

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED X'S (FORMERLY TWITTER) 2023 POST-ELECTION "ETHNIC HATE MESSAGES AGAINST THE IGBO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria's post-election atmosphere has always been inundated with one form of crisis or the other. The 2023 general election was not an exception to this historical fact. This study aimed to determine the degree of post-election ethnic hate messages against the Igbo people of Nigeria. The study is anchored on the social responsibility theory. The researchers employed qualitative textual analysis as the research methodology, where posts and comments from X (formerly Twitter) were textually analysed. Findings from the study revealed that hate messages are targeted against the Igbo people of Nigeria. From the hate messages analysed, Igbos were framed as betrayers, political intruders, subservient, people deserving of mass killing, and those never to be given the opportunity of leadership in Nigeria. Also, the researchers found that hate messages against Igbos continuously strain the unity of Nigeria as each election season impacts the unity of the country negatively. Further findings indicated that hate messages against the Igbos emanate from both prominent Nigerians and ordinary citizens. The researchers concluded that Hate Messages are dangerous and can set Nigeria ablaze if left unchecked and recommend that: X (formerly Twitter) and Nigeria government should activate punitive measures against posters of hate messages to deter those who may want to take that path.

**Keywords:** Post-election, ethnic, hate, messages, X (formerly Twitter)

### Introduction

The civil war may have ended over 50 years ago, but peace, unity and national cohesion seem elusive in Nigeria. The 2023 general election season conspicuously saw every section of the country to recline to ethnic sentiment. With the social media platforms making the vituperations more glaring, one will not but feel concerned. Nwodom et al. (2023) observe that the emergence of the former Governor of Anambra state, Peter Obi as the Labour Party presidential candidate, his popularity and acceptance among the youth in the country (Obedient movement) re-awakened an Igbophobic sentiment and hatred against Igbo people by the other ethnic groups. "Igbophobia" (Iruke, 2023) is observable in critical and hostile behaviour such as political and religious discrimination and violence towards Igbos, (Ekwe-Ekwe, 2022). Anti-Igbo sentiment (also known as Igbophobia) encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward the Igbo people. The Igbo people make up all of south-eastern Nigeria and a part of south-south Nigeria geopolitical zones.

Also, hate messages during elections can cause unquantifiable damage. Hate speech's effects on society, people, religious bodies, organisations, nations, groups and so on have been a topic of exploration among academics in the digital era (Asemah et al., 2022; Etumnu, 2020). If hate speech is not addressed, it will become normalised and accepted over time, as words are the first weapon we use to influence attitudes, conventions, and ethics in our society (Gelber & McNamara, 2016).

On the prevalence and effects of hate messages, Alakali, et al. (2017) observe that hate speech and foul language is prevalent on social media platforms in Nigeria and that there is adequate legal provisions to curb the phenomenon in Nigeria. Brown (2017 p. 20) points attention to its implications on “harm, dignity, security, healthy cultural dialogue, democracy and legitimacy.” Individual and collective victims are both harmed. According to Hernandez (2011), hate speech generates community discord, harms the target group, and infringes on equality by expressing, supporting, encouraging, promoting, or inciting hatred of a group of people characterised by a certain trait or combination of qualities.

Given the elitist nature of X (formerly Twitter), one will not associate it with hate messages but the reverse was the case. Since the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk, the platform has become very prominent for promoting free speech. Yet there seem to be fewer checks on people who post hate messages in the platform. There were numerous hate messages targeted against Igbo People of Nigeria after the 2023 general election and most of these hate messages went unchecked. If X has become a tool for promoting hate against a people, then there is cause for serious concerns. This is the reason for this study to evaluate how Twitter was used to promote hate messages during the last election.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Hate speech/ messages have the capability to create crisis in any society. The last general election witnessed a lot of ethnic division in the country. Social media platforms serve as forums for political campaign and interaction. The aftermath of the election attracted much attacks on the Igbo People of Nigeria. One of such medium for promoting these attacks and hatred against Igbo People was on Twitter. Many studies have been conducted on how the media reported the election, how the public perceived the outcome of the election, and so on. Unfortunately, not much has been done to investigate how political and none political actors used Twitter to promote hate messages against the Igbo People of Nigeria. It is this vacuum in research that this study seeks to fill.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the degree of post-election hate messages against Igbo people in Nigeria?
2. What are the dominant frames of post-election hate messages against Igbo people in Nigeria?
3. How has X (formerly Twitter) post-election hate messages impacted the Igbo people of Nigeria?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Social media and Hate Speech/Messages in Nigeria Politics**

The social media is the hub for events in recent times, overtime it has been sponsoring freedom of expression and participatory press, exposing several social vices in the society like terrorism, violence, genocide, contempt, hatred and revolts and mobilisation for paradigm shift. According to Mwende (2014), “the unprecedented emergence of social media technology in the face of developing societies has had a significant change of status quo within the socio-political and economic ecological settings of any society”. He described Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Wikipedia, LinkedIn as few examples of the most popular and well known social media channels. Overtime the use of social media platforms has migrated from families and friends ties and has moved up a latitude for reflecting on various social, political and economic spheres and hence nurtured a society of relationships built on mutual societal opinions (Mwende,2014).

It is pertinent to note that the use of social media for political campaigns and awareness has made social media platforms to become an avenue for misinformation, insults, hate, name calling and character assassination by political opponents in an unprecedented manner. Through the social media handles, the spread of hateful information and propaganda to a larger population across the globe with devastating consequences has been made easier (Ashibogwu, 2023).

The Agency for Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation (2016) in Berlin, Germany, defined hate speech as "a communication that denigrates people on the basis of their membership to a particular group. This can include any form of expression, such as images, plays and songs as well as speech. According to CEPO, hate speech is not freedom of speech. Hate speech is forbidden in many countries by law because it not only incites violence but it destabilises an individual."

Dambazau (2014), explained further that "security challenges posed by violent crimes, ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based conflicts, election induced violence and insecurity of lives and property are as result of the collapse of the economic and political systems. The central factors responsible for the collapse of the socio-economic system, according to Dambazau, were poor governance and lack of effective leadership at all levels of governance".

### **The Igbo Identity and Power Rotation in Nigeria**

Power sharing ensures that certain elective offices such as the office of the President, Governors, and chairman or membership of federal government-owned institutions are evenly distributed and rotated among the geopolitical divisions in the country. The goal of zoning is to validate a pattern whereby the ethno-regional origin of top political office holders, including the president, alternate from one election or set of elections to another (Omodia, 2012). The concept of power rotation emerged in the late 1990s as an expression of the South's opposition to Northern domination of the country.

The purpose for zoning and rotation of power was ostensibly derived from efforts to create a sense of belonging amongst ethno-national elite groups in the face of the inadequacies of the federal character principles. Muhammed (2013) explained that "zoning and rotation are suffused with conceptual confusion. Zoning and rotation tend to be confused with federal character principles enshrined in the 1999 constitution".

According to Christian et al. (2016), the amalgamation of 1914, Nigeria has witnessed several ethnic struggles and conflicts of varying magnitude. The most devastating being the thirty-month-old civil war between 1967 and 1970. Consequent upon these destabilising ethnic conflicts, various public measures have been enunciated as remedies to the nagging problem of ethnic diversity which include federal character and rotational presidency.

Solomon (2022) exerts that it should be noted that rotational presidency is an affirmation of the failure of the political process. It proves that the best aspirant for an election can be side-lined for tribal choices. Kutigi et al. (2017) argues that power sharing has been one of Nigeria's major issues militating against proper federal practice. Also, our leaders' practice of corruption, favoritism, and nepotism has contributed to making the situation worse. It is indeed no doubt that the issues of mistrust and distrust among Nigerians, particularly among the three major ethnic tribes have engendered bitter rivalries and conflicts along ethnic and religious lines. As a result, appointments are usually centered around members of the leader's ethnic groups as reflective of the previous and current administration.

## Empirical Review

The study by Uzochukwu and Okafor (2019) was aimed to examine the interplay between hate speech, social media and conflict in the society. The design adopted in the study is the Critical Discourse Analyses (CDA). This study revealed that while hate speech may be prone to manipulation at critical times such as during election campaigns, accusations of promoting hate speech may be traded among political opponents or used by those in power to curb opposition and criticism, suggesting the need for intermediaries to advance the fight against hate speech because of the tendency of negative opinion formation by those exposed to hate messages given that some efforts are motivated by the impulse to ban hate speech as it can provoke pain, distress, fear, embarrassment and isolation to individuals.

Nwozor, et al. (2022) focused their study on the use of Facebook by political supporters and electorates to canvass for support for their preferred presidential candidates in the 2019 general elections and the underlying hate speech that emanated therefrom. The results of this paper indicate widespread dissemination of hate comments by political supporters and electorates in the furtherance of their support for their preferred presidential candidates. The paper advocates responsible use of Facebook in electioneering and the imperative of regulation to guard against the circulation of hate electoral comments that could heat up the political arena and trigger electoral violence. Another study by Akpoghiran and Edewor (2019) examined users' views of hate speech in the social media. Findings of this study revealed that hate speech in the social media is capable of jeopardizing the unity of the country if not checked. It is recommended that social media users should be mindful of the things they post on the social media.

Msughter (2022) investigated Nigerian press coverage of hate speeches in the *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *the Guardian* newspapers. The study found that the manifestation of hate speech was frequent in the 2015 general election. The study also found that the manifestation of hate speech had an overbearing on political news by the selected newspapers in the 2015 general election in Nigeria. The study concludes that such publications (hate speech) tend to make electorates have a different connotation to a candidate. Sijuade, (2022) examined hate speech and responsible journalism in Nigeria: The way forward. This study revealed that hate speech is a manipulative tool that has engendered many negative narrative, ostracism, fury, misperception and economic challenges, which many political actors have used to their advantage either to misinform, disinform. The paper concluded that Impunity against hate crimes can be tackled by establishing monitoring and evaluation units in newsrooms.

Ohazuruike (2022), examines the impact of leadership and power-sharing on Nigeria's Federalism, focusing on the issues and perspectives. Findings amongst others revealed that the attitudes of Nigeria's political class in their intra-class struggle for political power to consolidate on their primitive accumulation of wealth developed a penchant for aggravating existing cleavages by interpreting politics in terms of survival of ethnic or regional entities. This study recommends that there should be an emergence of leaders with nationalist appeal who would be more interested in building a nation out of the diverse ethnic and religious nationalities as found presently in Nigeria. Nwobi and Husaini (2018) investigated presidential power rotation and unflinching role of ethnicity in Nigeria "fourth republic". The paper recommends a president who will unite Nigeria and play the role of a father to all, equal number of states assigned to every zone and equal representation in appointments.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the social responsibility theory. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm proposed social responsibility theory as a form of libertarianism - free press normative philosophy of media operations in 1956 (Asemah et al., 2017). The essential term in the theory that governs the media's normative functions in a democratic environment is responsibility. Gupta (2015) states that responsibility in media operations relates to the recognition of the media's role to take adequate custody, care, and

safeguard its audience. In a broader sense, social responsibility refers to the acknowledgment of the media's and practitioners' responsibilities to protect society's interests and needs while carrying out their jobs freely in a democratic society. Continuity, order, integration, motivation, direction and adaptation are only a few examples (McQuail, 2010). From the preceding, it is clear that social responsibility theory is based on the concepts of liberty, responsibility and obligation. Folarin (2002) observes that the media should be socially accountable in their activities by supporting economic and political systems, constructively debating public matters, sustaining public peace and social structure and safeguarding individual rights by functioning as government watchdogs. Media acceptance of societal duties; ownership as a public trust; truth, honesty, fairness, objectivity; professional ethical compliance. Self-regulation is social responsibility (McQuail, 2010).

In social media statements concerning clergymen, the quest of truth, honesty, impartiality, and objectivity is a must. Strict adherence to professional new media ethics is a non-negotiable requirement for halting Nigeria's hate speech trend. Self-regulation is a strategy for avoiding government meddling in media activities, particularly censorship. The importance of this theory to this study is that it serves as a reminder that the media has a social responsibility to the people. As a result, social media users must guarantee that their statements on social media are socially acceptable, particularly when dealing with clergymen.

## **Methodology**

The researchers employed qualitative textual analysis as a methodology. Textual analysis allows a researcher to understand how people make sense of the world around them (Asemah, et al. 2022). The area of this study involves political posts made on X within the month of March to May. These months are part of the time frame from when the presidential election result was announced to when swearing-in took place. The population of this study comprised all political posts that trended after the presidential and gubernatorial election. The researchers searched posts that contained subjects of 2023 elections and Igbos, over 2000 posts came up. These posts on X constitute the population of the study.

Furthermore, the multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to get samples for the study. In the first stage, the purposive sampling technique was used to select Twitter as the social media platform to study because it is an elitist social medium with the highest rate of informed political discussions and engagement among users. In the second stage, the researchers searched catchphrases like "IGBOS CAN NEVER BE PRESIDENT", "2023 ELECTION" "KILLIGBOS, "IGBOS IN LAGOS" within March to May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, and came up with over 200 posts and comments on the subject of Igbo and the 2023 election. etc. In the third stage, the researchers randomly selected ten (10) posts made within March to May 2023. and gubernatorial election in Nigeria. In the fourth stage, the posts were thematized and analyzed under three categories which are: Domineering/Political intruders, Betrayers and Igbo presidency.

## **Data Presentation**

### **Domineering/Political intruders**

**Excerpt Text 1:** "Let 2023 be the last time of Igbo interference in Lagos politics. Let there be no repeat in 2027. Lagos is like Anambra, Imo, any Nigerian state. It is not No Man's Land, not Federal Capital Territory. It is Yoruba land. Mind your business." (Bayo Onanuga)



**Excerpt Text 2:** “Nothing wrong with what he said. He said "Igbo Interference" in Lagos politics must not happen again. There is a clear Igbo interference during the last election in Lagos. He said interference not participation.” (@realshinny)

**Excerpt Text 3:** “Let's kill all the Igbos. Let's flush them out of Yoruba lands. I hate these people with passion. They are violent people. They are worst. They hate us. Let's hate them without holding back” (Kehinde AdesogaAdekusibe, @GideonAdekusibe).



The above posts were hate messages which identified Igbos as a domineering/ political intruders. Excerpt Text 1 showed that the poster who is also a public figure was of the opinion that Igbos should never interfere in Lagos politics. The X user’s hate message suggests that Igbos in Lagos should not free vote for candidates of their choice during the election period in Lagos but either vote the choice of the power brokers or leave to their various states. He believes that when Igbos who live in Lagos support candidates of their choice, it amounts to interference. Excerpt text 2 further gave credence to the above as the commenter noted that there was nothing wrong with the message in excerpt 1. The X user added that “there is a clear interference during the last election in Lagos by Igbos” the X user in except 3 simply suggested that all Igbos in Yoruba land should be killed. This is due to the fallout of both the presidential and the gubernatorial elections in Lagos particularly’. This message connotes explicit hate against Igbo people.

### Betrayers

**Excerpt Text 4:** "The same thing they did during the Igbo Coup 1966 "They killed all the prominent politicians in Northern Nigeria. They move to Southwest " Yoruba land " and kill Yoruba prominent politicians. While their own Igbo politicians were spared

They kill the North prime minister " is like assassinating a northern president "

They kill south-west prime minister " is like assassinating "Yoruba land prime minister "

They save the lives of all Igbo politicians

Kill others- save ours tactics and they still using it till today

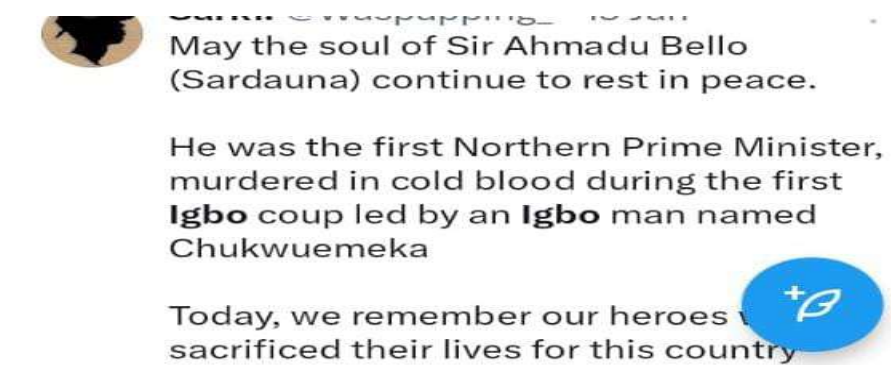
They will condemn other people politicians and side theirs "praise theirs "

Like I always said!! some of us see through their bullsh:t" (@NoNonsensezone)

**Excerpt Text 5:** 'If we are to carry out a massive revolution today in Nigeria that would require us erasing our politicians from face of the earth, the Igbos would somehow find a way to protect and preserve their own politicians while they motivate others to kill theirs'. (@Larry\_joko)

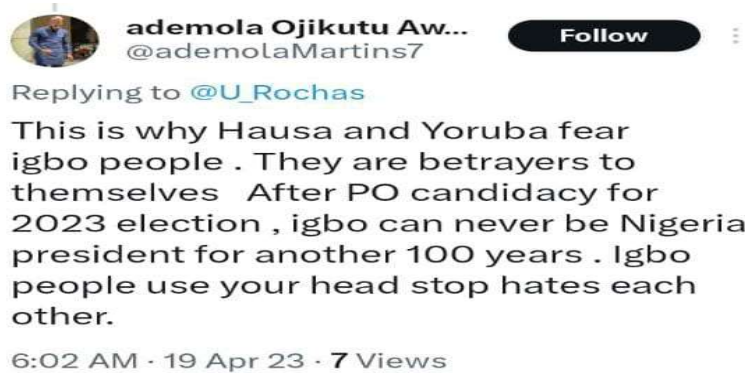


**Excerpt Text 6:** 'May the soul of Sir Ahmadu Bello (Sardauna) continue to rest in peace. He was the first Northern prime Minister murdered in cold blood during the first Igbo coup led by an Igbo man named Chukwuemeka. Today, we remember our heroes who sacrificed their lives for this country' (Sarki, @Wassapping)





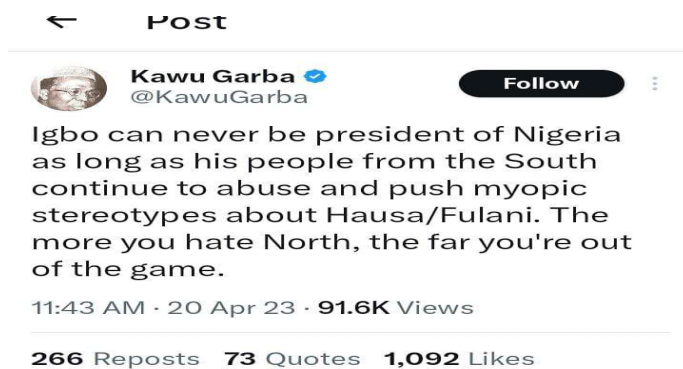
**Excerpt Text 7:** This is why Hausa and Yoruba fear Igbo people. They are betrayers to themselves after PO candidacy for 2023 election, Igbo can never be Nigeria president for another 100 years. Igbo people use your head stop hates each other (@AdemolaMartins7).



The above category of hate messages framed Igbos to be betrayers who have been involved in betraying other regions of the country. Igbos were said to be the sole master minds of the 1966 coup that saw the killing of prominent Nigerians from the North and West. It suggested that if there were to be a revolution that required the masses to kill all prominent politicians in the country, Igbos would have shielded their leaders while motivating other regions to kill theirs. The third excerpt text suggested that ‘Hausa and Yoruba fear Igbos because they are betrayers even to themselves’. These messages therefore revealed that X users of other regions in Nigeria consider Igbos as betrayers.

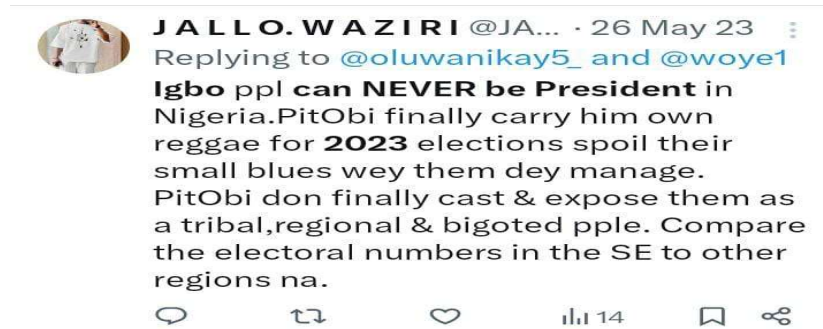
**Igbo man can never be President**

**Excerpt Text 8:** “Igbo can never be president of Nigeria as long as his people from the south continue to abuse and push myopic stereotypes about Hausa/Fulani. The more you hate north, the far you’re out of the game” (Kawu Garba)



**ExcerptText 9:** “Igbo ppl can NEVER be President in Nigeria. pitObi finally carry him own reggae for 2023 elections spoil their small blues wey them dey manage. PitObi don finally cast & expose them as a tribal, regional & bigoted pple. Compare the electoral numbers in the SE to other regions na” (JALLO. WAZIRI)





**Excerpt Text 10:** “When Tinubu is done with his Eight years, we’ll move back to the North and support Elrufai. Obidients will cry blood, that Igbo president Peter Obi will never be president of Nigeria, he can be the President of Biafra” (Duke of Africa).



The last category of hate for the Igbos after the 2023 election is that they can never produce a Nigeria president. Excerpt on text 8 showed a poster saying that Igbos were never going to be president ‘as long as the South continues to abuse the North’ this text connotes that Igbos will continue to bear the consequences of whatever differences that exist between the North and South irrespective of the fact that there are other ethnic nationalities in the south. The X user’s post on excerpt text 9 even showed Peter Obi’s attempt to contest against candidates from the southwest and the north has further slowed the chances of the Igbos to rule Nigeria. The poster also infers that Igbos voting for Peter Obi shows that they are tribalistic and bigoted. Excerpt text 10 showed the X user referring to Peter Obi’s supporters as those that will cry blood: “Obidients” will cry blood that Igbo president Peter Obi will never be President in Nigeria” ‘He can be the president of Biafra’. This message connotes a mockery to the Igbo people on the failed Biafra republic that led to the civil war.

### Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study reveal that hate messages are targeted against the Igbo people of Nigeria. From the hate messages analysed, Igbos were framed as betrayers, political intruders, subservient, people deserving of mass killing, and those never to be given the opportunity of leadership in Nigeria. By the findings, it is accurate to say that there is a high degree of hate manifested against the Igbo people in Nigeria.

Also, the researchers found that hate messages against Igbos continuously strain on the unity of Nigeria as each election season impacts the unity of the country negatively. The researchers also found that hate messages against the Igbos emanate from both prominent Nigerians and ordinary citizens. This is very disturbing especially when well-educated people spread hate messages against a particular ethnic group. Obviously, X was highly used to spread hate messages in 2023 post-election Nigeria. This is as Alakali, et al. (2017) cited in Asemah et al. (2022) noted that, most social media users lack the understanding that there are legal consequences for hate messages. The findings of this study agree with the study of Nwozor, et al. (2022), who found that “hate speech in the social media is capable of jeopardizing the unity of the country if not checked.” It is also important to note that the findings of this study contradict the basic prescriptions of the social responsibility theory that insist on self-regulation among media users (including social media). Nigerians of all works must refrain from hate messages if the country must make any meaningful progress in her democracy.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Hate Messages are dangerous and can set a country ablaze if left unchecked. From the findings of this study, the researchers conclude that there are high degree of hate messages targeted against the Igbos in Nigeria on X (formerly Twitter). They are also framed up and tagged with so many unhealthy stereotypes. This situation is further creating division among the various ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria. It is also delicate as it has got to the point of threat life and right to peaceful coexisting. The researchers therefore recommend that:

1. X (formerly Twitter) should activate punitive measures against posters of hate messages to deter those who may want to take that path.
2. Government agencies should be decisive in the application of laws that are against hate speech in Nigeria.
3. Nigerian government should initiate policies and programmes that will promote unity, respect for all ethnicity and fairness.

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