

## **Influence of Hate Speech on Nigeria's Political Environment and Voters' Choice in the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria: Implications for Sustainable Development**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the influence of political hate speech on voters' choices during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria and its implication for sustainable development in Nigeria. The study utilized Social Judgment Theory as an analytical framework to explain differing views that voters have about the use of hate speech. Adopting a quantitative survey design, data were procured from both primary and secondary sources, with a sample of 400 voters extracted from a total of 93,469,008 registered voters through a purposive sampling technique. Following the exclusion of 8 responses due to incomplete answers out of 400 copies of questionnaire administered, 392 were returned with complete and accurate responses. Consequently, 392 surveys of response rate of 98.00% were analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version (23). Results/findings reveal that hate speech was pervasive across both social and traditional media platforms, constituting 25.5% of documented instances while the overall influence of hate speech on voter behaviour was minimal as 50.5% of participants robustly asserted its effect on voting patterns throughout the election, 15.6% strongly disagreed and 11.0% disagreed, while 11.7% were adjudged to be indifferent. The research further indicated that 49.7% of political actors extensively relied on hate speech during their campaigns. These findings elucidate the deleterious impacts of hate speech on political discourse, as it diminishes candidate credibility, and endangers the integrity of electoral processes. The study recommends that: Electoral regulations prohibiting hate speech be rigorously enforced, media outlets be subjected to scrutiny, and perpetrators be prosecuted. Additionally, politicians are urged to utilize social media judiciously in campaigns. This will ensure that credible leaders are elected to support the realization of the sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Political Hate speech, Voters, Presidential Election, Campaigns, Nigeria

**1. Introduction/Rationale**

In democratic countries, freedom of expression plays a crucial role in politics. If the line between the right to freedom of expression and hate speech is not drawn, such a right may have unfavourable effects and words may turn into hate speech (Hazenbroek, 2012; Sevasti, 2014; Hassan, Fazal & Khalid, 2020). Therefore, Agbese (2018) asserts that Nigeria, like the majority of countries, struggles to strike a balance between exercising one's right to free speech and speaking in a way that undermines harmony, unity, and peace within the country. This is because Nigerian society's multiethnic makeup is a divisive tool used by the political class to sway voters' decisions during elections. The reason is that ethnic and religious factors typically influence voters' behaviour in the country's political environment, leading them to vote for candidates who share their views, regardless of whether the other candidate has a stronger track record of success in governance or greater potential for success (Sule et al., 2017). Thus, statements that propagate or incite violence, discrimination, or hostility against individuals or groups based on their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other protected characteristics can be considered hate speech (Obiora, Aboh & Dioka, 2021; Abdulazeez, Nasamu & Asemah, 2023).

Given the aforementioned, Abiodun, Olusola, and Kehinde (2017) and Abdulazeez et al. (2023) assert that hate speech has become more common in Nigeria in recent years, albeit under the pretext of the right to free speech via new media platforms like the internet, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and so on. For example, since the First Republic, political leaders and their supporters have employed hate speech, which has resulted in bloodshed. Two notable examples of this are the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) and Operation Wetie in the Western Region (1964–1965). Since then, politicians in Nigeria have made extensive use of hate speeches to gain strength and political influence (Abdulazeez, et al., 2023). This awful situation materialized in 2023 during electioneering since hate speech is a common occurrence in Nigerian politics. To put their rivals in a negative and derogatory light, for example, politicians fabricate and construct a variety of stories (Asemah, Nwaoboli & Nwoko, 2022). For example, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was charged for being a Cameroonian who wishes to sell off the nation's assets to his friends and associates. This was a loud campaign issue that dominated the other candidates' campaigns rather than concentrating on themes. However, the origin, identity, source of money, and standard of living of All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate and eventual winner, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, dominated the campaigns of the opposition parties. Other political parties have declared that Mr. Peter Obi, the candidate of the Labour Party, (LP) as an ethnic and religious bigot who supports the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and that he is incapable of winning even one vote.

According to Abdulazeez et al (2023), Nigeria's electioneering campaigns are seen as an opportunity to engage in defamation, condemnation, and outright disrespect of political oppositions and the ethnic nationalities to which they belong, to influence the electorate's choice, rather than as a means of delivering messages to the electorate about ideas the candidate wants to share with the voters. In light of this, Section 97(1A) of the Nigerian Electoral Act, 2022 forbids

any association, candidate, or individual from using sectional, tribal, or religious grounds in their campaigning or broadcasting to support or oppose a specific political party or candidate. Furthermore, Section 92(1A) forbids the use of abusive language in political campaigns or slogans that could inadvertently offend religious, ethnic, tribal, or sectional sentiments and that anyone found guilty of doing so faces a maximum fine of N1 million, a term of imprisonment of 12 months, or both, and, in the case of a political party, a maximum fine of N10 million.

Notwithstanding the constitutional provisions of the Nigerian federal government and further legal measures aimed at curbing political hate speech and its corresponding disparaging remarks, hate speech persisted as a recycling phenomenon and seems to be getting worse due to man's innate tendency to support his own during the 2023 Presidential contest as people vie to lead multiple nations within a single nation (Awe et al., 2020). In light of this, it is relevant to investigate how political hate speech affects voters' decisions in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election with a view to uncover the prevailing narratives present in the election reporting in Nigeria.

### **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study was to determine how political hate speech affected voters' choices of candidates in the 2023 Presidential Election. Specifically, the research set to:

- Determine electorate's level of exposure to hate speech during the 2023 Presidential Election.
- Ascertain the channel used to disseminate hate speech to voters during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria.
- Assess the voters' perception of hate speech during 2023 Presidential Election.
- Find out the extent to which hate speech influenced the voting pattern of the electorate during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria.

Given the foregoing, the research will also attempt to answer the following inquiries:

- To what extent were Nigerian electorate exposed to hate speech during the 2023 Presidential Election?
- What is the channel of exposure to hate speech messages among voters during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria?
- What is the perception of voters on the use of hate speech during 2023 Presidential Election?
- To what extent did hate speech influenced the voting pattern of the electorate during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Hate Speech**

In literature, hate speech's characteristics and essence are still mostly unclear. Any words, gestures, actions, or writing that has the potential to incite others to violent or destructive acts is considered hate speech. Slandorous and derogatory remarks, the use of labels and smears against

someone's character, and extreme religious and political discourse are all examples of hate speech. Therefore, statements that propagate or incite violence, discrimination, or hostility against individuals or groups on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other protected characteristics can be considered hate speech (Obiora, et al., 2021; Abdulazeez, et al., 2023). Echoing similar spectrum of thought, Ezeibe (2015), avers that hate speech is any speech that incites violence or is defamatory. In view of the foregoing, many authors opine that hate speech is defined by legislation in some nations as expressions, both said and unspoken, that encourage violence against or by a protected individual or group. According to Aboh (2019), hate speech can occur both within and between political parties and ethnic groups. It can also occur between two groups.

This is due to the fact that hate speech is defined as any verbal or nonverbal communication that incites hatred toward a specific racial, ethnic, or political group by demeaning them or exhibiting any kind of bias (Neisser, 1994; Ajani et al, 2021; Inobemhe et al, 2021). Neisser (1994, p. 337) describes hate speech as "any messages (verbal, written, symbolic) that insult a racial, ethnic and political group, whether by implying that they are inferior in some way or by signaling that they are disliked or not welcome for any other reasons." For instance, Ajani et al.'s 2019 study in Kwara State, Nigeria, focused on the influence of hate speech messages on voters' choice of candidate and was grounded in the agenda-setting theory. The survey research design of the study employed a single cross-sectional research method. The results demonstrated that during the 2019 Kwara State Gubernatorial Election, there was a significant amount of exposure to hate speech messages on social media. Additionally, it was shown that 82% of voters changed their support from one politician to another as a result of the use of hate speech during elections. In a similar spirit; Inobemhe et al. (2021) gave a speech about how hate speech affects Nigerian democracy. In order to investigate the relationship between political communication and national security in the digital age, the study concentrated on the effects of hate speech on Nigeria's democracy. The researchers emphasized the dangers of political discourse containing hate speech, which are made worse by new media outlets.

On the contrary, a study on textual analysis of select social media hate speech messages against Clergymen in Nigeria was carried out by Asemah, Nwaoboli and Nwoko (2022). The study's goals were to look at the frequency of hate speech towards specific Nigerian clergymen, the context in which such hate speech was expressed and the effects of such hate speech on Nigerian Clergymen on social media. The study's findings showed that hate speech violates press freedom, is detrimental to the rights of individuals and groups, and undermines the integrity of religion. The researchers concluded that between January and July 2021, there were a lot of hate words made on social media, especially on Facebook, that were aimed against clergymen. Ezeibe (2015) examines Nigeria's electoral violence and hate speech. He examines how hate speech affects violence in Nigeria before, during, and after elections. He notes that hate speech has been elevated to the status of a political campaign tactic in Nigeria, where political leaders ignore its offensive characteristics as long as it helps them seize and hold onto power.

What can be deduced from the foregoing is that previous studies have looked at the impact of hate speech on how political campaigns and elections are covered, and they have found both positive and bad consequences. Also, election-related violence has also been linked to political hate speech and other disparaging remarks, according to earlier research. Furthermore, academics have examined hate speech about elections, emphasizing the significance of framing, agenda-setting, and media biases in influencing public opinion, particularly in elections held in other climes. Most importantly, scholars have contributed to the research mentioned above, but none have been able to provide a comprehensive analysis of how political hate speech affects voters' choices in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election. Thus the current research adds to the existing literature by presenting a much more in-depth examination of political hate speech and its effects on the behaviour of voters in Nigeria during the 2023 Presidential Elections. The study further fills a void in the literature by indicating one of the settings for investigating how hate speech relates to electoral choices and the need for responsible political communication in future campaigns.

## **2.2. Contextual Historical Background**

Modern Nigeria can be traced back to the year 1914, when the British Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated. The nation achieved independence on October 1, 1960, and subsequently adopted a republican constitution in 1963, while electing to maintain its affiliation with the Commonwealth. Geographically, Nigeria is situated along the western coastline of the African continent. It exhibits a multifaceted geography, characterized by a range of climatic conditions from arid to humid equatorial zones. Nigeria encompasses an extensive land area of 923,768 km<sup>2</sup> / 356,667 sq mi. Nonetheless, the most distinguishing aspect of Nigeria is its diverse populace (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-association-of-states>). The country is home to numerous languages, including Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Hausa, Edo, Ibibio, Tiv, and English. (Additionally, the nation is endowed with rich natural resources, prominently featuring substantial deposits of petroleum and natural gas. The capital city is Abuja, located in the Federal Capital Territory, which was established by decree in 1976. Lagos, the previous capital, continues to hold its position as the foremost commercial and industrial hub of the nation. To the north, Nigeria shares borders with Niger; to the east, with Chad and Cameroon; to the south, it is bounded by the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean; and to the west, it is adjacent to Benin and is recognized as Africa's most populous nation (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria>).

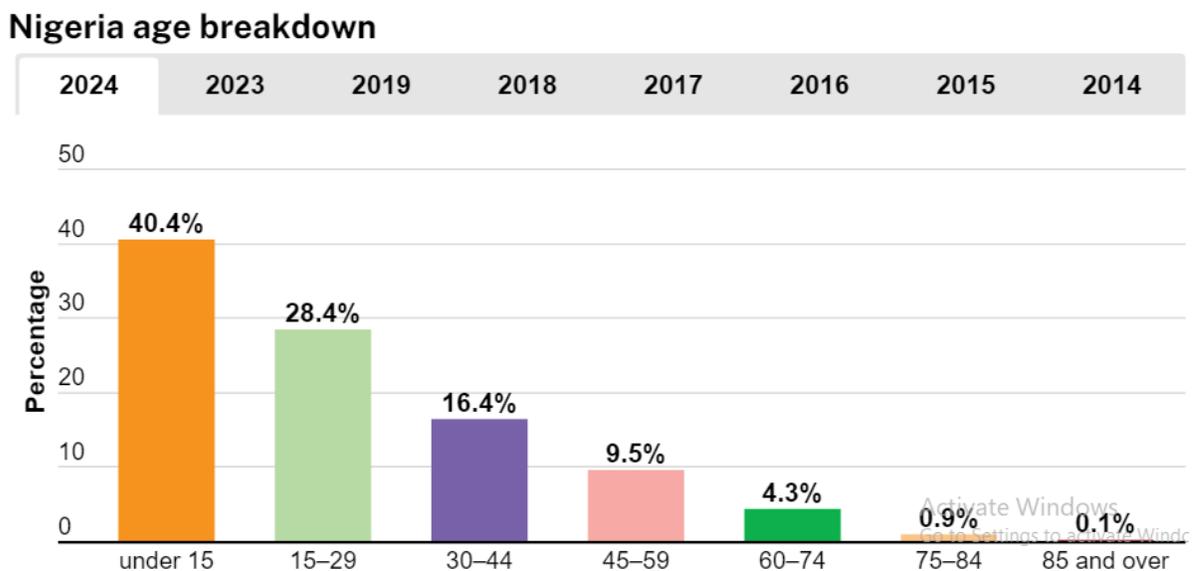
In terms of settlement patterns, approximately half of the population resides in rural areas. Densely populated communities are typically found along the coastline, in the Yoruba-dominated regions of the southwest, and in the Hausa- and Kanuri-inhabited territories of the far north. In certain locales inhabited by the Igbo and the Anang-Ibibio in the southeast, as well as in the central region populated by the Tiv, settlements are characterized by dispersed homesteads known as compounds. Conversely, there exists significant migratory movement within Nigeria, particularly between the northern and southern regions. A considerable number of southern migrants have established themselves in the northern urban centers of Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Jos, while seasonal migrants frequently traverse from the northern areas of Sokoto and Kano to the southern

regions where cacao cultivation is prevalent. An even more substantial number of individuals have migrated from the southeast to the more industrialized and urbanized western states of Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun, or to the agriculturally oriented western states of Ondo and Edo(<https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria/Settlement-patterns>).

### 2.2.1. Demographic Trends

Nigeria, akin to other nations categorized as developing, exhibits birth and mortality rates that surpass global averages. Nonetheless, from the mid-20th century onwards, there has been a significant reduction in infant mortality rates, accompanied by an increase in life expectancy; as a result, the rate of population growth has been notably accelerated. Nearly seventy-five percent of the populace is under the age of 30. Nigeria, akin to other nations categorized as developing, exhibits birth and mortality rates that surpass global averages. Nonetheless, from the mid-20th century onwards, there has been a significant reduction in infant mortality rates, accompanied by an increase in life expectancy; as a result, the rate of population growth has been notably accelerated. Nearly seventy-five percent of the populace is under the age of 30. The figure below exemplifies this reality.

Figure 1: Nigeria Age Breakdown



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria/Settlement-patterns>

### 2.2.2. Constitutional framework

The president, who is directly elected to a four-year term and functions as both the head of state and the chief executive, is granted executive authority under the 1999 constitution. The president also appoints the vice president and cabinet members. The House of Representatives and the Senate make up the bicameral National Assembly, as stipulated by the constitution. Ten representatives are elected by each state to four-year terms in the House of Representatives, while

three senators from each state and one from the Federal Capital Territory are elected to four-year terms in the Senate.

### **2.2.3. Political process**

The country's constitution ensures that every person who is at least eighteen years old is entitled to vote. When Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, the two main political parties there were the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC). But in the end, their regional rather than national focus—the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons represented the east, the AG represented the west, and the NPC the north—contributed to the start of the civil war by the middle of the 1960s and more than 20 years of military administration. Only parties with national rather than regional representation were permitted, such as the recently formed People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Alliance for Democracy (AD), and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). Political parties were permitted for a brief while in 1993 and again beginning in 1998. The All Progressives Congress (APC), the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and the Labour Party are among the several other parties that have emerged since then.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Analytical Framework**

In this study, the analysis is based on the Social Judgment Theory. Muzafar Sherif, Caroline Sherif, and Carl Hovland first introduced the Social Judgment Theory in 1961. The social judgment hypothesis, according to its proponents, emerged from early social psychology evaluations of attitudes and persuasion because it looks at people's internal processes in connection to messages that are sent. According to Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017), social judgment theory describes how an audience interprets a communication. Stated differently, Asemah (2015) notes that the theory centers on how individuals decipher messages and how that impacts their emotional states. The theory seeks to explain how people interpret messages and respond to them based on their attitudes toward the topic under discussion (Abdulazeez et al., 2023). The social judgment theory (SJT) further states that the recipient's ego involvement and cognitive map determine whether a message is accepted or rejected (Nwaoboli, 2022). In this sense, people can store information about themselves and their attitudes in three distinct cognitive compartments, according to the SJT. All of the acceptance, rejection, and non-committal latitudes are represented in this category. The theory's applicability to this study is based on the differing views that voters have about the use of hate speech in the 2023 Presidential Election and its result. Given the above, this hypothesis is relevant to the research since it says that viewers and voters won't just accept hate speech and act on it without considering their processing latitude. That is, they are allowed time to analyze hate speech messages before acting upon them.

### **3.2. Study Design**

The research utilized quantitative survey design. A quantitative survey is a method used to gather information from a broad population to identify pertinent relationships between and among variables. It is a kind of empirical study that gathers information using a questionnaire with the

aim of thoroughly describing occurrences collection using well-crafted questions targeted at the sample size (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo & Okpanachi, 2017; Nwaoboli, 2023; Asemah, NkwamUwaoma & Sabo, 2023). The rationale behind its adoption is due to its ability to provide a snapshot of trends or opinions within the study population, allowing researchers to generalize findings and make informed decisions. Additionally, the study design can be used to test hypotheses, track changes over time, or serve as the foundation for more in-depth studies. As a result, **survey research design** remains a cornerstone of this research method.

### **3.3. Population of the Study**

Participants in the elections in the six geopolitical zones who are INEC-registered voters make up the study's population. According to INEC's 2023 data, there are 22,255,562 million registered voters in the North West; 15,363,731 million in the North Central; 14,440, 714 million in the South-South; 10,907,606 million in the South East; 12,542, 429 in the North East; and 17,958,966 million in the South West. These figures add up to a total of 93,469,008 million registered voters (Adekunle, 2023). Population decisions are influenced by the knowledge that their views and opinions would be used to examine the impact of political hate speech on voters' selection of candidates in the run-up to and following Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Thus, the most appropriate respondent(s) to obtain responses from questionnaires administered in this study are those who are registered to vote in the presidential election of 2023.

### **3.4. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

Nigerian citizens who are registered to vote in the six geopolitical zones that make up the country's voter pool compose the study's sample and the sample size was drawn from the sample size statistical formula. The Taro Yamane formula for estimating the sample size of the population was used to determine this sample size. Through the formula (Yamane, 1973), the sample size was determined as follows:  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$  where;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

n= Sample Size

N= Population ((93, 469,008)

e =margin of error (0.05)

l= constant variable. Substituting the formula and allowing 5% error level, we have the following:

$$n = \frac{93,469,008}{1 + 93,469,006 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{93,469,008}{1 + 93,469,008 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = 93,469,008$$

$$\frac{1 + 233,672.51}{233,673.51}$$

$$n = \frac{93,469,008}{233,673.51}$$

$$n = 399.99$$

$$\approx = 400$$

The computed value of 399.99 was rounded to 400, which served as the sample size for the research endeavour. At this point, the study adopted purposive sampling in selecting 12 states from the 6 geopolitical zones in Nigeria. This implied that two states were selected from each geopolitical zone. The two states selected were based on two major characteristics, which include the accessibility and the level of development of the state: the accessibility of the state focused on the security and road network of the state; for the level of development, the study considered the political commitment and the socio-economic relevance of the state. The scoring for the selection was based on the low and high points of each state. Below is the tabular representation of the selected states.

**Table 1: Selected states and Local Governments for the Study’s Sample Size**

<b>Geo-Political Zones</b>	<b>Selected States</b>	<b>Characteristics of the state</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Selected Local Government Area</b>	<b>Area</b>
North West	Kaduna	Accessibility & Socio-economic relevance	Developed	Kaduna North	Urban
				Sanga	Rural
	Kebbi	Accessibility and security	Less Developed	Birnin Kebbi	Urban
				Fakai	Rural
North East	Bauchi	Accessibility & Socio-economic relevance	Developed	Bauchi	Urban
				Shira	Rural
	Gombe	Accessibility and Security	Less Developed	Gombe	Urban
				Kwami	Rural
North Central	Plateau	Accessibility & Socio-economic relevance	Developed	Jos South	Urban
				Kanke	Rural
	Benue			Makurdi	Urban

		Accessibility and Security	Less Developed	Ogbadibo	Rural
South East	Enugu	Accessibility & Socio-economic relevance	Developed	Enugu North	Urban
				Isi Uzo	Rural
	Ebonyi	Accessibility and Security	Less Developed	Abakaliki	Urban
				Izzi	Rural
South South	Rivers	Accessibility & Socio-economic relevance	Developed	Port Harcourt	Urban
				Etche	Rural
	Delta	Accessibility and Security	Less Developed	Asaba	Urban
				Patani	Rural
South West	Lagos	Accessibility & Socio-economic relevance	Developed	Ikeja	Urban
				Ifako-Ijaiye	Semi-Urban
	Osun	Accessibility and Security	Less Developed	Osogbo	Urban
				Egbedore	Rural

**Researchers Compilation (2023)**

The sample size by Geo-Political Zones was further determined by percentage calculation of the valid registered voters by zones. The formula for percentage distribution and proportional distribution are stated as follows:

Percentage distribution for the sample size by Geo-political zones

$$\frac{\text{Part}}{\text{Whole}} \times 100\%$$

Percentage proportional distribution for the sample size

$$P = \frac{N}{1} \times \frac{n\%}{N\%}$$

**Table 2: The tabular representation of the calculation for proportional distribution**

<b>Geo-Political Zones</b>	<b>Registered Voters by Zone</b>	<b>Calculated Percentage</b>	<b>Proportional distribution by Zone</b>	<b>Selected States</b>	<b>Distribution by states</b>
North West	22,255,562	23.8%	95	Kaduna	48
				Kebbi	47
North East	12,542,429	13.4%	53	Bauchi	27
				Gombe	26
North Central	15,363,731	16.4%	66	Plateau	33
				Benue	33
South East	10,907,606	11.7%	47	Enugu	24
				Ebonyi	23
South South	14,440,714	15.5%	62	Rivers	31
				Delta	31
South West	17,958,966	19.2%	77	Lagos	39
				Osun	38
Total	93,469,008	100%	400		400

### **Researchers Compilation (2023)**

Based on the proportional percentage representation, the study ensued that selected states under the geo-political zones are fairly represented. To achieve this, the study adopted purposive sampling in the selection of the respondents who were found to be very conversant with the subject matter and to reflect the characteristics and the category of the states. The guideline for the distribution of the questionnaire was drawn from tables 1 and 2.

### **3.5. Sources of Data and Description of Research Instruments**

Both primary and secondary sources were used as data sources. Using questionnaires, the researchers collected this data in the field from a variety of respondents chosen from each geopolitical zone. To further support and validate data collection from the field, secondary data was gathered from written resources like books, reports, and journals from reputable sources. However, descriptive tools must be used in the research to conclude the study's relationships. The study's observations and descriptions were brought to a close with the help of the descriptive approach, which also made it possible for the conclusions and suggestions to be grounded in the facts examined.

### **3.6. Measurement of Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments**

The researchers used an expert judgment method to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. After creating the questionnaires, the researcher contacted subject-matter experts to review and make sure the instruments were specific, relevant, and clear. Additionally, a pre-test

was conducted to test and improve the validity and reliability of the instrument (Yusoff, 2019). After the validation, 25 respondents were randomly selected from registered voters in Enugu Metropolis for a pilot study. The collated responses were subjected to trial testing to establish the degree of internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire through the application of the Cronbach coefficient Alpha formula. The Cronbach Alpha recorded an overall score of 0.84. The overall Cronbach Alpha of 0.84 indicated that the instrument is reliable.

### **3.7. Data Collection**

The research adopted on-the-spot mode in the distribution of the questionnaire. The respondents were given a letter that explained the nature of research being conducted and what they were expected to do. The researchers visited the designated cities in each State for the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaire. To ensure a speedy exercise, 10 research assistants who are registered voters across the six geo-political zones assist in the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaire. The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot, well-checked for their completeness, and subjected to data analysis.

### **3.8. Ethical Ramification/Consideration**

Strict confidentiality was adhered to in the use of information provided by the respondents. Beyond this, there were no fundamental ethical issues involved in the collection of data, given the nature of the information solicited from the respondents.

### **3.9. Limitations**

There are several limitations to a study on the influence of Political Hate Speech on Voters' choices. One of the major limitations of this study was the ability to single out the direct influence of Hate Speech on Electoral Choice, given that other factors such as party allegiance, candidates' credibility, economic condition and ethnic grouping could also influence voters' choices in an election. Again, in Nigerian politics, people pay more attention to the information that is either promoting or demoting them, especially if any of the political candidates is from their ethnic group or religious group. Separating their feelings from their ethnic bias was a difficult task. Other limitations to the study are the influence of self-reporting bias. Some of the respondents had a hard time responding to the survey instrument. Some of the respondents appear to have had a preconceived response because the election has been conducted, and they felt that their opinion would never change or amount to anything meaningful. Some of the respondents declined after responding to 2 or 3 questions. It made the survey laborious. Finally, the research had funding limitations. The research was carried out under a very tight budget; based on this, few researchers were engaged, and it took a longer time to cover the sample size.

### **3.10. Variables**

This research hypothesizes that the increasing prevalence of political hate speech in political campaigns, particularly in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria has deliberately affects voters' behaviour and decision-making processes. This is because; such conduct incited political volatility and violence, thereby amplifying apprehensions regarding its ramifications on electoral preferences. This makes political hate speech an independent variable since its influence on voters'

choice is what is being tested in this research. That also leaves us with multiple dependent variables, which include voters voting against a party in the 2023 Presidential Election because an opposition candidate attacked a candidate's personality and the political parties' use of derogatory campaigning influencing voters' choice of candidates for the 2023 Presidential Election.

#### **4. Data Presentation and Analysis**

The analysis was predicated on the perspectives of the respondents derived from the questionnaire that was disseminated across the forty-eight (48) designated cities within the six (6) geopolitical zones of Nigeria. An aggregate of 400 copies of the questionnaire was distributed to the selected sample population. From the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 392 were returned with complete and accurate responses, while eight were deemed invalid due to either incomplete answers or erroneous information. Nevertheless, the 392 completed questionnaires returned from the 400 distributed represent a response rate of 98.00%, which is considered highly satisfactory. To facilitate clarity and enhance comprehension, the quantitative method of data analysis was adopted using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version (23) to elucidate the data through tables, frequency and percentage distributions, while a criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for the decision rule. The details of the results are presented below:

**Table 3: Distribution of the Respondents by Geopolitical Zone (N=392)**

<b>Geopolitical zones</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
North West	93	23.7
North East	52	13.3
North Central	64	16.3
South East	47	12.0
South South	60	15.3
South West	76	19.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field work 2023**

The table above shows the distribution of the respondents across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The result as shown in the above table indicates that out of a total of 392 respondents used for the study, 23.7% were from North West, 13.3% were from North East, 16.3% from North Central, 12.0% were from South East, 15.3% from South South, while 19.4% were from South West. This indicates that the questionnaires were evenly distributed. On this note, it is important to state that the questionnaires were allocated to each geopolitical zones based on the number of registered voters they have. The information retrieved from the respondents across the 48 selected cities from the six geopolitical zones also represents the gender they belong to, as exemplified in the table below.

**Table 4: Gender of Respondents (N = 392)**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	231	59%
Female	161	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field work, 2023**

According to the table, 41% of respondents are women and 59% of respondents are men. The difference between men and women is not that great.

**Table 5: Distribution of the Respondents by Age (N=392)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
18-23	48	12.2
24-29	59	15.1
30-35	59	15.1
36-41	69	17.6
42-47	65	16.6
48-53	51	13.0
54-59	28	7.1
60 and above	13	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Fieldwork 2023**

The data presented in Table 5 elucidates the age demographics of the respondents. The findings suggest that among the 392 participants, 17.6% were within the age range of 36 to 41 years, 16.6% were aged 42 to 47 years, and 15.1% were between 24 and 29 years. In a similar vein, 15.1% of the respondents fell within the 30 to 35-year age bracket, 13.0% were aged 48 to 53 years, and 12.2% were categorized as being between 18 and 23 years. Additionally, 7.1% of the respondents were aged 54 to 59 years, while 3.3% were 60 years and older. This analysis highlights that the age group of respondents between 36 and 41 years exhibited the highest frequency.

**Table 6: Marital Status of Respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	129	32.9%
Married	227	57.9%
Divorced	36	9.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Field work, 2023**

In accordance with the information in table 6, 57.9% of respondents are married, 32.9% are, single and just 9.2% of all respondents had experienced a divorce. According to the data, the majority of responders are married people, followed by singles.

**Table 7: Respondents' Exposure to Hate Speech during 2023 Presidential Election**

<b>Respondent's Exposure to Hate speech</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Strongly agree	195	49.7	49.7	49.7
Agree	47	12.0	12.0	61.7
Undecided	46	11.7	11.7	73.4
Disagree	43	11	11.0	84.4
Strongly disagree	61	15.6	15.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Source: Field work, 2023**

Table 7 sampled the opinion of the respondents on exposure to hate speech during the 2023 Presidential Election, and the available information revealed that the respondents were exposed to hate speech during the 2023 Presidential Election. This inference was drawn from the different shades of opinion recorded. The table revealed that 49.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that during the election, they were exposed to hate speeches, similarly, 12.0% of the sampled population decided that they were exposed to hate speech within the period under study. This brought the percentage of those who indicated that they were exposed to hate speech during the 2023 presidential election; given the result, the study held that the majority of the electorates were exposed to hate speech during the 2023 presidential election. On the other hand, 15.6% strongly disagreed, and 11.0% disagreed, while 11.7% were adjudged to be indifferent.

**Table 8: Respondents' Extent of Exposure to Hate Speech during the 2023 Presidential Election**

<b>Respondent's Extent of Exposure to Hate Speech</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Very low	54	13.8	13.8	13.8
Undecided	68	17.3	17.3	31.1
To an extent	63	16.1	16.1	47.2
To a great extent	207	52.8	52.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Source: Field work, 2023**

The data presented in the aforementioned table elucidate the degree to which respondents encountered hate speech during the 2023 Presidential Election. For example, the information contained within the table indicates that 52.8% experienced hate speech to a great extent.

Additionally, 17.3% remained ambivalent, 16.1% reported a moderate level of exposure, whereas 13.8% indicated minimal exposure. Consequently, hate speech emerged as a predominant strategy in the political campaign during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that a significant majority of the respondents provided responses consistent with this assertion.

**Table 9: Channel of Exposure to Hate Speeches during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria**

<b>Channel of Exposure to Hate Speeches</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Radio	61	15.6	15.6	15.5
Television	52	13.3	13.3	28.9
Newspaper	68	17.3	17.3	46.2
Magazine	55	14.0	14.0	60.2
Social media	56	14.3	14.3	74.5
All of the Above	100	25.5	25.5	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Source: Field work, 2023**

The data presented in the preceding table indicate that the participants encountered hate speech via various mediums, as indicated by 25.5%.

**Table 10 Responses if Political Hate Speeches influenced Voter’s choice during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria – (N = 392)**

<b>Influence</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>UND</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
The employment of hate speech by a political aspirant prompted a transition in my support from one candidate to an alternative.	105 (26.8%)	157 (40.0%)	25 (6.4%)	53 (13.5%)	52 (13.3%)
The utilization of derogatory discourse by a political candidate significantly impacted my decision-making process regarding whom to support in the 2023 Presidential Election.	140 (35.7%)	139 (35.5%)	18 (4.6%)	46 (11.7%)	49 (12.5%)
During the 2023 Presidential Election, political parties' use of hate speech messaging affected	146 (37.2%)	117 (29.8%)	20 (5.1%)	52 (13.3%)	57 (14.6%)

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ISSN: 0009-7039

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my decision to support a particular candidate.

Political parties' use of derogatory campaigning	171 (43.6%)	101 (25.8%)	22 (5.6%)	43 (11.0%)	55 (14.0%)
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influenced my choice of candidates for the 2023 Presidential Election.

I voted against the party in the 2023 Presidential Election because an opposition candidate attacked a candidate's personality.	178 (45.5%)	65 (16.6%)	5 (1.3%)	98 (25.0%)	46 (11.7%)
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Where SD = Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, UND= Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Source: Field work, 2023

Table 10 sampled the opinion of the respondents on the impact of political hate Speeches on their choice during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria. The table revealed that political hate speech did not influence their choice of candidate. From the table it could be seen that majority of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree respectively on the followings: the employment of hate speech by a political aspirant prompted a transition in my support from one candidate to an alternative; the utilization of derogatory discourse by a political candidate significantly impacted my decision-making process regarding whom to support in the 2023 Presidential Election; during the 2023 Presidential Election, political parties' use of hate speech messaging affected my decision to support a particular candidate; Political parties' use of derogatory campaigning influenced my choice of candidates for the 2023 Presidential Election and I voted against the party in the 2023 Presidential Election because an opposition candidate attacked a candidate's personality, while minority strongly agree and agree on the above parameters. This implied that Political Hate Speeches did not influence voters' choices during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria. Table 11 below further strengthened the above position.

**Table 11: Mean Response on Political Hate Speeches influenced Voter's choice during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria – (N = 392)**

Influence	Range	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
The employment of hate speech by a political aspirant prompted a transition in my support from one candidate to an alternative.	4.00	1.87	0.98	SD
The utilization of derogatory discourse by a political candidate significantly impacted my decision-making process regarding whom to support in the 2023 Presidential Election.	4.00	1.70	0.83	SD
During the 2023 Presidential Election, political parties' use of hate speech messaging affected my decision to support a particular candidate.	4.00	1.81	0.95	SD
Political parties' use of derogatory campaigning influenced my choice of candidates for the 2023 Presidential Election.	4.00	2.04	1.06	D
I voted against the party in the 2023 Presidential Election because an opposition candidate attacked a candidate's personality.	4.00	2.00	1.00	D
Cumulated Average	4.00	1.88	0.97	D

Where SD = Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, UND= Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree (Criterion Mean = 2.90)

Table 11 above shows the mean scores of the respondents on five parameter questions, which cumulated into the influence of political hate speech on voters' choices during the 2023 Presidential election. The table revealed that the mean scores from the responses are low, and the cumulative average of the mean scores is 1.88, which is adjudged to be less than the criterion mean of 2.90. This further revealed that the respondents' opinion is on the negative perceptions. Given the foregoing, the study maintained that Political Hate Speeches did not influence voters' choices during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria.

#### 4.1. Data Summaries

A succinct general interpretation was included in each variable data summary to bolster and emphasize comprehension of the study's findings and how it had achieved its goals. The deontological and consequential gaps—the shortcomings and obstacles that require definitive

recommendations—were clarified, and a more comprehensive comprehension of the research findings was provided by the inference of data analysis results.

### **5. Results/Discussion of Findings**

The findings demonstrated that hate speech was a prominent strategy employed by political players in the run-up to the 2023 presidential election. Table 7, for example, showed that 49.7% of participants strongly felt that they were subjected to hate speech throughout the election. Table 8 data, which indicated that 207 respondents, or 52.8 percent, had been exposed to hate speech to a significant degree, provided additional evidence for this. *This is in line with the results of Ajani et al.'s (2021) investigation of how hate speech messages affected voters' 2019 candidate selection in Kwara State, Nigeria.* They found that the use of hate speech reduced the importance of political candidates with 72% of voters in a particular election. According to the aforementioned, concerns that directly impacted voters were minimized during the 2023 election, and campaigns centred solely on criticizing other candidates. Trivializing the campaign will undoubtedly hinder the public's ability to acquire a comprehensive opinion on the political candidates and their agendas.

The results also demonstrated the widespread usage of hate speech in all media (social and conventional media). Table 9, for example, demonstrates that a sizable proportion of respondents (25.5%) strongly agreed that hate speech dominated the media campaigns (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and social media). Attacks against opponents' religions, tribes, personalities, and affinities were made through these means. This demonstrates how concerns about development are downplayed while politics of slander, insult, and filth are accepted during electioneering. This is in line with research by Inobemhe et al. (2021) and Asemah, Nwaoboli & Nwoko (2022), which found that hate speech can jeopardize national security and unity. Additionally, it agrees with Ezeibe's (2015) *analysis of hate speech and electoral violence in Nigeria. He examines how hate speech affects violence in Nigeria before, during, and after elections.* He notes that hate speech has been elevated to the status of political campaign strategy in Nigeria, where political leaders ignore its offensive tendencies as long as it helps them seize and hold political power. This implies that hate speech in all its manifestations is the wicked spawn of a wicked parent who, if not appropriately and swiftly suppressed, can destroy the nation.

Above all, the results also showed that the people already decided who they would support before electioneering ever began, therefore hate speeches had little or no impact on how they cast their votes. This is due to the statistics in Tables 10 and 11, which showed that the majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that hate speech affected the decisions made by voters in Nigeria during the 2023 presidential election. This demonstrates that hate speech employed in the election only served to solidify preexisting opinions among voters. This bolsters the position of Abdulazeez, Nasamu, and Asemah (2023) who *examined how hate speech affected the candidates that the Edo electorate chose to support in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election.* They examined the perceptions of Edo State voters on the influence of hate speech on the results of the 2023 presidential contest. They note that the main political parties' 2023 election campaigns essentially

disregarded the laws against hate speech. Consequently, in the fight against development difficulties that directly affect the general public, prejudices based on race, religion, culture, and morality were made clear. This also bolsters the position of the Social Judgment Theory, which serves as the study's foundation. The idea states that judgmental ability affects how audiences react to persuasive communication. Since communications that contradict their preexisting beliefs are rejected and only those that support their preexisting attitudes are accepted, they first evaluated and analyzed messages as soon as they were received.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study's findings support the notion that politicians used hate speech in a major way when campaigning in 2023. Nevertheless, voters' choices of presidential candidates were not affected or decided by political hate speech, even if it was widely used. This suggests that the electorate's choice was influenced or moulded by causes other than hate speech, which is why the following suggestions are made.

## **7. Recommendations**

1. The section of the election legislation barring hate speech during political rallies or campaigns should be strictly enforced, to deter politicians from engaging in political hate speech while campaigning.
2. Individuals and groups that violate the laws governing public speech and political campaigns should be identified and prosecuted by INEC and other civil society organizations, such as the Nigerian Human Rights Commission.
3. The Nigerian government and civil society organizations ought to keep a close eye on the media, particularly on native language radio stations that incite hatred and sway voters' decisions by airing hate speech.
4. Above all, Nigerian politicians must to fully embrace social media for next election campaigns, even in spite of its evident drawbacks (hate speech, inaccurate information, and name-calling, to mention a few).

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding

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