

PERILS OF HATE SPEECH AND POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: THE EDO EXAMPLE

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Abstract

A fundamental feature of any nation's democratic process is the electioneering period that affords political parties and their candidates the opportunity to approach the electorate to canvass for votes. Rather than being the avenue for marketing one's credentials to woo the electorate, political campaigns since the birth of Nigeria's Fourth Republic have assumed the avenue for political propaganda, manifesting in virtues exaggeration and assassination of the opposition. Using Edo 2016 and 2020 governorship elections as examples, this paper examined the influence of hate speech and political propaganda on Nigeria's political democratisation. The aim of the paper was to demonstrate how hate speech and political propaganda undermine Nigeria's political development. The qualitative paper combined Liberal Theory of Democracy and Opinion Leadership as the theoretical keystone. Findings showed that hate speech and political propaganda resulted in the paradoxical electoral drama that characterised Edo 2016 and 2020 governorship elections, where the propagation of virtues of candidate of All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2016 governorship election, Godwin Obaseki by then Edo topmost political opinion leader and Governor, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole influenced the candidate's victory not only in 2016 but also in 2020 governorship race despite Governor Obaseki's defection to People's Democratic Party (PDP). The researchers recommended, among other things, that Nigerian politicians should encourage the conduct of violence-free elections by discouraging campaigns of calumny. It was also recommended that Nigerian politicians should place national interest above personal advantages to enable the development of the country's democracy.

Keywords: Democratic Governance, Edo Governorship Elections, Hate Speech, Nigeria's Democracy, Political Propaganda

Introduction

One of the cardinal features of the democratic process is the electioneering period that affords political parties and their candidates the opportunity to approach the electorate to canvass for votes and other forms of support. For aspiring political parties and their candidates, electoral campaigns offer the opportunity to present to the electorate planned actions and programmes that demonstrate a candidate's understanding of the yearnings of the people and society. Where there is an incumbent office holder, for democracies where the constitution guarantees a second tenure in office, political campaigns offer the opportunity to present to the people a score card of actions, programmes and projects that were executed in the incumbent's first tenure. An incumbent who is vying for a second tenure also uses political campaigns to inform the electorate of his proposed programmes and projects if re-elected. The programmes and projects that political aspirants hope to execute to better the society and its people are often spelt out in what is regarded as the manifesto. The presentation and understanding of candidates' manifestos are expected to inform voters' decisions at the polls.

In Nigeria, electoral campaigns are considered as a serious business that the nation's Electoral Act (2010), as amended, stipulates the modes and timeframe within which political parties and their candidates should commence and conclude campaigns. The provision of unified guidelines for electoral campaigns by the Nigerian Electoral Law is to ensure the provision of equal opportunity for political parties and candidates to achieve their goals in an election. The electoral law also regulates the activities of critical stakeholders, such as, the electoral body – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, election monitoring groups and the mass media to ensure that the success of a participant in an election is not undermined.

Beyond the manifesto, the character and antecedents of a candidate seeking a political office are critical matters of consideration that can affect the electoral fortunes of a political party. To this end, the electorate seek to know certain attributes of political aspirants, such as, family background, education, work experience, community service, family life, contributions to party stability and even social

relations. Knowledge of these attributes is required in determining the capacity of a candidate to prudently manage the demands of the office he seeks. At the political party level as well, critical assessment of candidates is undertaken by party leadership to ensure that the right candidate is presented. This assessment underscores the screening exercises that are conducted before party primaries.

The importance of fielding right candidates for political offices also underscores the supervisory role of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) over the activities of political parties. The Commission monitors political party activities, such as, party conventions and primaries.

On conclusion of internal party affairs and the emergence of party flagbearers, the political process progresses to actual campaigns which involve face-to-face interactions with the electorate at organised settings and over other approved campaign modes. Whether at the interpersonal sessions or other mediated forums, political campaigns involve propagating the message of a political party and its candidate to solicit for votes. It is the time to sell not only a candidate's manifesto but also to sell his personality and attributes to woo the electorate. Interactions at this stage of the electoral process enable the electorate to make comparisons between the flagbearers of participating political parties in order to make informed decisions at the polls.

The implication is that the electioneering atmosphere must be devoid of the propagation of falsehood either targeted to destroy the reputation of an opponent and his political party or to beguile the public in defence of a rather unpopular candidate. In pursuance of a political and electioneering atmosphere devoid of hate speech in order to enable the emergence and election of credible candidates and to entrench democratic culture, Nigeria's Electoral Act (2010) prohibits conducts, including abusive claims and exaggerations that are capable of misleading the electorate. Section 95 (1) of the Electoral Act (2010) states that "a political campaign or slogan should not be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly likely to injure religious, ethnic or ethnic feelings" (p. 119). Section 95 (2) stipulates that "abusive, intemperate, slanderous or base language or insinuations or innuendos designed or likely to provoke violent reaction or emotions should not be employed or used in political campaigns" (p. 119). These provisions of the Electoral Act leave no one in doubt of the consequences of hate speech and political propaganda to the democratic process.

With the usual promises of good governance and improved social and economic welfare for the people, it is unexpected of candidates and political parties seeking the people's mandate to assume governance of the federation, a state or of a local council to involve in conducts that are directly or indirectly skewed to mislead the electorate. This has not been the case in Nigeria where electoral campaigns have greatly assumed the theatre of hate speech and political propaganda directly skewed to rubbish the opposition and to lead the captive electorate to vote for preferred candidates, who sometimes are foisted on the process and the people (Fasakin, Oyer. Oyesomi and Okorie, 2017; Ezeibe, 2020). Like the propagation of the virtues of a candidate at political campaigns can stimulate likeness and the acceptance of the candidate and his political party, hate speeches can as well stimulate hatred and batter the reputation of a candidate, leading to his rejection by the misinformed electorate. Thus, the consequences of hate speech and unguarded virtues exaggeration through political propaganda on Nigeria's political development serve as justification for this study.

Statement of the Problem

Since the birth of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, political campaigns have witnessed substantial depreciation in terms of the target role of educating the electorate to make informed choices and to defend public interest at the nation's polls. Rather than being the avenue for marketing one's credentials to woo the electorate, political campaigns at both interpersonal and mediated forums have assumed the avenue for political propaganda, manifesting in virtues exaggeration of oneself or a preferred candidate and the assassination of the reputation of opposition political parties and candidates. Even mass media channels and social media are substantially exploited to propagate hate speech and political propaganda in order to misinform the public.

During Edo 2016 governorship election, former governor of the State (then incumbent governor) and immediate past National Chairman of *All Progressives Congress* (APC), Comrade Adams Oshiomhole presented Mr. Godwin Obaseki as his preferred successor and candidate of the APC. Comrade Oshiomhole not only propagated the virtues of Mr. Obaseki to the Edo electorate but also described the latter as the brainbox and creativity of his administration (Enogholase, 2019; Akinpelu, 2020). Thus, at various 2016 campaign forums, Comrade Oshiomhole urged Edo people to vote for Mr. Obaseki and to reject the governorship flagbearer of *People's Democratic Party* (PDP), Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu whom he (Comrade Oshiomhole) described as incompetent for Edo governorship job.

Barely two years after Edo 2016 governorship election, the political marriage between Comrade Oshiomhole and Governor Obaseki fell apart. The disaffection between the former political heartthrobs led

to Comrade Oshiomhole's paradoxical preference of the 2016 *PDP* governorship candidate, Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu as the *APC* flagbearer in the 2020 governorship election. Governor Obaseki, the estranged political mistress of Comrade Oshiomhole, was forced to defect to *PDP*, while Pastor Ize-Iyamu was cleared as candidate of *APC* in Edo 2020 governorship election (Aytogo, 2020; Oyero, 2020).

At the 2020 Edo governorship electioneering, Comrade Oshiomhole was confronted with the task of convincing Edo electorate to vote for Pastor Ize-Iyamu, whom he described in the previous election as lacking the managerial competence to govern Edo State. On the other side of the prism, Comrade Oshiomhole was confronted with the task of convincing Edo electorate that incumbent Governor Obaseki, the exalted brainbox and creative industry of his administration, was incapable of governing Edo State, not after the latter had successfully led the State between 2016 and 2020. It seemed like while Comrade Oshiomhole's propagation of the virtues of Mr. Obaseki paved the path for the latter's victory in 2016 and 2020 Edo governorship elections, his unguarded hate speech against Pastor Ize-Iyamu in 2016 was entropic to the candidate's political fortunes in the elections, notwithstanding his dramatic switch of political platforms.

Whether or not Godwin Obaseki was the best candidate for Edo governorship job was seemingly inconsequential; his unmistakable labelling as the brainbox of his predecessor's administration was a sufficient hype to sway the political opinion of Edo electorate to vote for the exalted creative industry of Edo politics. Thus, the problem of this study is encapsulated in the following question: what is the role of hate speech and political propaganda in the development of Nigeria's democracy?

Theoretical Underpinnings

The Liberal theory of Democracy was popularised by philosophers, such as, John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hobbes whose works advocated for private liberty, social justice, natural rights, majority rule and ownership of private property (Kwasau, 2013). The theory states that politics should be patterned in the manner that encourages citizen participation and that the democratic process should engender the moral development of citizens. It pushes for a democratic atmosphere where citizens are empowered to choose the leadership of their society through even participation aided by the provision of balanced political information (Adagbabiri, 2015).

As identified by Kwasau (2013), a liberal democracy may take different governance forms, such as, a federal system of government, as practiced in United States, Nigeria, Ghana, Germany, and Brazil, or a constitutional monarchy, as it is the case in United Kingdom and Japan. Whether a presidential system or monarchical order, the Liberal Theory of Democracy advocates for a governance structure that guarantees free enterprise and the empowerment of citizens to maximise social resources, including socio-political and economic opportunities. The genuine application of the liberal democratic philosophy will help to liberalise Nigeria's democracy, thereby encouraging participatory governance and overthrowing god-father politics.

Opinion Leadership.

Before attempting a definition of opinion leadership, it is imperative to establish the meaning of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are individuals who exert some influence over other members of their group or community by virtue of possession of some attributes (George, 2006; Reddi, 2009). They are people who have the ability to influence other people's opinion or behaviour in some desired manner. Ndimele and Innocent (2006) state that such individuals who have the capacity to lead the thought or opinion of other members of their group or community through interpersonal relationships are regarded as opinion leaders. Thus, opinion leadership describes the situation where the opinion, decision and action of members of a group can be influenced or even determined by the opinion of those leaders they look up to for instruction or for advice over given phenomena. What this means is that opinion leaders can shape and shield the attitudes and values of their followers from external influence.

The force that opinion leaders wield in influencing the thoughts and actions of their followers underscores the roles of interpersonal relationships in the successful implementation of change or development projects, including general elections. Thus, UNESCO (1981) observes that if the goal of any public project is to affect the attitude of citizens, interpersonal communication must be accorded prominence. The Commission argues that if the goal of a public policy is to promote socio-cultural or political change, decisions must be made on how to strengthen such a policy through interpersonal networks. It adds that interpersonal influences of peers and opinion leaders cannot be underestimated in critical situations or periods of major political and social change, such as general elections, national emergencies, wars, counter-culture experiments, religious upheavals and other matters of public interest. What this means is that the influence, interest and utterances of opinion leaders during a general election can affect the decisions of his followers at the polls.

One feature of opinion leadership is that it may not flourish through overt coercion, rather it thrives on the assumption that the opinion leader possesses the idea, experience or talent that should be beneficial to

opinion followers if they abide by his instructions. This accounts for why opinion followers look up to the opinion leader for advice and directive, especially on social causes. Ndimele and Innocent (2006) observe that opinion leaders are often sought after for advice and directives on certain issues on which opinion followers consider their opinion as best.

In the Nigerian political arena, opinion leadership is given expression by the political and economic influences that adore many Nigerian politicians. This is not simply due to the respect that is accorded to political offices but the force Nigerian politicians wield to influence the whole fabrics of the national political economy. The situation is that anybody that possesses political power in Nigeria possesses everything that life can offer and can affect people, authorities and institutions.

But the exertion of political influence is not peculiar to Nigeria, since the race for political offices around the world remains contentious and sometimes manipulative. Even the 2020 United States presidential election witnessed claims and counter claims of election rigging and manipulations, with the Trump's Campaign Team claiming that increased postal voting (popularly called "mail" in the American parlance) due to covid-19 pandemic enabled tremendous electoral fraud (Goodman and Carmichael, 2020). The reporters observed that former President Donald Trump had suggested that 50,000 people in Ohio getting erroneous absentee ballots was evidence of a rigged election. Even outside the U.S territory, the political influence of 2020 presidential election contenders affected the interest of their supporters overseas. Thus, while populist politicians in Europe rallied around Donald Trump, proponents of a more alliance-led globalised America threw their support behind Joe Biden (Perrigo, Haynes and Dozier, 2020). Nwabueze (2015) states that every person is associated with and affected by politics. He adds that politics represents the critical aspect of the society that virtually affects how citizens of a country live their lives. It goes to say that political opinion leaders must be guided by the desire to improve the well-being of the society and its people and not the maximisation of advantage through deceit.

The Concept of Politics

Politics involves the effort directed at acquiring and keeping the power of governance. It also involves the acquisition of power to influence the actions and policies of the government. The above definition entails that politics is synonymous with power and that political power is exercised to govern or participate in the governance of a state. Griffin and Moorhead (2007) define power as the ability of an individual or a group to exercise control over other individuals or groups. Nsereka (2014), citing Nnoli (1986), defines politics as "all those activities which are directly or indirectly associated with the seizure of state power, the consolidation of state power and the use of state power" (p. 19). The seizure of state power is exemplified by military incursions and coup d'etats witnessed around the world. This is opposed to the tenets of democracy which abhors power seizure. The participatory nature of democracy underscores the wide acceptance of political democratisation that saddles the people with the power to select the leadership of the state (Johari, 2006; Bhargava and Ashok, 2008; Ekeanyanwu, 2015).

Another important feature of the democratic process that encourages political participation is the permission of inter- and intra-party activities that culminate in the supposed open selection of candidates or representatives. These processes saddle the people with the power to choose who governs them. Nwabueze (2015) states that democracy is the backbone of the political process. He avers that politics is not confined to the activities of public officers but includes intra- and inter-party activities at various levels of the democratic process. This supposed free political atmosphere enables citizens to participate in the governance of the society.

In Nigeria, as it is the situation globally, politics involves the element of struggle or wrestle for power. That is, despite being democratic, politics involves the struggle to acquire and to keep power. Ogbonnaya, Omoju and Udefuna (2012) observe that Nigeria's political process since the Fourth Republic in 1999 has been plagued by certain intricate challenges, such as electoral irregularities, malpractices, inter-and intra-ethnic rivalries, weak democratic institutions and institutionalised corruption. The scholars cited instances where individuals won elections from prison custody in contravention of the Electoral Act. Ogbonnaya, Omoju and Udefuna (2012) also cited the conduct of elections where the tenure of an incumbent still subsisted as witnessed in Anambra State in 2007.

Also, the persistent challenges of majoritarian tyranny, political party indiscipline, political candidates' indiscipline and abuse of power have left Nigeria's democracy near comatose. These challenges resonate in the neglect of minority rights, perpetuation of winner-takes-it-all political approach, breach of constitutional platforms, election thuggery, vote buying, ballot manipulation (also known as vote rigging) and total electoral fraud. These challenges have left Nigeria's democracy unstable since the return of democratic governance in 1999.

The perpetuation of electoral frauds in Nigeria depicts the seeming connivance of political

stakeholders in defence of the political ambitions of preferred candidates or political parties to the disadvantage of vulnerable masses and the destruction of egalitarianism (Ogbonnaya et al, 2012; Ajayi and Ojo, 2014; Lord-Mallam and Mijah, 2019). Thus, ThisDay Editor (2020), citing Igini (2020), describes local government elections in Nigeria as organised crimes. The perpetuation of these electoral crimes through outright infractions and the use of political propaganda exemplifies the struggle to acquire, use and keep political power. The manipulation of Nigeria's electoral process in defence of a preferred candidate or political party also clearly demonstrates that the goal of seeking political power by many Nigerian politicians is not to serve but to maximise political advantages. This scenario accounts for why after two tenures of eight years, a Nigerian State governor returns to serve in the National Assembly and afterwards becomes a Minister of the Federal Republic and political god-father of his State. As the chief political king-maker of the State, he enthrones and dethrones whom he wills as has been witnessed in several States in Nigeria, such as Anambra, Abia, Lagos, Edo, Bayelsa, Delta and Akwa-Abom States. The power of the political king-maker is highly unquestionable, especially since he possesses the material resources to control or, at least, influence the people's opinion in matters of public interest, especially political matters. This political arrangement of god-fatherism is only overthrown when the people speak with a united accord as was the case in Edo 2020 governorship election which witnessed political switch-overs occasioned by failed political fraternity between Comrade Adams Oshiomhole and Godwin Obaseki (Akinpelu, 2020; Ayeni, 2020; Enogholase, 2020).

Peril of Political Propaganda in a Democracy

Propaganda involves the exaggeration of an idea or a cause to sway public opinion towards the cause. It is the manipulation of the minds of a target group with a view to influence the group to accept and to support a cause (Reddi, 2009). What this means is that there is the element of deceit in propaganda. In other words, although the message of the propagandist may be persuasive, the underlying goal is to affect the opinion or view of the target population to subscribe to the idea being propagated by the propagandist. Wilcox, Ault, Agee and Cameron (2003) thus define propaganda as the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perception and to manipulate behaviour in order to achieve a desired goal.

Propaganda thrives through the exploitation of certain devices. Some propaganda devices openly exploited in the Nigerian political arena are:

Name Calling: Name calling, otherwise referred to as labeling, is used to label an idea or a person as good or bad so as to influence the target audience to accept or reject such a person. In politics, name calling is employed when politicians want to promote the political agenda of a preferred candidate. Thus, the candidate could be described as being honest, credible, competent and a square peg in a square hole. When propaganda is targeted to get rid of a political opponent and to lead public contempt against his political ambition, the individual is labeled as being evil, corrupt or incompetent.

Name calling was manifested in Edo (2016) governorship electioneering when former governor of the State and immediate past national chairman of *All Progressives Congress* (APC), Comrade Adams Oshiomhole described his then preferred successor and incumbent governor of Edo State, Godwin Obaseki as the brain box and creativity behind the success of his administration while presenting Mr. Obaseki to Edo people as his successor (Akinpelu 2020). Contrarily, Comrade Oshiomhole was said to have labeled the candidate of *People's Democratic Party* (PDP) in the 2016 governorship election, Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu as being incompetent for the job.

When the political honeymoon between Adams Oshiomhole and Godwin Obaseki fell apart and countdown to Edo 2020 governorship election, their political divorce led to political marriage between Comrade Oshiomhole and the 2016 governorship candidate of *PDP*, Pastor Ize-Iyamu whom Mr. Oshiomhole hitherto described as incompetent for Edo governorship job. This dramatic political union led to Comrade Oshiomhole's endorsement of his new political heartthrob, Pastor Ize-Iyamu for Edo 2020 governorship office instead of his estranged ally and incumbent Governor Godwin Obaseki (Enogholase, 2020; Emwante, 2020). This paradoxical political disarray was seemingly too bitter for the average Edo electorate to swallow in order to support the unstable politics of Comrade Oshiomhole-led *APC* and his new political lover for Edo 2020 governorship job. Having being disqualified by *APC* Screening Committee, the estranged political lover of Comrade Oshiomhole, Godwin Obaseki sealed a new deal with the *PDP*. Seemingly, the brainbox title with which Mr. Obaseki was glowingly decorated in the 2016 electioneering paved the way for his massive support of the Edo electorate and emergence as winner of the 2020 governorship election. The implication is that name calling has consequences for a nation's electoral process and the development of democratic tenets. It also has consequences for the people since leadership performance has impact on society and its people.

Glittering Generalities: This is another propaganda device that was used in Edo 2016 governorship

electioneering. This device takes effect when a policy or action is associated with virtue words in order to manipulate the target audience. Glittering generalities also emphasises one aspect of a cause or of an individual, usually his virtues, while concealing the individual's shortcomings. Wilcox, Ault, Agee and Cameron (2003) state that glittering generalities associates a person or a cause with favourable abstractions. It goes to say that an individual or his political ambition could also be associated with unfavourable abstractions. Unfavourable abstractions in the Nigerian political space represent unfounded claims often perpetrated in hate messages and targeted to ridicule a candidate or political party and to provoke public hatred against them. These hate messages are even sometimes, unfortunately though, published over the news media as witnessed in the hate documentaries targeted at some *APC* political bigwigs during 2015 presidential electioneering (Abah, 2015; Ogunbiyi, 2015).

In Edo 2016 governorship electioneering, glittering generalities was manifested when Comrade Oshiomhole described his successor as the brainbox and creative industry of his administration (Akinpelu, 2020). Comrade Oshiomhole's attempt to make public the purported shortcomings of Mr. Obaseki during Edo 2020 electioneering, when he described him (Mr. Obaseki) as a mistake (NAN, 2020; Engholase, 2020), is a testimony that glittering generalities could be exploited to advance deceit and that it is antithetical to the development of democracy.

Hate Speech and Development of Nigeria's Democracy

According to *United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (2013), hate speech includes: "(a) all dissemination of hatred, by whatever means; (b) incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on the 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 against 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 organisations and activities that promote and incite racial discrimination (p. 4). In their own definition, Kayamba-zinthu and Moyo (2002) define hate speech as the war waged by an individual or a group against others by means of verbal expressions that rob the discriminated individual or group of its reputation.

What this means is that hate speech involves any word or statement, expressed verbally or non-verbally which lowers or destroys the reputation of the person or group it refers to in the estimation of members of the public. It also means that hate speech is discriminatory and can instigate hatred and violence against the discriminated. Neisser (1994), cited in Ezeibe (2020), observes that hate speech can instigate discrimination, hatred, violence and avoidable reprisal attacks on the discriminated. Abah (2015) notes that negative appearances, especially against an injured person or group which linger in the mind could be reinforced through hate speech. When this happens, the temptation to reprisal could be stimulated.

According to Ezeibe (2020), political intolerance, often promoted by hate speech, is the foundation of inter-group violence. This is because hate speech promotes dislikeness and diminishes empathy and tolerance. Quoting the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (2018), Ezeibe (2020) avers that hate speech engenders extreme form of intolerance and forms the foundation of electoral violence in polarised democracies. Ogunbiyi (2015) laments the promotion of hate speech in the Nigerian political space. He argues that although it is the right of every Nigerian to support a political party of their choice, the unguarded promotion of hate speech could engender violence and that when this happens, democracy would be endangered.

Apart from the promotion of ethnic politics and electoral violence, hate speech is dangerous to the development of democracy. This is because hate speech does not encourage healthy opposition in the body polity. Anthony and Anyanwu (2019) observe that political hate speech not only heats up the polity and promotes disunity, but also promotes hatred and disrespect for opposition political parties whose reputation could be battered by their opponents. The impact of hate speech on the maturity of political opposition was the situation in the Edo (2016) governorship, where the electorate overwhelmingly supported the *All Progressives Congress* (APC) leading to the victory of the party in the election. Hate speech swayed public opinion to the party (APC) in 2016 against *People's Democratic Party* (PDP). Secondary data sources, especially newspaper articles indicated that hate speech and political propaganda affected Edo 2016 polls, not only as it pertained to the electorate voting decisions but also triggered apathy and violence during the election (Engholase, 2020).

The impact of hate speech on Edo 2016 governorship election appeared that it did not matter the candidate that was fielded by the parties due to the intense propaganda. The impact of hate speech on political opposition was demonstrated in Edo 2020 governorship election when the *People's Democratic Party* (PDP) that was rejected by many Edo electorate in 2016 emerged as winner of the 2020 governorship election. This

is due to the fact that the *PDP* chose as its candidate governor Godwin Obaseki who flagged the *APC's* flag and won the governorship office in 2016. The *PDP* could not have emerged victorious in Edo 2020 governorship election if the party leadership and ideology were in conflict with the aspirations of Edo electorate. This suggested that the chances of the party (*PDP*) in 2016 governorship election may have been affected by the campaign of calumny staged by the opposition.

It is also interesting to point out that hate speech precipitates political apathy. This is what happens when some electorate dissociate themselves from the electoral process essentially due to lack of trust in political leadership and heightened insecurity. Anthony and Anyanwu (2019) observe that perceived threats discourage the electorate from exercising their franchise and thereby creates the unacceptable situation of low turnout during general elections. For instance, in Osun 2014 governorship election, the then incumbent governor and candidate of the *AllProgressivesCongress* in the election, Rauf Aregbesola was reported to have instructed his party supporters to attack security agents with charms and amulets (Wahab, 2014). Earlier, Okoro (2012), cited in Anthony and Anyanwu (2019), observes that five Nigerian governorship elections in Kogi, Cross-River, Adamawa, Bayelsa and Sokoto States witnessed low turnout of voters due to the tensed political atmosphere charged by political hate speeches.

Similarly, in Edo 2020 governorship election, the *APC* was accused of engaging some agitators, tagged *lions and tigers* to disrupt the polls. Emwante (2020), Editor (2020) and Enogholase (2020) state that the leadership of the party had asked the agitators to move from one polling unit to another to ensure victory of the party in defiance of the Electoral Act that prohibits such unauthorised movements on election day. It is noteworthy that the leadership of *APC* may not have engaged the said agitators to perpetuate violence or to disrupt the election but the mention of lions and tigers in a charged political atmosphere is nonetheless capable of scaring the electorate. It is known that voter apathy is one of the signs of a depreciating democracy and an invitation to anarchy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria has witnessed avoidable blood-births on accounts of pre-election, on-the-election or post-election violence orchestrated by political hate speeches. For instance, *INEC* declaration of results of 2011 presidential election was greeted with the massacre of scores of citizens in some northern States of the country. In what is described as the bloodiest presidential election in Nigeria, *Human Rights Watch* (2011) reports that the 2011 post-presidential election violence led to the massacre of more than 800 persons. The ethnic cracks created by the 2011 presidential election and other elections in Nigeria have left the country deeply divided, at least politically. This division, in addition to earlier inter-ethnic animosities carried over from the civil and other inter-ethnic/inter-tribal conflicts, have remained the foundation of perennial ethnic violence and killings such as the hydra-headed Southern-Kaduna killings. Since democracy thrives on the sustenance of peace, Nigerian politicians should encourage the conduct of violence-free elections by discouraging campaign of calumny and divisive tendencies that encourage electoral violence.

The promotion of hate speech in the Nigerian political arena has left the country's democracy almost polarised with substantial inter- and intra-party intolerance across several Nigerian political parties, hence the parallel party structures at both national and state levels, as it is the case with the ruling *APC*, *PDP* and other opposition political parties in Nigeria. The result is that after two decades of democratic governance, Nigeria's democracy has substantially remained anaemic and unimpressive. With the understanding of the role of political opposition in serving as a check on the privileged ruling party, it is expedient that Nigerian politicians shun divisive tendencies to allow testable ideology to drive the nation's democracy.

Many Nigerian communities with hitherto strong ethnic cleavages are currently dislocated by politics. Even zoning of political offices recognised by the constitutions of many Nigerian political parties has suffered substantial neglect across many Nigerian political parties, leaving the marginalised with the feeling of revenge and sometimes forcing others to defect to perceived favourable alternative political structures. Salawu and Hasan (2011) and Adetiba (2019) observe that politics and ethnicity in Nigeria are twin challenges that have led to the collapse of traditional authority structures, state's managerial institutions and results in factional rivalries among the political elite with majority and minority disparities in the country's political space. As corroborated by interviewees, not only is the crack in Nigeria's political fabric a problem associated with one political party but the entire body polity, resulting in the emergence of factions even in the leading political parties and dislocation of traditional and ethnic communities that hitherto lived together. It goes to say that ethnic politics is antithetical to Nigeria's political development. The perils of ethnic politics on Nigeria's socio-political and economic development, which pre-dates the birth of the fourth republic in 1999 should serve as a clarion call on Nigerian politicians to place national interest above personal or parochial gains.

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