

Original Article

HATE SPEECH AND NATIONAL SECURITY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY OF ETHNOPOLITICAL RHETORIC ON NIGERIAN TWITTER (2019–2025)

Amadi, Cletus Okechukwu (Ph.D) and Samuel Harrison

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18671040>

Abstract: This study examines the relationship between hate speech and national security through a Critical Discourse Analysis of ethnopolitical rhetoric on Nigerian Twitter between 2019 and 2025. Anchored on Critical Discourse Analysis and Securitisation Theory, the study conceptualises online hate speech as both a linguistic practice embedded in power relations and a political mechanism through which social issues are framed as existential threats. Drawing on a qualitatively constructed Twitter corpus covering elections, mass protests, separatist agitations, and periods of national unrest, the study analyses how ethnoreligious identities are discursively mobilised in digital political communication. Using purposive sampling and thematic discourse coding, the analysis reveals recurring strategies of othering, collective blame, historical grievance mobilisation, and threat construction that normalise hostility and legitimise exclusion. The findings demonstrate that hate speech on Nigerian Twitter is not incidental but patterned and amplified by platform affordances, elite participation, and securitising narratives that transform political disagreement into identity-based antagonism. The study concludes that ethnopolitical hate speech on social media has significant implications for national cohesion, democratic dialogue, and security governance in Nigeria, and it calls for discourse-sensitive regulation, context-aware platform moderation, and sustained civic media literacy as key interventions.

Keywords: Hate speech; National security; Critical discourse analysis; Ethnopolitical rhetoric; Nigerian Twitter

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria’s digital public sphere has become one of the most contested sites of political meaning-making in contemporary Africa. With the expansion of social media platforms, particularly Twitter (now X), political communication has increasingly migrated from traditional institutional spaces to algorithm-driven arenas where speed, affect, and visibility define influence. Between 2019 and 2025, Nigeria experienced repeated cycles of elections, mass protests, separatist agitations, and security crises, all of which were accompanied by intense online

Original Article

discursive struggles. In these moments, language did not merely describe political realities but actively produced antagonisms, identities, and threats. Hate speech, embedded within ethno-political rhetoric, emerged as a powerful discursive weapon shaping perceptions of belonging and exclusion.

Hate speech in Nigeria cannot be understood outside the country's complex ethno-religious composition and colonial history. The Nigerian state is marked by deep-seated ethnic pluralism and religious bifurcation, conditions that have historically been mobilised by political elites for strategic gain. Contemporary digital platforms amplify these fault lines by enabling the rapid circulation of exclusionary narratives framed as freedom of expression or political resistance. As Chigbu, Aboh, and Ganaah (2025) argue, Nigeria's hostile ethno-political climate has normalized religious othering, particularly during electoral contests where symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them" are discursively hardened. Twitter thus functions not only as a communicative tool but as a battleground where ethno-religious identities are linguistically weaponised.

The period under study witnessed landmark political events that intensified online hostility. The #EndSARS protests of 2020, the 2023 general elections, and ongoing separatist agitations generated unprecedented volumes of political discourse on Nigerian Twitter. While these moments reflected legitimate grievances and democratic participation, they also produced waves of inflammatory speech targeting ethnic, religious, and regional groups. Disinformation and propaganda often masqueraded as activism, blurring the line between political critique and collective vilification. According to Idiong, Ekong, and William (2025), emotive framing in Nigeria's digital discourse has become central to ethno-political propaganda, especially during moments of national uncertainty.

From a national security perspective, the implications of online hate speech are profound. Digital rhetoric does not remain confined to the virtual space; rather, it frequently spills into offline mobilization, violence, and policy responses. Studies on security politics in Africa demonstrate how rhetorically charged online narratives are used to coordinate protests, escalate tensions, and justify coercive state actions (Saaka & Saaka, 2025). In Nigeria, inflammatory tweets have been linked to communal clashes, electoral violence, and intensified distrust in state institutions. Hate speech thus operates as a discursive precursor to insecurity, shaping how groups interpret threats and respond to perceived enemies.

Ethno-political rhetoric on Nigerian Twitter often relies on historical grievances and collective memory. Narratives of marginalisation, domination, and betrayal are reactivated through language that frames entire groups as existential threats. Ejiofor's (2025) analysis of Biafran separatist discourse reveals how anti-Fulani and anti-Muslim rhetoric is strategically deployed to legitimise claims for self-determination. Such discourse draws on affective language that transforms political demands into moral imperatives, thereby intensifying polarisation. These patterns underscore the need to examine hate speech not merely as offensive language but as a structured discursive practice with political intent.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an effective framework for questioning these lingering processes. CDA prefigures the correlation between language, power, and ideology, which is why it is especially appropriate to the research of hate speech in politically unstable situations. Twitter users make social actors either legitimate citizens or dangerous people through discursive practices, including nomination, predication, and intensification. The rhetoric of elites and the media, as pointed out by Young and Zhou (2025), is instrumental in making acts of hostility normal, particularly in societies with intergroup conflict. The use of CDA in the analysis of Nigerian

Original Article

Twitter discourse enables a systematic study of the reproduction of structural inequalities and security fears through linguistic choices.

The case of the Nigerians is also indicative of the more general tendencies of hate digitalisation. Comparative research of Ethiopia, Myanmar, and the Rohingya diaspora exposes the same patterns as the communication of hating rhetorical malware, which creates the embedding of hatred in the daily interaction of communicative practices, is facilitated by social media (Messele and Ayalew, 2025; Aziz, 2024). These studies emphasize the fact that platform governance is failing, which enables the thriving of hate speech, especially in weak political contexts. The history of Nigeria follows this universal trend, but it has its own peculiarities, because of the peculiar combination of colonial traditions, federal politics, and pluralism of religions.

Elections are one of the most unstable situations of ethnopolitical discourse. The techniques of populism common in campaign rhetoric usually lead to a zero-sum game of political competition between incompatible identities. Studies of autocratizing populism reveal that exclusionary rhetoric is especially increased following defeat in elections to attract a following and discredit adversaries (Akkoyunlu & Sarfati, 2025). Such mechanisms can be observed in the Twitter debate in Nigeria, which has taken the form of ethnic conspiracy and not democratic elections. These accounts destroy the legitimacy of elections and help to cause post-election hostility.

There is a leading role of religious identity in hate speech among Nigerians particularly in online political communication. The necessity of religious othering in the electoral discourse is illustrated by Chigbu et al. (2025) who state that the principle strengthens intolerance and increases social fragmentation. Twitter hashtags and viral postings tend to use religiosity as a way to portray political rivals as morally corrupt or Godless. Such sacralisation of politics enhances emotional reactions and diminishes the chance of a conversation. This merging of religious words and ethnopolitical words therefore comes as a great challenge to the national unity.

The issues of hate speech are also complicated by the spread of disinformation. False or misrepresentative narratives will often be incorporated in emotionally charged wording that is geared towards certain groups. Digital propaganda in Nigeria, as Idiong et al. (2025) argue, thrives on the ambiguity of the situation, enabling hate speech to get away with no moderation but still stay persuasive. The algorithmic amplification of content by Twitter puts content that is sensationalist and divisive above factual content, allowing it to reach vast audiences. This dynamic poses some important questions concerning platform responsibility and the regulation by the state. As a matter of governance, the control of hate speech is at the point between security and civil liberties. Unregulated hate speech is dangerous to the stability of the nation, but too much regulation will result in stifled dissent. According to Hersi (2025), this dilemma is placed in a greater crisis of global democratic legitimacy whereby states do not know how to balance freedom of expression with social protection. The history of social media regulation in Nigeria has resulted in negative publicity, and this underscores the conflict in social media regulation and the issue of democracy. The discursiveness of hate speech as such must be understood in order to formulate policy responses in a more nuanced manner.

The communicative nature of the conflict rhetoric also helps to understand how hate speech operates under larger frames of violence and resistance. Routledge Handbook of Conflict and Peace Communication underlines that hate speech tends to be accompanied by mis- and disinformation, protest communication, and identity politics (Connaughton and Pukallus, 2025). Twitter is one of the platforms in Nigeria where protest accounts are placed

Original Article

alongside exclusion or revenge demands. This co-existence makes it difficult to simplify the concept of activism and hate and the issue should be carefully examined in discourse.

This paper identifies hate speech as an action of political expression and not a language misappropriation. With the Nigerian Twitter being the object of interest in 2019-2025, it is almost a capture of the time of digital political engagement, which is crisis-driven and transformative. The ethnopolitical rhetoric is forecasted in the analysis as the way of forming threats, legitimising violence, and transforming national imaginaries. The paper questions the language processes, which bridge online speech and offline insecurity, through a critical discourse approach.

In the end, the study can add to interdisciplinary debates in the intersection of linguistics, political communication, and security studies. Through the analysis of hate speech as speech embedded in the ethnopolitical conflicts of Nigeria, one can track it beyond the descriptive accounts to the following power relations. The paper highlights the dire need to deal with digital hate as more than a social vice but also as a national security issue. By so doing it brings out the key role that language plays in defining the digital age political future of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis and Securitisation Theory within the framework of hate speech and ethnopolitical rhetoric analysis on Nigerian Twitter are seen as complementary concepts to this research. In combination, these theories contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which language is simultaneously a place where ideological struggle happens and a process of constructing security threats. Whereas Critical Discourse Analysis predetermines the linguistic and semiotic forms according to which power and domination are replicated, Securitisation Theory gives us an answer to the way specific discourses turn social problems into existential ones. A combination of these frameworks makes it possible to conduct a multidimensional analysis of online hate speech as a discourse and a political action. This is a theoretical fit especially to the digitally mediated ethnopolitical conflicts in Nigeria.

Critical Discourse Analysis conceptualises discourse as a social practice, which reflects as well as constructs power relations in society. It is interesting in the reproduction of ideological positions via linguistic options like lexical selection, Metaphors, presuppositions, and intertextual references. The discourse used in the ethnopolitical context of Nigeria is often seen as a means of forming in-groups and out-groups based on ethnicity and religion. As Chigbu, Aboh, and Ganaah (2025) show, religious othering in Nigerian political discourse makes intolerance normal by framing it repeatedly. CDA thus gives the means of analysis to reveal how hate speech on Twitter justifies exclusion and perpetuates structural inequalities.

In the digital environment, CDA closely follows the impact that platform affordances have on discursive practices. The conciseness, virality, and amplification of Twitter posts promote the use of emotionally charged and polarising responses. These characteristics increase the spread of simplified discourses that engage complex political realities in hostile dichotomies. According to Idiong, Ekong, and William (2025), emotive framing and ambiguity have aided the flourishing of digital propaganda in Nigeria such that hate speeches are used in disguise as political expression. The systematic de-packaged approach to these rhetorical strategies is made possible by CDA to see how meaning is being framed and naturalized through repetition and visibility.

The applicability of CDA to intergroup violence can also be enhanced with the help of studies on ethnopolitical conflict. According to Young and Zhou (2025), elite rhetoric and mediated discourse have a critical role to play

Original Article

when it comes to the process of aggravating or de-escalating intergroup tensions. The politics of Nigeria and the Twitter followers possessing power are in many cases represented by political actors and discussed by people and influential Twitter users whose language has the symbolic power. Nomination and predication represent strategies that enable the representation of whole communities as a threat, an opponent, or a factor hindering national development. CDA therefore enables the given study to track the manner in which such representations are circulated and legitimized in the digital public.

Although CDA is the theory that explains the linguistic production and reproduction of hate speech, it is the Securitisation Theory that explains the political implications of hate speech. Securitisation Theory explains that when a problem is discursively constructed as an existential threat, which may only be met by extraordinary means, such issues become security concerns. The key aspect of this process is language because security is not a state of affairs but a socially constructed reality. The article by Saaka and Saaka (2025) demonstrates how rhetorically loaded accounts related to Africa are employed to justify security interventions and legislation. Online ethnopolitical discourse in the Nigerian case often presents some groups as a threat to the existence of the country.

Securitisation is particularly eminent at the time of political crises like elections, protests as well as separatist movements. Ejiofor (2025) discusses the use of anti-ethnic and anti-religious rhetoric in the separatist discourse in Nigeria to justify political demands and build up support. On Twitter, parallel stories are being constructed that the political opposition or ethnic minority constitutes a source of threat to the security of the state, thus beckoning state espionage or persecution. Akkoyunlu and Sarfati (2025) go on further to show that exclusionary rhetoric is a rhetorical strategy that is often stepped up following election losses to counter political losses. Securitisation Theory is used to explain how hate speech can lead to the intensification through the transformation of political rivalry into survival.

This paper will give a comprehensive framework of hate speech on the Nigerian Twitter by combining Critical Discourse Analysis with the Securitisation Theory. The disclosures of CDA reveal the micro-processes of language to construct ethnopolitical hostility, whereas the discourse can be transformed into security narratives at the macro level as the Securitisation Theory. This interdisciplinary approach recognizes hate speech as a material and discursive practice. It will eventually facilitate a better insight into how online language activities are intertwined with national security in Nigeria in its loose ethnopolitical environment.

Empirical Review

The existing empirical research materials on hate speech and ethnopolitical speech in Nigeria have repeatedly shown that the issue of political communication is highly intertwined with the process of religious and ethnic identity formation. The discourse-based analysis of the electoral language in Nigeria presented by Chigbu, Aboh, and Ganaah (2025) reveals how the normalised othering and religious othering are mediated using campaigning and debates. Their results demonstrate that political actors habitually employ religious identity as a source of legitimacy and moral superiority thus creating the image of those who challenge them as a danger to the shared values. This discursive trend gets even more intense in election periods, as power rivalry intensifies the influence of exclusionary discourses. The research provides a factual foundation on the issue of hate speech and proves that hate speech is not accidental but systemic in the political language of Nigeria. The two works are concerned with hate speech in the ethno-political arena in Nigeria and they take a discourse-based perspective to examine how

Original Article

language builds exclusion, othering, and political hostility especially during elections. Although the main focus of Chigbu et al. (2025) will be on the electoral discourse and religious tolerance, the present research will also explore the role of protests, national unrest, and security concerns of ethno-political rhetoric on Nigerian Twitter in the year 2019 up to 2025.

In addition to the roles in the electoral context, researchers have also studied the role of digital spaces in the propagation of ethno-political propaganda. Idiong, Ekong, and William (2025) examine the digital ecosystem in Nigeria and show how it is common to consider disinformation and hate speech in the context of digital democracy and free speech. Their analysis reveals that emotive framing and symbolic simplification are some of the major rhetorical tools that are employed to motivate online audiences. Such stories flourish especially in social media where there is a lack of control, and the virality is encouraged. The study supports this empirically, by confirming that hate speech online in Nigeria is more of a political persuasive tool rather than an expressive excess. These two papers explore the digital arena of Nigeria and the ways emotive words, propaganda, and hate speech are spread over the social networking sites to shape political behaviour. Idiong et al. (2025) address the issue of disinformation and propaganda in the digital environment in Nigeria in a broad way, whereas the present research focuses on the issues of ethno-political hate speech on Twitter and the role it plays in national security.

The scholarly focus has also been on separatist movements in terms of ethno-political rhetoric. The results of the empirical study of Biafran separatist discourse conducted by Ejiofor indicate that anti-Fulani and anti-Muslim rhetoric were tactfully employed to justify the demands of statehood (Ejiofor, 2025). The paper reveals the re-contextualisation of historical grievances into modern digital language by creating an impression of collective victimisation. Although this rhetoric is presented as resistance, it often tends to resemble hate speech tendencies that dehumanize the whole group of people. The results provided by Ejiofor highlight the fact that ethno-political discourse softens the line between political mobilisation and incitement. The two works examine the ethno-political rhetoric in Nigeria and how hate speech is deployed to energise the supporters, justify their political ambitions, and build threatening out-groups. Ejiofor (2025) focuses on the topic of separatist discourse and statehood claims, but the present paper uses an even more generalized perspective that embraces elections, protests, and national turmoil in the context of the Nigerian Twitter community.

The connection between disinformation, protest mobilisation, and security outcomes has been tested empirically outside Nigeria but with high applicability to the situation in Nigeria. Saaka and Saaka (2025) examine the rhetorical urgency of narratives, employed in African settings to organize disruptive protests and have an effect on the outcomes of legislative actions. They show that the discourse of security is becoming more and more influenced by digital discussion as opposed to material dangers. Such accounts provoke feelings of existential insecurity in fractured ethno-political settings. This is an empirical observation that online hate speech is a direct cause of national security issues. Both works associate digital discourse with the result of security and underline the role of rhetorically charged stories in creating instability and a sense of existential danger. Saaka and Saaka (2025) take the continental African view of security politics, whereas the present paper has an in-depth and Nigeria-specific discourse analysis of content on Twitter during a particular time.

The experience of populism in relation to ethno-political conflict is also explained by the comparative study. Akkoyunlu and Sarfati (2025) also review the case of Turkey and Israel and empirically demonstrate how exclusionary rhetoric is strengthened after an electoral loss to re-mobilise its supporters. Their conclusions

Original Article

emphasise the misuse of the identity-based narratives of legitimisation of the democratic institutions by the populist actors in order to legitimise the conflict. Even though the research is located outside Africa, it provides useful comparisons to the study of the politics of Nigeria. It objectively proves that ethno-political hate speech is a strategic reaction to political weakness, but not an unconditioned hostility. Both research efforts acknowledge hate speech and exclusionary rhetoric as tactical political elements that are employed to rally the followers and demolish the legitimacy of democracies. Akkoyunlu and Sarfati (2025) concentrate on comparative examples beyond Nigeria, whereas the present investigation is placed on the ethno-political realities of Nigeria and the Twitter-centered discourse. Broader empirical research on the decline of democracies places hate speech as a part of a global crisis of legitimacy. Hersi (2025) records the impact of apocalyptic and moralising rhetoric in political talk as indicators of more dysfunctional institutional structures and civil failure. The paper attributes ethno-political disintegration and colonial histories to modern practices of communication that undermine democracies. In this regard, hate speech is a symptom and a contributor to democratic erosion. In practical terms, the work supports the necessity to study hate speech as a broader issue of governing and security dilemma. Both works place hate speech in a larger context of questions of government, legitimacy, and national security. Hersi (2025) develops a global and theoretical approach to the decline of democracies, whereas the present paper provides an analysis of the Twitter information in Nigeria in terms of a discursive approach.

The empirical basis of this study is also enhanced by the global digital case studies. Messele and Ayalew (2025) also show that colonial discourses are reenacted with the help of social media discourse to condone systemic hate in Ethiopia, which they term rhetorical malware. On the same note, Aziz (2024) demonstrates how the inability of social media to pick up hate speech leads to stability in the online communities of the Rohingya diaspora. Young and Zhou (2025) scientifically determine that elite discourse and mediated discourse play a leading role in intergroup violence, as is the case with Nigerian interreligious riots. Taken together, the results of these studies demonstrate a regular empirical trend: hate speech on online sources acts as an ethno-political trigger, which is why it is important to conduct a discussion-oriented study of the Nigerian Twitter. Each of these works, similar to the present study, focuses on the contribution of digital discourse, elite rhetoric, and hate speech to the presence of ethno-political conflict and violence. Although these works consider various global and comparative settings, the given research concentrates on Nigerian Twitter and directly associates the ethno-political hate speech with the concept of national security in the 2019-2025 timeframe.

Methodology

The research design of this study is a qualitative study based on Critical Discourse Analysis, which aims to explore hate speech and ethno-political rhetoric on the Nigerian Twitter using the period of 2019-2025. The qualitative technique is suitable since the research aims at analyzing the construction of meanings, ideologies, and power in and through the language, and not to quantify frequency alone. The approach puts depth of interpretation and contextualisation of linguistic decisions at the forefront of its methodology by emphasising discourse. The research also incorporates the understanding of the securitisation theory to explain how online discourses construct particular groups or occurrences as existential threats. Such an approach to methodology allows for analyzing the connection between online discourse and national security in a sophisticated way.

The study design is an interpretive and discourse-based study, which relies on Critical Discourse Analysis as its main frame of analysis. The analysis of social media texts can be performed through CDA, specifically, due to

Original Article

the possibility of discussing not only micro-linguistic characteristics but also macro-social situations. Tweets are viewed as social texts that are integrated in the wider ethnopolitical context of Nigeria. The design identifies Twitter as a mixed mediated public space in which elite players, activists, and everyday users communicate and create political discourses. In this way, the study can relate the personal linguistic decisions to the large-scale trends of power, identity, and security.

This study uses the tweets about ethnopolitical events and discussions in Nigeria between 2019 and 2025. The reason behind this period is that it covers several turbulent situations such as general elections, mass protests, separatist agitations, and increased security crises. The collection of tweets was carried out using the prominent hashtags, keywords, and events that were related to ethnoreligious identity, national cohesion, elections, demonstrations, and security challenges. The corpus consists of original tweets, retweets with comments, and reply tweets to ensure that interactional processes have been captured. Tweets that were publicly available only were taken into consideration so that the ethics could be adhered to.

To achieve this, the purposive sampling method was used to choose tweets that fulfilled the research goals the most. The purposive sample method enables researchers to limit themselves to those texts that specifically reference ethnopolitical, hate speech, or language of securitising. Out of the greater volume, the tweets were filtered using their relevance to ethnicity, religion, national security, and political conflict. Tweets with high engagement were given priority as they have a higher chance of influencing the people in discourse. The sampling was done until discursive saturation was reached, i.e. there were no more new analytical insights gained on the tweets.

Twitter's advanced search and archival tools which enable access to historical tweets within the given period were used in data collection. The search terms were ethnoreligious identifiers, political actors, protest-related words, and security keywords used in the Nigerian discourse. Textual and screenshot copies of tweets were put away in order to save original content, including spelling, emojis, and hashtags. The metadata date, engagement metrics, and verification status of the user were also pointed out where applicable. The methodology guaranteed the quality and traceability of data.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic and discourse-based coding process based on Critical Discourse Analysis. The first open coding was performed to determine common linguistic themes, such as othering, demonisation, the construction of victimhood, and the construction of threats. These codes were further categorised into broad analytical groupings that included ethnic labelling, religious stereotyping, historical grievance mobilisation, and securitising moves. Lexical options, metaphors, pronouns and modality, and intertextual references were given attention. This graded coding procedure allowed performing a systematic study of the linguistic means with which hate speech is formed and disseminated.

The ultimate coding scheme comprised the main discursive categories that applied to ethnopolitical hate speech and national security. These were nomination strategies that name social actors, predication strategies that attribute values to groups, and argumentation strategies that legitimize hostility or exclusion. The markers of securitisation like urgency, existential threat, and calls to exceptional action were also coded. The visual cues, emojis, and hashtags were examined as the meaning-making process. This broad structure enabled the research to take into account both explicit and implicit hate speech.

Original Article

The research process focused on ethical aspects. Though the study was based on publicly available tweets, anonymisation of user identities was done as required. Direct quotations were applied for analytical purposes but not to attack individuals. Responsible management of sensitive content was done to prevent reproduction of harm. The paper is written in accordance with the existing ethical standards of social media studies, and it is aware of possible dangers related to the examination of politically charged texts.

Coding decisions based on well-defined categories were used to improve the reliability of the analytical process, and they were based on the established CDA scholarship. The analysis was conducted in a way that ensured that reflexivity was upheld to reduce bias in the researcher. The credibility of the findings is enhanced by the transparency of the data selection and codes. Although qualitative, the methodological rigour used in the research designates that interpretations can be made using the data that has been analysed systematically. Such a strategy gives a credible explanation of the work of hate speech and ethno-political rhetoric on Nigerian Twitter.

Analysis

The review of the discourse of Nigerian Twitter in 2019-2025 shows that hate speech is not produced randomly but organized systematically and based on repetitive linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Throughout the tweets sampled in the process of elections, protests, and times of national instability, it can be seen that ethno-political identities are always front-loaded as the main prism through which political events are viewed. Ethnic and religious classification is often based on users in order to classify political actors and social groupings as a way of simplifying complex political realities into simplified identity binaries. This trend represents a wider discursive trend of conceptualizing national problems as a conflict between opposing ethno-religious blocs, and not as a civic or institutional problem.

A single prevailing trend that can be observed in the data is the employment of nomination strategies explicitly referring to ethnic or religious groups as political agents or dangers. The tweets tend to generalize individual political actors into the collective identities of the Fulani agenda, the Muslim North, or the Christian South, and impose individual actions and activities on the whole community. This linguistic action eliminates within-group diversity and means the collective blame. These kinds of tweets usually have tremendous engagement, implying that collective labelling is very appealing to online users. The statistics show that nomination serves as the supporting strategy, which normalizes and legitimizes hate speech.

Nomination closely intersects with the strategy of predication, via which negative predicates are predicated to named categories. It is analyzed that evaluative adjectives and metaphors are frequently used in which some ethnic or religious group is described as violent, deceitful, backward, or just dangerous. Protecting a certain area during the time of protests, particularly the EndSARS movement and its aftermath, tweets presented specific regions as opponents of the state progress or supporters of state violence. Through these representations, moral hierarchies are created where certain groups are the victims and others are continual aggressors. The similarity of those descriptors in several tweets proves the reproduction and stabilisation of stereotypes in the digital discourse.

The data also indicate the pivotal role of the historical grievance accounts in the justification of the aggressive speech. Tweets tend to rely on selective historical appeals such as colonial marginalisation, memories of civil war, or perceived post-independence domination, to ground current-day aggression. Such sources are hardly put into the context but are rather summarised into the emotionally loaded slogans and hashtags. Users justify hate

Original Article

speech by using the historical context as a kind of resistance justified as opposed to discrimination. Such a discursive approach is also consistent with the data showing that ethno-political rhetoric often reinstates collective memory to escalate conflict in the present day.

The securitisation processes can be followed especially on tweets that present ethno-political groups as existential threats to national survival. Such linguistic indicators of urgency as this country cannot survive them, we are under attack, and Nigeria is finished are recurrent expressions in times of crisis. These words create a story of imminent threat that requires extraordinary action. In other cases, tweets directly request exclusion or expulsion and violence as a survival measure. The information, therefore, reveals the way hate speech transcends to be represented to serve as a call to securitised action.

Hashtags are instrumental in boosting securitising discourses. This analysis demonstrates that identity markers coupled with crisis language in hashtags serve to act as a unifying sentiment in a group. When these hashtags go trending they trigger more tweets which replicate similar frames, cementing discursive cohesion. This forms a sort of echo chamber where other readings are relegated. These hashtags have become visible, which shows that platform affordances are part of the rise of ethno-political hostility.

Another important trend that is revealed in the data is the influence of influential users in the legitimisation of hate speech. Verified accounts, political commentators, or activist tweets are also frequently used as discursive anchors by others to repeat or paraphrase them. Although hate speech may be implicit and not explicit, it is still symbolically empowered by its utterance by perceived elites. Responses and quote tweets often use more direct ethno-religious invocation and make the original more inflammatory. This form of interaction depicts how hate speech is actively built in Twitter networks.

Also, in the analysis, it can be seen how the lines between the protest discourse and hate speech are becoming blurred. Although in most cases Twitter posts raise valid concerns with regard to state institutions, the concern is often shifted to ethno-religious groups instead of political setups. In particular, it can be said that the critique concerning the failure of the government is redefined as an ethnic domination or religious conspiracy. This is a change that turns civic opposition into hostility based on identity. The information, therefore, demonstrates that the discourse of protest rhetoric may be discursively captured to reenact ethno-political hostility.

Notably, the research concludes that hate speech on Nigerian Twitter is often justified as truth-telling or resistance. The hostile statements usually start with the users claiming themselves to be courageous, silence-breaking, or morally obligated. It is a rhetorical framing that protects speakers from accusations of bigotry by declaring hate speech as one of the necessary truths. This type of framing is consistent with the logic of securitisation whereby extraordinary language is based on extraordinary threats. The evidence shows clearly that hate speech is being discursively legitimised with the help of moral and political 2.

In sum, the discussion shows that ethno-political hate speech on Nigerian Twitter is carried out by means of a complex of linguistic strategies that build the identity, blame, and opinion on insecurity. The strategies do not exist as independent and isolated but instead support each other by repetition and amplification of platforms. According to the data, hate speech is a potent tool for defining political perception and justifying war. By identifying such trends, the analysis highlights the pivotal role of discourse in associating online communication with the national security issues in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Original Article

The paper has analysed hate speech and national security using critical discourse analysis of ethno-political rhetoric on the Nigerian Twitter during 2019-2025. The results indicate that hate speech on the Twitter of Nigerians is not occasional and distant but a discursive habitual practice that shapes ethnic and religious communities as both political actors in collectivity as well as existential threats in a few instances. Due to othering, historical grievance mobilisation, and securitisation, online discourse would turn political disagreement into hostility based on identity, especially during elections, protests, and times of national unrest. Such discursive actions enhance fear, legitimise exclusion, and undermine democratic dialogue which proves that digital hate speech has direct consequences to national cohesion and security.

Based on these findings, the study suggests an online hate speech is discourse-sensitive in the context of dealing with hate speech in Nigeria. Instead of acting towards dissenting views, policymakers and security organs ought to aim at guiding patterns of collective blame and threat construction and the social media platform ought to reinforce context-sensitive moderation that considers the ethno-political intricacies of Nigeria. There is also the need to run media literacy and civic education programmes so that users will have the ability to receive the political discourse in an analytical manner and resist the proliferation of inflammatory accounts. Politicians and those in charge should be answerable for their rhetoric on the Internet, particularly in critical political scenarios. The combination of these strategies will enhance safety against security threats of ethno-political hate speech, and keep the democratic expression of publicity alive on the digital landscape of Nigeria.

References

- Akkoyunlu, K., & Sarfati, Y. (2025). Blood gambit: How autocratizing populists fuel ethnic conflict to reverse election setbacks. *Democratization*.
- Aziz, A. (2024). Rohingya diaspora online: Mapping the spaces of visibility, resistance and transnational identity on social media. *New Media & Society*.
- Chigbu, G. U., Aboh, S. C., & Ganaah, J. (2025). Religious othering in Nigeria's electoral discourse: Towards a critical religious tolerance. *Discourse & Society*.
- Connaughton, S. L., & Pukallus, S. (2025). *The Routledge handbook of conflict and peace communication*. Routledge.
- Ejiofor, P. F. (2025). In pursuit of statehood: An exploration of the contentious repertoires of Biafran separatists in Nigeria. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*.
- Hersi, A. M. (2025). Democracy in decline: Institutional disruption, civic collapse, and the crisis of global legitimacy. *SSRN*.
- Idiong, N., Ekong, T., & William, U. (2025). Propaganda and disinformation in the digital age: The Nigerian experience. *Global Journal of Modern Studies*.

Original Article

Messele, D. Y., & Ayalew, Y. E. (2025). Colonial narratives and systemic hatred against the Amhara in Ethiopia. *African Identities*.

Saaka, S. S., & Saaka, S. A. (2025). Disinformation, security politics, and legislative outcomes in Africa. *Security Politics and Legislative Outcomes*.

Young, L. E., & Zhou, Y. Y. (2025). Intergroup conflict and violence. In *Handbook of innovations in political psychology*. Edward Elgar.