



PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF NIGERIAN HATE SPEECH BILL: A STUDY OF RESIDENTS IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian lawmakers passed a bill on hate speech in the readings of the House which has received more criticism from the people. Most Nigerians believe that such bill if made a law can be deadly and against the citizens' right in Nigeria's democratic system. This study tried knowing the publics' thought on the Nigerian hate speech bill. The study was anchored on perception theory. The study arrived at a population of 5,781,372 comprising of the five states of Southeastern, Nigeria namely: Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi States. The study employed the survey research design and used Taro Yamane to arrive at a sample size of 400. The purposive sampling technique was employed to arrive at a sampling frame. The research instrument used for the study was the questionnaire instrument. Findings got from the study revealed the respondents think that the hate speech bill is: autocratic and against Nigerians fundamental human right to freedom of expression; was passed by Nigerian politicians to satisfy their hidden political ambition (ulterior motive) more than the intended general good; and that the punitive measures that came with the bill is deadly. The researchers concluded that most Nigerians are not favourably disposed to the hate speech bill.

Keywords: Public, Perception, Nigerian Law makers, Bill, Hate Speech.

Introduction

Man has been known since primordial epoch to instinctively display a desire to express himself in matters that concern his general welfare and the development of the society he finds himself. Layefa and Johnson (2016) states that as societies develop, the inner most desire of man has more often been met with repressive tendencies in form of draconian laws, banishment, physical torture, etc. meted out by the ruling government. Man, nevertheless has remained dauntless in the quest for free expression of thoughts.

In the world, it has been noted that most countries has adopted the democratic rule in its countries affair. Nigerian is not left out, as Nigeria practices democracy. It is popularly seen and known as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Ogah and Ogeyni (2014), conceptualized democracy as an ideology which they explained as the philosophy of governance which sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, rule of law, the right to property, the free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. Democracy is that system of politics in which sovereignty is vested on the people rather than in a small clique or an oligarchy, where the rule of law, majority rule and constitutionalism are basic guiding principles of governance. Ramaswamy (2007) posited in this context that democracy means the rule by the people as contrasted with the rule by one person or a group. He went further to say that it is the people who are both rulers and rule unlike other systems like monarchy, dictatorship or oligarchy where a distinction between the ruler and the ruled exists.

One of the cardinal points of a true democracy is freedom. The ability to be free is most expressed in one's capacity to express himself freely without any physical or psychological threats (by the government or otherwise). The limits of the freedom of expression can be said to have become elastic. This could be attributed to globalization which has physically removed all borders and is principally engineered by the internet. The internet has transformed the freedom of speech and expression which was previously limited to the confines of television, radio and print media etc. (Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi & Okorie, 2017). Today we have the social media which permits individuals or groups to sit in the comfort of their bedrooms or offices and with a click on the mouse or a tap on a screen express themselves freely to millions of other users who are not restricted by the physically defined borders and boundaries of countries or regions (Joel, 2013).

Hate speech in itself is wrong and should not be supported by anybody, as everybody knows that speech's like that threatens the country's unity, peace and efforts of the government in nation building. Hate speeches similarly widens the social gap between Nigerians. However, its regulation should be traded with caution, the extremely punitive capital punishments proposed in its bill should be reviewed and the wordings of the bill should be redrafted to avoid falling into a slippery slope with precarious consequences. Legislators should engage the services of experienced and knowledgeable draftsmen or lawyers in drafting such sensitive laws because at the bottom of it all, the aim is to build a unified and peaceful Nigeria (Amnesty, 2019).

The Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill believes that the current hate speech bill has remained one of the most controversial bills to be passed by the Legislative arm of government in Nigeria. This bill, which is still in its reading stage, has received tons of criticisms and agitations by various groups and stakeholders who are irritated by the bill. These individuals who constitute the masses of the country Nigeria are clamouring for a review of the

punishments prescribed in the bill as well as for the discountenance of the bill in its entirety (Mondaq, 2020).

People perceive that this bill is an attempt by the government to place limitations on the freedom of expression of its citizens, a fundamental human right laid down in the country's constitution for its citizens, while some others see the bill as that which not only goes against morality but is a legalized camouflage by the political leaders who desire to further their personalized objectives. The law makers wanted to use this bill to objectively promote national unity and integration by outlawing unfair discrimination, hate speeches and the establishment of an Independent National Commission for the prohibition of hate speeches and connected matters (Eke, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

In every country bills are passed into law by its legislators, this is synonymous to every country. Every country's mode of the country's mode of rulership is peculiar to them. Nigeria is known to be a democratic nation and as such no bills that should be passed by its legislators should infringe on its citizen's fundamental rights. Nigerian law makers just passed a bill on hate speech. From the perspective at which this bill stands on and its punitive measures, it all points that the current government of the day wants to use this particular bill to set right some records. This bill sets out its punitive measures to be a huge fine and in other cases dead of the defaulters who are believed to be enemies of the government. For a country which claims to be democratic, the citizens in the country should have a say on what they feel is happening or is going wrong and not be sanctioned by the government of the day for speaking out when their speech is labeled with hate intentions. From how this bill was stipulated, it is certain that almost all Nigerians at one point or another will default, yet the government believes that the citizens are democratically free to voice out their grievances and opinions. Hate speech according to this bill was not even clearly defined, meaning that it is only the government that can state which of the peoples' speech has hate intent in it. Those who would even try to voice their complains to all who cares to listen will now through this bill be afraid to say what they think is going on right and those who are responsible for the ones that are going wrong already.

The punitive sanction for this hate speech bill is too strong, harsh and detrimental to Nigerians who it is meant for, these are main reasons why most Nigerians are headstrong against this bill. It is no news that in Nigeria the laws' are made for the simple and not for the wealthy nor politicians who although they default on a matter are not punished as stated in the law. The publics in Nigeria will always be against most bills passed into law as they are the ones who suffer for it and are punished in any situation should they mistakenly go against these laws. The Nigerian publics are strongly against laws like this. This law if its real motive is wrong the whole country will have to suffer for allowing it to be made a law. It is because of this that the researcher through this study tried ascertaining the publics' exposure level and perception on the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill and how it can be adjusted in accordance with their fundamental human right.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for this study:

1. What is the public's awareness level on the Nigerian hate speech bill?
2. What is the publics knowledge level on what the hate speech bill entails?
3. How do the publics perceive this bill on hate speech?

Overview of Hate Speech

The nature and characteristics of hate speech is still very much uncertain. Hate speech is considered as any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display, which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action (Alakali, Faga & Mbursa, 2017). UN on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013) notes that hate speech includes:

- a. All dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means
- b. Incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin;
- c. Threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above.
- d. Expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; and
- e. Participation in organizations and activities, which promote and incite racial discrimination.

Hate speech categorically refers to all forms of communications (whether verbal, written, symbolic) that insults a race, ethnic and political group, whether by suggesting that they are inferior in some respect or by indicating that they are despised or not welcome for any other reasons. On the other hand, Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002) refer to hate speech as war waged on others by means of words. This understanding of hate speech is particularly true especially when in social media sites and networks.

According to Gagliardone, Danit, Thiago and Gabriela (2015) online hate speech is not essentially different from similar expressions found offline; however, there are some specific characteristics as well as challenges unique to online content and its regulation. They summarized these characteristics as permanence, itinerant, anonymity or pseudonym and transnationality. On permanence, hate speech can remain online for long periods of time and in different formats across different platforms, and can be repeatedly linked. Notwithstanding, online hate speech content may particularly be itinerant, which means that even when it is removed from one platform it may find expression elsewhere, possibly on the same platform under a different name or on different online spaces. The itinerant nature of hate speech also means that poorly formulated thoughts that would not have found public expression and support in the past may now arrive on spaces where they can be visible to large audiences (Alakali, Faga & Mbursa, 2017).

A Review of the Bill

Punch Newspaper (2019) and NASSNIG (2020) stated that the bill was broke down into four parts and further divided into fifty-five provisions.

-) Part I provides for preliminary aspects of the Bill like the short title and interpretation of words and phrases adopted by the drafters;
-) Part II makes provision for the types of discrimination to which the Bill applies.
-) Part III makes provision for the establishment of an Independent National Commission for the prohibition of hate speeches.
-) Part IV provides for enforcement matters. We will examine below, some of the provisions in the Bill which are relevant to note.

-) **Ethnic Discrimination:** The Bill makes provision that if a person should be found discriminating against another Nigerian citizen by placing him at a disadvantageous position compared to how he treats others from his own ethnic group or if he extends a criteria to such person which he applies equally to persons of a different race or ethnic origin, he would be in breach of this provision and hence be found liable. The inclusion of this provision appears to be an attempt by the government to address the perennial challenges of tribalism and ethnic favouritism in Nigeria.
-) **Hate Speech:** S.4 of the Bill prohibits the use, production, publishing, distribution, presentation, or direction of the performance of any visual or written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting or involves the use of such words in order to stir up ethnic hatred or from which ethnic hatred is likely to be stirred up against such person from an ethnic group in Nigeria. It prescribes a punishment of life imprisonment for any person found liable of committing this offence and a penalty of death by hanging where such act causes any loss of life.

This implies that if a person is found guilty of committing any of the above stated offences; such person could be sentenced to life imprisonment upon conviction or death by hanging if his actions results in the death of another person. The punitive sanctions prescribed appears to be rather harsh and extreme, taking cognizance of the current civil reactive unrest in Nigeria. In some other jurisdictions like the United States, there are no regulations on Hate Speeches, not to mention a regulation with such an extreme penalty in Nigeria (Abdulrahman, 2019).

Also, the Cybercrimes Act made similar provisions criminalizing some racist and xenophobic related offences which are contained in the Hate Speech Bill but the penalties prescribed are imprisonment for a term not more than 5 years or a fine of N10 million or both, which are also lesser punishments as opposed to the capital punishment stipulated in the Bill (Deutsche Welle News, 2020).

-) **Harassment on the basis of ethnicity:** S.5 of the Bill makes provision for persons who subject another citizen to harassment on the basis of ethnicity, it buttresses on the circumstances when the offence will be said to have been committed. For instance, if a person unjustifiably engages in a conduct with the intention of violating the dignity of another citizen or if the person creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, or offensive environment for another citizen, such person will be found liable under this provision of the Bill. Furthermore, the Bill prescribes a punishment of imprisonment for a term not less than 5 years, or a fine of not less than N10 million or both, for a person found liable of the offence.
-) **Ethnic or Racial Contempt:** The offence of ethnic or racial contempt will be said to have been committed, if a person intentionally utters inciting words to elicit contempt, hatred, hostility, violence or discrimination against any person, group or community on the basis of ethnicity or race. A term of imprisonment for not less than 5 years, or a fine of not less than N10 million or both, is prescribed for a person found liable of employing inciting words or utterances intended to elicit ethnic or racial contempt.
-) **Discrimination by way of victimization:** This provision prohibits discrimination in the form of victimization of another citizen, especially if a person is found doing any act calculated to be injurious to the wellbeing and esteem of another person by treating such other person less favourably than he would likely treat other persons because the person subjected to the victimization has lodged or intends to lodge a complaint under the Bill or has given or intends to give information in connection with actions brought against another person under the Bill. A second aspect of the provision prohibits the making of false statements or the giving of

false or misleading information to the Commission or any person acting on the delegated authority of the Commission. It prescribes a penalty of a fine of N2 million or imprisonment for a term not less than 12 months or both for anyone found guilty of the aforementioned offences.

-) **Offences by body of persons:** The Bill did not exclude corporate entities and firms from liability. It prescribes that in the event that a corporate body commits any of the above stated offences and is found liable under the Bill, every director, trustee and officer of that corporate body will be deemed guilty of the offence. This implies that the veil of incorporation of the corporate entity will be removed in order to proceed against the alter egos of the corporate body. The provision also extends to firms, and in such instance, every partner of the firm will also be deemed guilty of the offence.
-) **Establishment of the Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches:** The Bill makes provision for the establishment of an Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches ("the Commission"). The Commission would, amongst other functions, be responsible for promoting peaceful co-existence amongst peoples of all ethnic groups by ensuring the elimination of all forms of hate speeches against any person or ethnic group; planning, supervising, co-coordinating and promoting educational and training programs to create public awareness. The Commission will also be responsible for discouraging persons, institutions, political parties and associations from advocating or promoting discrimination or discriminatory practices through the use of hate speeches; investigating complaints of ethnic or racial discrimination and making recommendations to the Attorney General, the Human Rights Commission or any other relevant authority on the remedial measures to be taken where such complaints are valid.

Furthermore, the Bill states the powers of the commission. It first gives the commission broad powers necessary in undertaking its objectives and other specific powers such as, the power to publish the names of persons or institutions engaged in the furtherance of ethnic discrimination or whose words or conduct would likely undermine good ethnic relations; power to join any local or international organization or body that it considers expedient in carrying out its objective.

Empirical Review

A study done by Esimokha, Bobmanuel, and Asaolu, (2019) which tired examining the perception of Nigerians on the Hate Speech Bill using Akungba-Okoko Residents, Ondo State). Their findings revealed that majority of the respondents (87.2%) were aware of the Hate speech Bill and majority of them were aware of the bill not just of recent. Finding out about the relevance of the bill in the present democratic dispensation, most of the respondents said the bill is irrelevant. In fact, 42.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that it is irrelevant. Describing the bill, 52.1% of the respondents said the it was a bad bill which the government tends to benefit more from if passed into law, and that the bill would not be beneficial to Nigeria as a nation. The respondents justify this claim as 73.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that the freedom of expression would be tampered with if such bill is passed into law. Furthermore, the average respondents said the press would be gag if the bill becomes a law in Nigeria. They said the press would not have the freedom to criticize the government while others said the press would not be able to challenge government policies. The average respondents also believed that the minority would be silenced if such bill becomes law in Nigeria.

A similar study done by *Guardian* (2020) features stated jurisprudentially that the law is not static but is dynamic and evolving with society to meet with social needs. In Nigeria, most of our laws are obsolete, and more so, there are social challenges that are new to us as a country that need to be regulated by laws. As such, it is proper, lawful and constitutional for the National Assembly to make laws regulating social media in Nigeria provided it is in line with the demands of the constitution; the ground norm and the supreme law of the land, which binds all authorities, and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria and which gives validity to every other law in force in Nigeria. Emphatically speaking, any law passed by the National Assembly which is inconsistent with the Nigerian constitution shall be to the extent of such inconsistency null and void. A lot of Nigerians are apprehensive that such law is intended to be used to gag free speech by a government that is perceived as being highly intolerant of dissenting views.

However, Adegboruwa (2019) did another study which tried pointing out that this hate speech bill if passed could transform Nigeria into haven for sycophants. According to him, the senate working on a bill that prescribes the death sentence for anyone who makes a hate speech that causes the death of another. What do you think will be the effect of the bill, if passed into law? That bill is dead on arrival. It will never see the light of day because it is unconstitutional. Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for all Nigerians to impart information and ideas without restriction and interference. That is the language of the constitution. Now, we have enough laws to deal with hate speech or fake news. Section 24 of the Cyber Crime Act is very clear and unambiguous on how fake news and hate speech can be dealt with. The Criminal Procedure Act and the Criminal Procedure Code are replete with sections dealing with unfounded rumours. The consequence of this bill for us, as a nation, is that there seems to be a hidden agenda.

Coincidentally, Amnesty (2019) did a write-up stating that the hate speech bill and social media are dangerous attacks on freedom of expression. According to Amnesty (2019), it urged Nigerians authorities to drop these bills, which are open to vague and broad interpretations and impose incredibly harsh punishments simply for criticizing the authorities”. It stressed that the, “Social media is one of the last remaining places where Nigerians can express their opinions freely.

Another study was done by Adibe (2018) criticizing the Hate Speech Bill and its Critics. According to him, several organizations such as the Ijaw Youth Council, the International Press Centre, and the Punch newspaper as well as eminent Nigerians such as Senator Shehu Sani have condemned the bill on several grounds: Problem of definition; and that it is an Attack on free speech.

Similarly, Nwachukwu and Ihebuzor (2018) in their book on hate speech stressed that participatory democratic culture is founded on the indelible rights of citizens to freely express their opinions and to keep tabs on governance. But conversation spaces have long expanded from physical spheres like newspaper stands, beer parlors and/or bukas to digitally mediated online public spaces. Nigeria is the most active African country as relating to political conversations on Twitter, followed by South Africa, Ethiopia, Burundi and Egypt. However, Nigeria’s vibrant digital sphere is fraught with vile speech. Scholars of communication and sociology are asking questions and querying this growing incidence of hate speech on social media.

Olanrewaju, Ojeka, Oweye and Ojeka-John (2019) study on Nigerians perception on the hate speech revealed that the meaning of hate speech and fake news is well defined among Nigerians, as they perceived them to be offensive in Nigeria's volatile sociopolitical environment. It was, however, recommended that appropriate laws should be consciously promulgated and enforced against hate

speech and fake news because of its volatile nature of aggravating ethno-religious crisis in the quest for nation building in Nigeria's social environment.

However, Mrabure (2016) has opined the need to counteract hate speech and the right to freedom of expression in selected jurisdictions. According to him Hate speech does exist and freedom of expression may sometimes be curtailed whenever there is an occurrence of the uttering of hate speech whether verbally or in print that might endanger public safety, unity and national security. Legislation should be passed and prosecutions initiated and pursued against suspects irrespective of their status. Proactive public enlightenment should be embarked on by the governmental bodies saddled with this responsibility in partnership with the media to curb incidences of hate speech as it is a recipe for violence and anarchy.

Comparatively, Wilson and Jibrin, (2019) states the Nigeria situation of hate speech, stressing that the governments at the federal and state levels have continued to express concern over the growing wave of hate speech in the country. They agreed that the inherent possibilities of AI (Artificial intelligence technologies) can be used to mitigate hate speech in any country. Arguing that since machines can recognize speech and transcribe it just like typists did in the past, if computers can accurately identify faces or fingerprints from among millions, cars drive themselves and robots fight wars, among other remarkable things, there is no doubt there would be a way round the complex challenge of hate speech.

Theoretical Framework

Perception theory

Perception theory was developed by social psychologist Daryl Bem in the late 1960's and early 1970's (McQuail, 2010). Perception opens our senses to sense things ordinarily it would not process. Six factors makes sensitivity possible, they are background, intensity, extensity, concreteness, contrast, velocity and impressivity". Perception is the first stage of the formation of an opinion and is linked to experience, expectations and the general impression. Public opinion is a conclusion of experience, impressions, beliefs, convictions of an individual on matters or issues which may have public interest or concern. Here individuals favour or support some definite conditions, person or proposal of widespread importance in a way that it affects the action of all the concerned in a particular way (Castells, 2009).

Perception is the first impression which may be true or not but if allowed to settle it becomes a conviction or belief leading to formation of opinion. Once an opinion is formed it is very difficult to change (Anorue, 2010). Perception or impression, the first step in opinion formation can be formed by experience, by the issue concerned, the uttering's of professionals, politicians or statesmen or the people within the organization and travel to affect the largest number of people (Okoro & Okolie, 2004).

Perception theory explains that none of us can retain or later recall all the messages we receive, but recall accurately messages that are favourable to our self-image than messages that are unfavourable. The saliency of the message, the method of transmission and the interests and beliefs of the receiver are also known to affect retention rate (Kerr, 2011).

This theory is important to this study in that it opens the mind of southeasterners to the reality of the hate speech bill. As southeasterners are aware of this hate speech bill, their opinions on the said bill points that they do not trust the government and law makers of the country, this must have been

culminated due to their earlier experiences, expectations, general impression and beliefs on the nation's government and its lawmakers. Southeasterners perceive this bill to be imbalanced, adding that those passing in this bill has some hidden motives beyond the ones they have presented already.

Methodology

This study employed the survey research design. The 2006 population census gave a total population of southeasterners to be 3,927,563. However when projected by a 2.8% growth rate in 2020, the projected population became 5,781,372 comprising of South Eastern states namely: Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi state). Taro Yamane sample size was used to arrive at a sample size of 400. The purposive sampling technique was employed to arrive at a sampling frame based on the criteria that:

-) Respondents must be residents in southeastern states
-) Respondents must be good listeners to Nigerian news

The choice of the South-East was based on the fact that it is believed that Igbo's are the ones who these hate bill are targeted to shut up and penalize should they voice their opinion against the government. The multi- stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The researchers distributed 400 copies of the questionnaire to respondents from which 350 copies were filled correctly and found valid for the study.

Table 1: What is the publics' awareness level on the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill?

Questions	Options	Frequency	Percent
Respondents response on being aware of the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill	Yes	350	100%
	No	-	-
Publics' awareness level on the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill	Very High	70	20%
	High	90	25.7%
	Moderate	170	48.6
	Low	20	5.7%
	Total	350	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The above finding shows that all (100%) the respondents are aware of the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill and its implications. The respondents were moderately aware of the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill and the punitive measures following the bill.

Table 2: Publics' knowledge level on the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill

Options	Frequency	Percent
Very High	70	20%
High	90	25.7%
Moderate	130	37.1%
Low	60	17.1%
Total	350	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The respondents from the above finding are moderately (37.1%) knowledgeable on the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill.

Table 3: Publics' perception on the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill

Perceptions	Options	Frequency	Percent
The bill is autocratic and against Nigerians fundamental human right to speech	Strongly Agree	209	59.8%
	Agree	141	40.2%
	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
Total		350	100%
The bill was passed by Nigerian politicians to satisfy their hidden political ambition more than the intended good ambition	Strongly Agree	190	54.2%
	Agree	80	22.2%
	Strongly Disagree	50	14.3%
	Disagree	30	8.6%
Total		350	100%
The punitive measures that came with the bill is deadly and needs amendment	Strongly Agree	220	62.9%
	Agree	113	32.3%
	Strongly Disagree	15	4.3%
	Disagree	2	0.6%
Total		350	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Findings above showed that: 59.8% of the respondents strongly think that the hate speech bill is autocratic and against Nigerians fundamental human right to speech; 54.2% as well think that the policy was passed by Nigerian politicians to satisfy their hidden political ambition (ulterior motive) more than the intended good ambition; while 62.9% of them think the punitive measures that came with the policy is deadly and needs amendment.

Discussion of Findings

Southeastern residents are aware of the Nigerian law makers hate speech bill. To that regards a greater percent of the claimed to be moderately aware of hate speech bill and the punitive measures following the bill. This is in line with Esimokha, Bobmanuel and Asaolu (2019) study which showed that majority of their respondents (87.2%) were aware of the Hate speech Bill and that majority of them were aware of the bill recently. Mrabure (2016) on his study added his voice that there is a great need for proactive public enlightenment and awareness by governmental bodies saddled with this responsibility. These bodies should partner with the media to curb incidences of hate speech as it is a recipe for violence and anarchy. Nwachukwu and Ihebuzor (2018) supporting the above findings stressed that participatory democratic culture is founded on the indelible rights of citizens to freely express their opinions and to keep tabs on governance.

South eastern residents' knowledge level on what the hate speech bill entails showed that southeasterners are moderately knowledgeable on the law makers hate speech bill to be passed into law. Adibe (2018) stated that Nigerians haven known of the hate speech has continually criticized the Bill as eminent Nigerians such as Senator Shehu Sani have condemned the bill on grounds of: problem in properly defining what constitutes hate speech and the entire idea being a clear attack on Nigerians free speech as the country is a democratic country and not an autocratic country. Olanrewaju, Ojeka, Oweye and Ojeka-John (2019) added that Nigerians after knowing of the bill know this bill to be offensive in Nigeria's volatile sociopolitical environment and recommends that appropriate laws should be consciously promulgated and enforced against hate speech and fake news because of its volatile nature of aggravating ethno-religious crisis in the quest for nation building in Nigeria's social environment.

The south east residents perception on the hate speech bill showed that most of them think that: the hate speech bill is autocratic and against Nigerians fundamental human right to speech; was passed by Nigerian politicians to satisfy their hidden political ambition (ulterior motive) more than the intended good ambition; the punitive measures that came with the policy is deadly and needs amendment. The respondents justify this claim as more than half the population of the respondents were of the opinion that their freedom of expression would be tampered with if such bill is passed into law. This is in line with Esimokha, Bobmanuel and Asaolu (2019) as their study described the bill as a bad bill which the government would benefit more from if passed into law, arguing that the bill would not be beneficial to Nigerians. Mrabure (2016) is legally against this hate speech bill as he encouraged all Nigerians to counteract hate speech and the right to freedom of expression in selected jurisdictions. Amnesty (2019) adding their own voice has urged Nigerians law makers to drop these bills, which are open to vague and broad interpretations and impose incredibly harsh punishments simply for criticizing the authorities". It stressed that the, "Social media is one of the last remaining places where Nigerians can express their opinions freely. Adegboruwa (2019) encouraged Nigerians to stand up to this government which rose to power on background work done using the social media. Now that the government has power, it wants to remove the ladder which it used to attain its present position. Nigerians and the Nigerian judiciary will not allow its plan to succeed as

the bill will be challenged in court. Olalekan (2019) explained that Nigerians are scared of this hate speech bill because shutting down the internet has been one of the weapons used by some African leaders who did not find comment against them favourable. Wilson and Jibrin, (2019) study clearly came from a different perspective from the findings in this study, they explained that there is no need for these harsh and death penalties, stressing the need to use the advanced technology invoke and at the disposal of the government (AI: Artificial intelligence technologies) to mitigate hate speech in any country as it is safer and more convenient.

From the above findings from various scholars, it is clearly seen that hate speech should be curtailed just that the current way the Nigerian law makers are going about it is partly wrong, is against the constitution and does not gain the approval of its citizens and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

The right of every citizen to free speech is one of the peoples fundamental human right and should not be abused, the government are supposed to place restrictions on those rights necessary to protect the rights of other citizens or public confidence in the government and its systems. Nigeria as a country claims to operate a democratic system of government, laws which tend to abridge the fundamental rights of citizens require proper consultations with the people or their representatives before such Bills are proposed in the legislative houses. The legislative body, as one of its duties, is permitted to originate Bills, bordering on any lawful issue, to be passed into law but such powers also needs to be checked to curtail incidences of legislators who want to further their personalized objectives rather that effectively representing and furthering the interest of the people who elected them. The researcher concluded that most Nigerians are not favourably disposed by this hate speech bill majority of the respondents are not favourably disposed to the passage of the Hate Speech Bill into law. They believe it would jeopardize freedom of expression in the country. This simply means that the bill is anti-people.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

-) Since respondents are moderately aware of governments' policy, it was recommended that the public should keep up with their updates on government bills and policies.
-) It was recommended that the publics' should keep up with their information update on the Nigerian daily bills and policies as it makes them more knowledgeable about what is happening around them.
-) It was recommended that this government policy should be looked into and amended properly as it will help reduce the ills that the law makers had in mind when passing the bill on Nigerians, Nigerians thought on the bill should be considered and constructively tackled to produce a bill devoid of human right restrictions.

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