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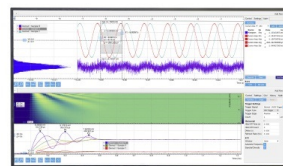
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Influence of Hate Speech Messages on Voters' Choice of Candidate in Kwara State 2019 Gubernatorial Election

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Abstract: The Nigerian and some Asia country's media landscape over the years has projected numerous political campaigns that are hate speeches directed at the perceived opposition candidates and political party. This study examined the influence of hate speech messages on voters' choice of candidate in Kwara State, Nigeria in 2019 GE and was anchored on the agenda-setting theory. The study used a survey research design with a single cross-sectional research method. The study generated 464,393 registered voters as the study population. Using cluster sampling and purposive respectively to select 400 samples. The study, therefore, discovered that social media is the most channel of exposure by respondents on hate speech messages during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Kwara State with 66%. The study also found that the use of hate speech undermines the importance of political candidates with 72% in any given election. The study further discovered that the use of hate speech during elections influenced the voters by making them change from one candidate to the other with 82% thereby encouraging more votes against the opposition party. The implication of these findings has a strong influence on the way electorates undermine the importance of political issues and as such rendered political candidates and parties irrelevant with a critical effect on the credibility, fairness, and smooth running of any political landscape and the conduct of Nigerian elections in general. The paper proposes critical political education to electorates on voting behavior to promote good governance.

INTRODUCTION

In some nations of Africa, democratization progress was rekindled during the 1990s, the era frequently labeled as the third upsurge of democratization [1]. There are certain areas of advancement in terms of regular election and change of power, and setbacks in terms of widespread use of hate speech, rigging and electoral viciousness, political corruption during the process of democratization [2].

Democracy in Nigeria is hinged on party politics. Deplorably, the role of political parties in consolidating democracy and engendering national development in the country is greatly undermined by the modus operandi used by these political parties which are geared towards winning election contests by all means because of their desperation to secure, control and wield political power. This has made politicians resort to all sorts of illegal and immoral acts to ensure that they acquire political seats at all costs irrespective of what it takes [3]. In the history of Nigeria's politics, particularly since the first elections in the country under the 1922 Clifford Constitution, the political landscape in

Nigeria has experienced series of crises that could be traced to hate speech, which is the bedrock of any political and electoral violence among other anti-social behaviors [4]. Similarly, just like in Nigeria, communication delivery is also significant in relaying messages to the Malaysian public, which is evident from the last general elections, particularly in the 14th general election on May 9, 2018. The pattern of message delivery showed a series of false news that made the election the most nerve-wracking election.

However, unlike in Malaysia, in Nigerian, hate speech includes acts of insulting persons for their faith; abusing people for their ethnic or dialectal connection; uttering contempt against individuals based on their origin; and deliberately spreading falsehood or rumors that demeans people [3]. The campaigns of major political parties were characterized by a lot of oral attacks bereft of developmental, innovative as well as ideological ideas [4].

Broadcast, print, and social media were used to propagate hate speech and sometimes from online posts and trends [5]. For instance, the 2019 general elections where conventional media channels were glowing with campaigns of numerous political parties abusing the right of free speech as well as hate speech.

A national TV, (AIT) on June 7, 2019, was shut down by Nigerian Broadcasting Commission for airing hate induced documentary on Presidential election. In the Nigerian political arena, hate speech is mostly used to make the ground for hostile political struggle in preparation for general elections. In the same way, in Malaysia political abhorrence occurred due to political divergence, as well as inability to acknowledge other group's opinions and voices of the society members [7]. Though the impact in Malaysia may not be much in Nigeria it fueled ethnic differences and particularly increasing the animosity between the largely Northern Muslims as well as the Southern Christians [8]. In Kwara State, hate speech message was made against many of the politician's preludes to the election [9].

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

All through the political campaigns, hate speech was used to mislead electorates [1]. Because political actors are deficient in the necessary concepts to campaign and contest for political authority; hate speech becomes desirable as an avenue of getting to power [10]. Though, hate speech in Nigerian politics can be traced to the First Republic (1960 to 1966) and turn out to be severe from 2010. Earlier studies showed that across Africa, elections are the settings for hate speech and skirmish. Rwanda's massacre in 1994, Kenya's election conflict in 2008, Burundi's flawed election in 2015 then South Sudan protracted fights are instances of hate predisposed violence across Africa [11]. Thus, hate speech induces intolerance in multicultural and multiethnic countries [12].

Similarly, studies have shown the extent to which hate speeches came up in Nigeria at the previous general [13]. Not much has been done in looking at the impact of hate speech messages on voters' choice of candidate, especially in Nigeria. Because of this, the study investigated the impact of hate speech messages on voters' choice of contenders in the 2019 GE in Kwara State, Nigeria through the following questions:

RQ1: What is the channel of exposure to hate speech messages among voters in Kwara state during the 2019 gubernatorial election?

RQ2: What is the perception of voters in Kwara State on hate speech messages during the 2019 gubernatorial election?

RQ3: What influence does the hate speech messages have on voters in their choice of the candidate during the 2019 gubernatorial elections?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextualizing Hate Speech in Contemporary Malaysia and Nigeria Elections

The nature and features of hate speech are still very much ambiguous in literature. Hate speech is seen as any speech, gesticulation, behavior, or writing, with the tendencies to inflame people to violence or harmful act [14]. Hate speech usually comprises of character damaging abuse and pestering, usages of smears and labels, and some fanatical political as well as religious speeches.

In Malaysia in particular, the subjects that have dominated political hatred in the last GE were the 1MDB matter, execution of GST, price rise of gas, and other issues. Therefore, candidates' attacks were one of the prevalent counter-attacks means to influence the voters' attention. All through the electioneering campaigns, hate speeches were used quite a lot of times by the contenders to influence public confidence and faithfulness from the other candidates [7].

Similarly, in Nigeria defamatory statements were common in both the mainstream and digital media spaces. Just like in Malaysia, the upsurge of the proximity of the 2019 gubernatorial elections prompted politicians to use the media for abusive and hate speeches against other aspirants and their parties. It is however imperative to note that hate speech generates a lot of consequences. Some of these consequences include electoral violence. Also, hate Speeches and disrespect for opposition parties pose grave consequences on democratic consolidation and national development and national cohesion.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study revolves around the Agenda Setting Theory of McComb and Shaw of 1972. The basis of this theory is that mass media may not be effective in telling us what to think nevertheless they are strikingly effective in telling us what to think about. This suggests that they (the mass media) can put more pictures in our head and thus affect our thinking by successfully directing us to think along with a political leaning through their frequency of reports, prominence and the extent of conflicts generated in the report [15].

Applying this theory to the Nigerian political landscape, the agenda-setting theory served as an explanation of how the mass media affects to change the pattern and ways in political behavior during elections [16]. The 2018 GE in Malaysia and the 2019 GE in Nigeria witnessed the use of all forms of available media channels in reaching out to the electorates. In the course of achieving political gains, politicians used media to set the agenda of hate speech against the opponents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was used to investigate the effect of hate speech messages on voters' choice of candidate in Kwara State, Nigeria 2019 GE. The study was carried out in all three geopolitical zones in Kwara State using a single cross-sectional research method. The population of the study comprised of all accredited voters in the 2019 GE in the state which amounted to (464,393). The sample size of 400 was obtained after it was subjected to the Taro Yamane formula. The formula is $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$ where;

n signifies the sample size

N implies the population under study

e indicates the margin error (0.05) it could be illustrated as:

$n = 464,393 / (1 + 464,393(0.05)^2) = 399.655$. To round it up, $n = 400$.

Hence the sample size 400 was derived.

The tool used in gathering data for this study was a questionnaire with 400 questionnaires administered, 366 retrieved and 32 from the 366 were invalid while the remaining 344 were analyzed for the study. This research employed a cluster sampling technique based on geopolitical in selecting the sample. Registered voters in Kwara state were divided into three groups based on the three geopolitical zones of the state (i.e. Kwara South, Kwara North, and Kwara Central). Purposive sampling was used to select local government which was sampled from each geopolitical zone based on the highest number of registered voters, and only those who voted and are eligible to vote were sampled. Hence, Ilorin west was sampled to represent Kwara Central, Ifelodun for Kwara South, and Patigi for Kwara North purposively. As such, 94 questionnaires were administered in Ifelodun, 140 in Patigi, and 166 in Ilorin west. The distribution of these questionnaires was based on the percentage of registered voters in each of the geopolitical zones in Kwara State. As such, the study used descriptive statistics such as percentage, the mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Based on the data collected through surveys with regards to the influence of hate speech messages on voters' choice of candidate in Kwara state 2019 gubernatorial elections, the data retrieved were subjected to quantitative analysis using tables, charts, and percentages, mean and standard deviation.

Table 1 indicated that (54%) of the respondents never saw television as their channel of exposure of hate speech messages with ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.5$), while (62%) of the respondents perceived radio as their channel of exposure of hate speech messages with ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.3$). Similarly, (62%) of the respondents often perceived newspaper as their channel of exposure of hate speech messages with ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.4$) and (66%) of the respondents saw social media

as their channel of exposure of hate speech messages in the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Kwara State with (M=3.3, SD=1.3). It is implicated here that exposure to social media hate speech will influence the voter's behavior during the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Kwara State.

TABLE 1. The channel of exposure to hate speech messages

	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	%
Television	35.2	11.9	16.9	19.5	16.6	2.7	1.5	54
Radio	14.5	16.2	27.0	23.0	18.6	3.1	1.3	62
Newspaper	21.5	11.6	20.6	24.1	22.1	3.1	1.4	62
Social Media	14.8	10.8	22.4	25.9	26.2	3.3	1.3	66

Scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Always, 4=Often, 5=Sometimes

The data in the Table 2 provide detailed respondents' responses to the perception of voters towards hate speech messages. Thus, the implication of this table showed that hate speech messages undermine the importance of political candidates in any given election of a democratic society, and this is illustrated in Fig. 1.

TABLE 2. Perception of voters towards hate speech messages

Voters' Perception	Level of Agreement					M	SD	%
	1	2	3	4	5			
Use of hate speech messages can lead targeted people into isolation	12.5	15.4	20.9	31.4	19.8	3.3	1.2	66
Use of hate speech messages create feelings of fear	10.7	12.8	17.1	26.8	32.6	3.1	1.3	62
Use of hate speech can render targeted political candidates irrelevant	13.6	10.3	15.8	29.6	30.7	3.4	1.4	68
Use of hate speech undermines the importance of political candidates	10.5	11.9	23.5	34.3	19.8	3.6	1.4	72
Use of hate speech has no effect on the society	14.2	24.1	10.5	27.3	23.8	3.2	1.2	64
Total						3.3	1.3	66.4

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

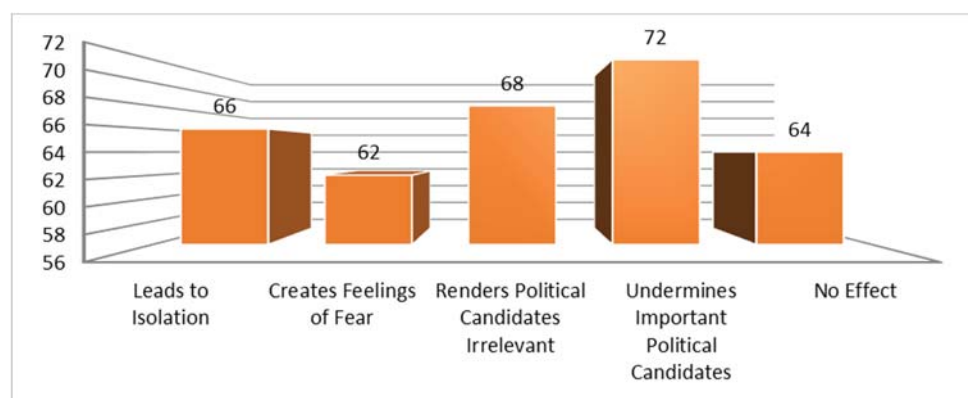


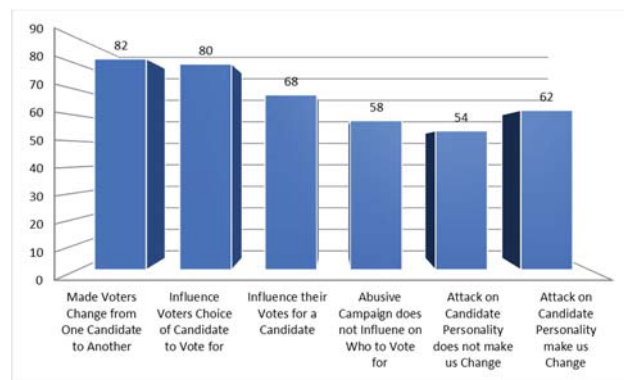
FIGURE 1. Perception of voters towards hate speech message.

The data in the Table 3 detailed the influence of hate speech messages on voters' choice of the candidate during the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Kwara State. Thus, it is implicated in this table that the use of hate speech by a political candidate made voters changed from one party candidate to another as illustrated in Fig. 2 below.

TABLE 3. Influence of Hate Speech Messages on Voters' Choice of Candidate.

Influence	Level of Agreement					M	SD	%
	1	2	3	4	5			
Use of hate speech by a political candidate made me changed from one candidate to the other	5.8	4.9	9.0	25.0	55.2	4.1	1.1	82
Use of hate speech messages by a candidate influenced my choice of who to vote in the 2019 gubernatorial election	6.7	9.0	8.4	23.8	52.0	4.0	1.2	80
Use of hate speech messages by political parties influenced my vote for a candidate during the 2019 gubernatorial election	11.6	11.0	19.5	33.4	24.4	3.4	1.2	68
Use of abusive campaigns by political parties influenced my decisions on who to vote for during the 2019 gubernatorial elections	26.2	13.4	16.3	24.1	20.1	2.9	1.4	58
An attack on the personality of a candidate by an opposition candidate made me vote against the party during the 2019 gubernatorial election	30.5	13.4	18.0	25.3	12.8	2.7	1.4	54
An attack on the personality of a candidate by an opposition candidate made me vote for the party	20.1	13.1	21.5	25.3	20.1	3.1	1.4	62
Total						4.04	1.54	80.8

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

**FIGURE 2.** Influence of Hate Speech Messages on Voters' Choice of Candidate

DISCUSSIONS

This study examined the influence of hate speech messages on voters' choice of the decision in the 2019 Kwara State gubernatorial election. The first research question was to investigate the voters' channel of exposure to hate speech during the 2019 gubernatorial election; the respondents submitted that they did not see TV as a channel of exposure to hate speech messages, but the radio. Respondents also often see the newspaper as a channel of exposure to hate speech while they rank social media as the main channel of exposure to hate speech messages.

From this discussion, it is apparent that social media are the channels through which hate speech messages get to the electorates which have consequent effects on their voting behavior. Research question two investigated the perception of voters towards Hate Speech Messages in the 2019 gubernatorial elections in Kwara State. As such, the majority of the respondent perceived that the use of hate speech messages undermines the importance of political candidates in any given election. Very few respondents perceived that hate speech messages create feelings of fear when used while few respondents perceived that hate speech does not affect society. Some believed that hate speech messages are capable of leading people into a state of isolation while a close majority of respondents perceived that hate speech can render targeted political candidates irrelevant. Furthermore, research question three looked at the extent to which hate speech messages influenced voters' choice of the candidate during the 2019 gubernatorial election. The finding affirmed that hate speech does influence voters' decisions during the election by making them

change from one political candidate to another. This corroborates the submission of Blais (2014) that after voters receive new information that borders on the capability of candidates sometimes lead voters to change their behavior out of strategic concerns.

Based on this study, respondents strongly agreed that the use of hate speech messages by candidates influenced their choice of vote. Finally, respondents agreed that an attack on the personality of a candidate by an opposition candidate made them vote for the party. Thus, it is apparent from this discussion that hate speech messages influence voters' decisions during the election.

CONCLUSIONS

The study inferred that hate speech messages carried out by Nigeria political parties showed that political space in Nigeria still have the problem of socially tempted political problems. More importantly, politicians speeches in the name of election campaign are the indicator that Nigerian politicians are still not matured politically. Thus, the following conclusions are made:

1. Social media, as it lacks gate-keeping increased voters' exposure to hate speech messages in any given political elections especially in a third world country like Nigeria.
2. Hate speech messages undermine the importance of political candidates in any given election of a democratic society.
3. The usage of hate speech messages influenced voters' choice of candidates during elections as it makes Nigerian voters swing from voting one party candidate to another.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for political orientation from the grassroots to the national level. This is attainable when there are relentless public seminars, conferences, public lectures as well as inquiries that will be geared towards educating political parties, politicians, and citizens. The media should rise to their social obligation to avert hate speeches from being in the public domain before, during as well as after elections in Nigeria.

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