak their languages and perform other cultural activities. Society’s mainstream culture, or subculture, transmits hate speech to children as much at home as throughout the community. Hate speech, indeed, is learned and transmitted in a cultural setting. In the Nigerian setting, tribes or ethnic societies have derogatory names, songs, and perceptions about others, and the younger generations are socialized into these derogatory issues. Hate speech is also promoted when Nigerians feel frustrated or disappointed in governance. Diamond (2004) notes that the yawning deficit of good governance characterises countries to realise their poverty alleviation goals and constitutes a strategy to sustainable poverty reduction and all-around development. Corrupt or bad government promotes policy instability and non-implementation of desirable or sustainable development goals, as public funds are diverted for private use. Bad governance fares well when leaders are corrupt and not committed to public goods and services to the masses. Thus, the leadership problem is the bane of development in Nigeria. Dike (1999) observes several complaints about waste and inefficiency in performing public services in Nigeria and resultantly recommends honest and Godfearing leaders to improve Nigeria’s socio-economic situation. Frustration arising from bad governance can make people give hate speech. In this case, hate speech is a frustration-induced behaviour. When people are frustrated, especially with unmet goals or blockage of desired goals, they become aggressive and abusive. The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria have shown that elections or party politics are fertile ground for hate speech and conflict. Hate speech often manifests glaringly during political campaigns, even in some other countries of the world. It is mostly used by politicians, especially in developing societies, as a tool for propaganda. Hate speech reached a crescendo in Nigeria during the 2015 General Elections, as faithful of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and faithful of All Peoples Congress (APC) engaged in a verbal war or speechifying to tarnish the image of their opponents and inciting the public against such perceived opponents. Unfortunately, the media (sponsored by politicians) have become instrumental in disseminating hate speech. Joel (2012) observes that although the absence of a set of aggressors and victims is a part of hate speech in Nigeria, the manifestations of hate speech in the northern part of the country are accompanied by violent acts but are mild or subtle in the southern part. The extent to which hate speech has become a political instrument in the hands of ethnic conscious individuals to capture, exercise and consolidate political power in Nigeria should not be ignored easily. Thus, the ethno religious dimensions of hate speech in Nigeria have made it a more pervasive issue. Mute (2008) reports that Kenya’s experiences of political campaigns during the 2005 Constitutional Referendum and the 2007 General Elections promoted hate speech, as politicians are given to making utterances that incite the public against their opponents. For instance, Mute recalls that some Kalenjin politicians used certain negative utterances, in the forms of labels and idioms, to dehumanize communities such as Kikuyu and Kisii in the Rift Valley by referring to them as „madoadoa“ (stains or spots) before and during the post-election violence. The consequences of hate speech in Nigeria are devastating. Also, hate speech promotes conflict and violence and also poses a threat to national unity. The Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programmed (NSRP, 2017) described hate speech as a catalyst for violence. Scholars Palfrey (2018), Oloja



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(2018), and Wilson & Jibrin( 2019) aver that hate speech has instigated violence that led to the deaths of many people. Hopko (2018) observes that hate speech is a threat to individuals, groups, or societies. NSRP (2017) exposes the damage that the propagation or spread of hate speech through the media (online and offline) can cause to society. The devastating consequences of hate speech in human societies have attracted the attention and involvement of international organizations through legal processes. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), states that “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law”; the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) (ICERD) prohibits all incitement of racism; and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has sponsored several conferences concerning the debate over how freedom of speech applies to the Internet. Similarly, several countries have made some hate speech laws and regulations, thereby incriminating hate speech and offenders.

### **Curbing the menace of Hate Speech in Nigeria**

Hate issues can be effectively controlled or reduced in Nigeria through a plethora of strategic options such as:

**Increased Advocacy:** Active verbal support for the war against hate speech is seriously needed; actively raising awareness about hate speech can effectively combat the menace. The general public, including Nigerians in rural areas, can become aware of the causes and consequences of hate speech, especially its effects on national unity and development. Therefore, government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency, Ministry of Information, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and development partners should take steps to advocate against hate speech. Joel (2012) advocates that the rate of hate speech can be controlled through art forms, comedy routines, music, theatre performances, and radio and television jingles.

**Increased Education/Sensitisation:** Advocacy of hate speech is achievable through deliberate education, whether informally or formally dispensed. According to Walker (2017), a growing awareness of the problem has resulted in increasing teaching in schools about the issue, with enhanced reporting often occurring. Indeed, education is a powerful tool for combating the menace of hate speech. Informally, parents should bequeath their children a socialization process devoid of hate speech; they should teach children from infancy to avoid making hate speech because it is catastrophic to human happiness and societal development. The causes and consequences of hate speech, especially in Nigeria, should be taught in schools at all levels, from kindergarten to tertiary levels.

**Hate Speech Laws and Regulations:** Hate speech laws and regulations do not infringe on the right to freedom of expression. As advocated in a 2001 Joint Statement by the UN, OSCE, and OAS Special Mandates on the right to freedom of expression, the following conditions should guide or be respected by hate speech laws:

- No one should be penalized for true statements;
- No one should be penalized for the dissemination of hate speech unless it has been shown that they did so to incite discrimination, hostility, or violence;
- The right of journalists to decide how best to communicate information and ideas to the public should be respected, particularly when they are reporting on racism and intolerance;
- No one should be subject to prior censorship and any imposition of sanctions by courts should be in strict conformity with the principle of proportionality. Indeed, these conditions provide a basis for assessing the legitimacy of a particular hate speech law. Thus, hate speech laws and regulations in Nigeria should be guided.

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**Artificial Intelligence:** Wilson & Jibrin (2019) propose that hate speech in Nigeria can be controlled through Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. They are technologies that perform human intelligence functions. The hypothesis is based on the scholars' idea that as much as AI technologies are used to spread hate speech, they are also used to check or mitigate hate speech. Starr (2004) submits that Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and the United Kingdom Police work with the hosting service provider to remove any reported or identified hate speech. Wilson & Jibrin (2019) observe that for hate speech to be mitigated through AI, the Nigerian government and other stakeholders (bloggers, online news media, and security agencies) should partner with the hosting service provider, which can develop and float online software or websites that can detect and filter hate speech. The Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP, 2017); Zhang, Robinson & Tepper (2018) have advocated the possibility of engaging scalable, automated methods or computer-based approaches to detect hate speech. Hopko (2018) reports that researchers have adopted computer-based approaches to detect and recognize hate speech on social media platforms using artificial intelligence. In Nigeria, however, human rights challenges, subjectivity of hate speech, and socio-political factors, and lack of political will, pose challenges to the mitigation of hate speech through AI.

**Good Governance:** Corrupt governance breeds hatred, hate speech, and sarcastic criticisms from the public, thus, the bane of development in Nigeria (Agha, 2017). However, good governance can reduce hatred, hate speech, and sarcastic criticisms from the public. Good governance is indispensable for overall development, occasioned by effective management of human and natural resources. Oyediran & Agbaje (1999) cited in Robert (2002) list eight attributes of good governance to include: accountability of government officials, transparency in fundamental procedures, predictability in government behaviour and mutual decisions, opening in government transactions, the rule of law and an independent judiciary, free flow of information and freedom of the press, respect for human rights; and decentralization of political structure and power. Bad governance lacks all these attributes. Good governance is needed for building or promoting healthy nation-building. Good governance carries every segment of society in terms of development and appointments. It also behoves to suggest that any government founded on good governance would not allow the citizens to feel frustrated and abuse the occupants of power. As rightly observed by Odinkalu (2017), visionary leadership is needed to communicate government needs in honesty and transparency and give Nigerians a sense of equal worth.

**Religious Tolerance:** Religion has caused conflicts and violence in Nigerian society. The Christian and Muslim conflicts found in most places and the Boko Haram insurgency are cases in point. To curtail hate speech arising from religious groups and its consequences, religious tolerance should be prioritized in a multi-cultural and multireligious Nigeria. Policies and activities of the government, religious groups and agencies should be tailored towards religious tolerance in Nigeria.

**Political Remedy:** The Nigerian experience has shown that hate speech is popularised during political activities by political parties and their faithful. Therefore, efforts should be made by the Nigerian government and other supportive agencies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and parties to curtail hate speech during political periods or for political reasons. Importantly, politicians should stop heating the polity just because of their interests.

**Regulation of the Social Media:** As hate speech is disseminated through social media, it can also be controlled or regulated. It is possible to regulate the spread of hate speech without tampering with people's right to press

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freedom. Press freedom can be enhanced through media laws and ethics education. The education should focus on people's use of social media to create and promote peaceful societies and existences; rather than promoting hate speech. People should know that individuals and groups have political, social, and cultural rights, which include freedom of speech and the implications of these rights. Thus, they should identify and report or counter hate speeches. In particular, journalists should exercise professionalism in writing articles or reports, airing programmes, and interviewing people without promoting hate speeches and taking sides.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper examined the causes and consequences of hate speech based on sociological perspectives. Despite the destructive outcomes of hate speech on Nigeria's co-existence and unity, the phenomenon continues to live with us, even glaringly. Intensify efforts to incriminate hate speech and offenders, especially by the government. However, the same government, occupied by horrible politicians, exacerbates or sponsors hate speech during political activities and programmes and for their political interests. This paper has also vegetated around the issue of separating hate speech from the right of freedom of expression and adequate care while tackling issues of hate speech to ensure that the social menace does not conflict with constructive criticisms and freedom of expression. Constructive criticisms and freedom of speech should be encouraged as bases of a democratic society. The way to incriminate hate speech and offenders in Nigeria is still very far because the phenomenon has not been engagingly discussed by scholars, academics, organisations, agencies, and the general citizenry in Nigeria, as has been the cases in South Africa, Kenya, and most European countries. Also, hate speech has been a cheap tool for Nigerian politicians to achieve their political interests. The inclusion of hate speech as a topic in recent conferences in Nigeria's academic firmament is commendable. Academics, scholars, interested organisations, agencies, and the general public owe this society a great deal in engagingly discussing issues of hate speech in Nigeria, especially from different disciplines and perspectives.

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