A CRITICAL STUDY OF HATE SPEECH CONSTRUCTS IN NIGERIA'S 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONEERING CAMPAIGN DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The paper focused on analysing underlying ethno-political ideologies in hate speeches produced and circulated in the media during the 2023 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. Using van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the study analysed the linguistic and ideological features of hate speeches produced by politicians of All Progressive Congress Party (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP). Data were purposively selected from fourteen newspaper publications and Twitter posts using purported samplying. The data comprised campaign speeches circulated on the websites of *Vanguard*, *Guardian*, *Tribune*, *Premium Times*, and posts circulated on some party loyalists' Twitter (now rebranded as X) handles. Data were collected from speeches circulated from September 28, 2022 to February 23, 2023. The period covers the inception of the 2023 general election campaigns to forty-eight (48) hours before the presidential election. The findings of the study showed, among others, that political candidates and their supporters employed ethno-political ideologies in the hate speeches to enact or resist power, supremacy, discrimination and marginalisation. The study recommends that Nigerian government and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should intensify voters' awareness on hate speeches deployed during election campaigns in the country as a way of mitigating the spread of dissension and ethnic intolerance fuelled by desperation during elections.

Key words: Cda, Election Campaigns, Hate Discourse, Ideology, Print and Digital Media

Introduction

Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multicultural nature sometimes poses a challenge to its national cohesion (Ejobowah, 2014). Since the country's return to democratic system of government in 1999, the media has gradually become a platform for citizens' engagement with political leaders. Ironically, this has also created the opportunity for citizens to disseminate discourses that exhibit characteristics of hate speech. However, the use of hate speech is not limited to ordinary citizens as the public discourse of Nigeria's political leaders has also been observed to reflect features of hate speech. This is particularly noticeable during political campaigns when politicians and their supporters deploy hate speeches to woo the electorate. The 2023 presidential election which took place in Nigeria was significant because, for the first time in the country's twenty-four years of democracy, a third political force emerged – the Labour Party (LP) – with its presidential flag bearer, Peter Obi to challenge the All Progressives Congress' (APC) and the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) hegemonic control of Nigeria's political space. The presidential election campaigns were therefore intense as the two dominant parties on the one hand exploited different media platforms to persuade the electorate to vote for them. On the other hand, the LP and, by extension, Obi's supporters popularly tagged as the *Obidients* deployed the media, particularly social media platforms, to attempt to wrestle power from the APC and PDP.

Against this background, it has been observed that the campaign discourse used by politicians and their supporters during this period reflected Nigerian citizens' predilection for aligning along regional and ethnic cleavages during campaigns (Oamen, 2018). It should be noted that the use of hate speeches during campaigns has been identified as a major cause of electoral violence in Nigeria. Nwozor *et al.* (2022) have posited that the use of hate speech in Nigeria's politics poses a threat to the country's already fragile national cohesion. In light of the foregone discussion, this paper critically examined ethno-political ideologies of hate speeches used by Nigerian politicians during the 2023

general election campaigns. This is intended to reveal the underlying ideological characteristics of Nigerian citizens' campaign discourse.

Thus, the objectives of the study are to:
1. identify the underlying ethno-political ideologies of in the selected hate speeches;
2. critically examine the linguistic resources deployed to express ideologies in the selected hate speeches;
3. examine the discursive strategies used in the selected hate speeches;

Ethnicity and Hate Speech

Ethnicity is defined as an aspect of social relationship between persons who consider themselves as essentially distinct from members of other groups who they are aware of and with whom they have some form of relationship (Eriksen, 2010). Ethnicity is a tool that people in society use as a means of solidarity. It could also be used by group members for identity constructions. People in multi-ethnic society usually look for ways to access opportunities for their ethnic group. In the process of attempting to have supremacy, members of a group may tend to impose their ideologies on people, in order to get whatever, they want from the society. This sometimes leads to ethnic rivalry and conflicts, which could also lead to violence. Cases of inter-ethnic violent contention for land and mineral resources in Nigeria include those of the Ijaw/Itshekiri crisis, 1997, Ife-Modakeke crisis, 1997, Berom/Fulani crisis in Jos, 2001, Lugunda/Waja in Adamawa state, 2023, among others. This study therefore is focused on investigating underlying ethnic sentiments that Nigerian politicians deploy during campaigns to project Self/in-group and opponents/out-group as (un)desirable.

According to Royzman *et al* (2005), hate is a tendency in humans to express emotion in different ways in situations involving the object of hatred. Hate may manifest as a result of fear, anger, injury or from certain information received. The United Nations (2019) defines hate speech as any kind of communication in speech, writing or

behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are. Weber (2009) describes hate speech as the speeches that insult, attack, or have undertones of threat to a person or group on the basis of their, nationality, colour, gender, identity, sexual orientation or disability. The similarity in these descriptions of hate speech is its tendency to create an intimidating environment that could incite people to violent reactions. This is corroborated by Ezeibe (2015) who observes that hate speech, in any way it is deployed in communication, could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Osaghae and Suberu, (2005) have attributed the divisive hate discourse that sometimes surfaces in Nigeria's public domain to its heterogeneous nature with regards to ethnicity and multiparty structure.

The emergence and growth of digital media has further aided the dissemination of hate speeches globally. Although, it must be pointed out that hate speeches are also propagated through the traditional media, its reach is limited when compared to the digital space. Digital media enables users to reach a large audience at the same time, and it has been used by various public office holders and politicians in Nigeria to show or gain large active followers who are sympathetic to their cause. For instance, Goodluck Jonathan, a former president of Nigeria, used the Facebook platform to create awareness on his presidential campaign bid in 2011. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party also made use of Twitter and other media platforms to grow a significant number of supporters during the 2023 presidential election campaigns. Nonetheless, the use of the digital platform for political engagements has drastically altered political communication and led to increased dissemination of hate speech, particularly during campaigns in Nigeria (Ejiga & Ede, 2024). Generally, the unregulated nature of the digital space has been attributed to the easy dissemination of hate speech and fake news in today's technologically driven world (De Morais, 2022).

Studies, including Okpara and Chukwu, (2019) on the implication of hate speech on Nigeria's national cohesion, Terfa, *et al*

(2017) on audience perception on hate speech in Nigeria, Ejiga and Ede (2024) survey on the use of hate speech on Facebook during the 2023 election campaigns and that of Ajayi and Kilani's (2024) study of the new nature of hate speech in Nigeria revealed the increasing use of hate discourse during campaigns in the country due to the affordances of the digital sphere. Their research however concentrated on descriptive and statistical approaches to data analysis. This current study focuses on a critical discourse analysis of ethno-political ideologies underlying hate speech used during 2023 election campaigns. It provides the opportunity to make clear opaque political discourse used by Nigerian politicians and their supporters during electioneering campaigns in the country.

The Media and Ideological Discourse

The media portrays the world and shapes reality. One of the purposes of the media is to inform. As the world is evolving, every sector is also changing. The conventional media has embraced technology and this has changed how it operates. The print media is no longer limited to publishing printed materials. Rather, it has also moved its activities to the online space where news can be accessed digitally. With digital media, information/news can be accessed at the speed of light via the Internet. This also implicates the idea that the print media and social media could be used to disseminate hate speech, particularly during campaigns. Perhaps, due to awareness of the power of the media to influence public perception on issues, newspaper editors in particular wield some form of checks on news contents that could be circulated through the print medium (Fondren, 2019). However, this is becoming challenged because today, online users could post comments on print media websites.

Social media platforms are even more accessible with regards to online users' synchronous and asynchronous activities. Nonetheless, some form of restrictive measures to counter the threat of the circulation of hateful contents have been put in place by different social media. For instance, YouTube frowns on the dissemination of any

video or contents that incites violence or hatred towards people. Facebook also removes content that encourages violence. Therefore, any post that is frightening and could promote offline violence is removed by Facebook. In addition, there is also an icon on every post shared on Facebook that enables a user to report if they have any issues with the post.

The Nigerian government has also made efforts to curb excesses in the use of the digital space for hate speech dissemination, due to its tendency to generate/escalate crisis. This led the Senate to introduce an anti-social media bill aimed at controlling social media usage in the country in 2019. However, elements of hate discourse sometimes still surface in the media particularly those circulated on the digital space during campaigns. It has been noted that some of the campaign discourses are imbued with biases, constraints, opinions and variable judgements of members of opposition parties and in some cases ethnic groups. Although, Brown and Yule (2003), define discourse as "language in use", Fairclough, (2001) posits that generally, discourse is a form of social practice. In other words, it is conditioned by non-linguistic aspects of society, rather than being a neutral reflection of society, social identities and relations. Following Fairclough's view, the critical approach to the analysis of discourse was considered useful for this study of hate speeches produced and circulated during campaigns in Nigeria's multi-ethnic domain.

Review of Relevant Literature

Ezeibe (2015) and Fasakin *et al* (2017) are studies which investigated the link between hate speech and election violence in Nigeria. Ezeibe specifically examined the effects of provocative media campaign discourse which were circulated between 2010 and 2015 on pre, during and post-election violence in the country. Data for the study were drawn from interview conducted for thirty (30) interviewees who comprised religious leaders, youth leaders, traditional leaders and civil society groups selected from the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The study specifically identified political leaders and ethnic/regional

supporters as the perpetrators of hate speeches during campaigns in the country. In addition, the author posited that hate speeches had become a political campaign strategy deployed by politicians and their supporters to garner support at the ethnic and regional levels of Nigeria. Similarly, Fasakin *et al* (2017) is a study that focused on the use of hate speech by Nigerian politicians in television political campaigns. Drawing on social responsibility theory, the study analysed hate speeches disseminated in the media during the 2015 election campaigns and recommended that stringent measures should be taken against political actors who circulate hate speech during campaigns in Nigeria. Rasaq *et al.* (2017) and Akinsanya (2024) adopted the critical approach to the study of hate speech deployed in newspapers during campaigns. The former study employed van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to the analysis of data while the latter used van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Wodak's discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis. CDA was adopted to unveil opaque positive/negative constructions of the in-group/out-group schemata and expressions of inequality among citizens in hate speeches. The findings from both studies showed that hate speeches circulated by Nigerians in the media reflect ethnic, religious and political colourations and are capable of worsening inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts in the country. The findings of Rasaq *et al*'s and Akinsanya's studies are significant particularly when viewed against Windisch *et al.* (2022) observation that hate speeches circulated in media space tend to create a sense of normalcy about hatred in intergroup relations.

Against this background, this paper focuses on a critical discourse analysis of hate speech used by political actors in the media. The point of departure from Rasaq *et al* (2017) and Akinsanya (2024) is that the study applied van Dijk's (2001) socio-cognitive approach to CDA to the unveiling of ethno-political ideological underpinning of hate speeches circulated during 2023 presidential election campaigns. Van Dijk posits that the shared perception of group members

influences their shaping of others and relations in text produced in different social contexts.

Methodology

   The study employed the qualitative method of critical discourse analysis of hate speech. The analysis focused on ethno-political ideologies that suggest underlying hate expressed through campaign speeches circulated during the 2023 electoral campaigns in Nigeria. In this regard, discursive strategies such as (de)legitimisation, criminalisation, negative framing of the opponent and ethnic argumentation were examined to reveal how they projected Self/ethnic group as powerful and the opponents as insignificant. The data were purposively drawn from the websites of Nigeria's newspapers: The *Vanguard*, *Guardian*, *Tribune*, *Premium Times* and Twitter social media platform. The purposive sampling method adopted helped to limit data to only the ones that reflected politicians' use of ethnic ideologies in hate speech to represent self positively and others negatively. The samples include fourteen (14) speeches (eight from print media and six from Twitter) circulated from September 28th, 2022 to February 23rd, 2023. This period is significant because it spans the beginning of the 2023 general election campaigns to forty-eight (48) hours before the presidential election.

   In addition, the choice of print media and Twitter helped to investigate the campaign speeches delivered by presidential candidates at rallies on the one hand, and the posts of significant supporters of the candidates circulated on their Twitter handles. The speeches include those of candidates from the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) and some of their supporters. The parties were considered to represent incumbency, major opposition and the third political force. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA, specifically, his notion of ideological square, was employed for the qualitative analysis. For ease of analysis, the data samples were labelled extract 1, 2, 3, etc.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis focused on identification and explanation of the linguistic resources deployed, to express ethnic and political ideologies in the hate speeches circulated on traditional and social media platforms during the 2023 presidential campaigns. In addition, it analysed the strategies employed in the discourse to achieve inclusive/exclusive relations among Nigerian politicians in particular and the citizens in general. Furthermore, the analysis focused on the interpretation of the underlying ideologies of the speeches. Finally, the data analysis examined the influence of the socio-political contexts of production on the hate speeches produced by Nigerian politicians and their supporters during the campaign.

Ethnocentric Ideology of Political Power

The form of persuasive discourse deployed by some of the presidential candidates and their supporters during the 2023 presidential campaigns demonstrated how Nigerian politicians use ethnic arguments to entrench the image of group's right to sustain hegemonic control of political power. To achieve this, politicians deployed the force of logic to validate their argument of ethnic descent as candidates'/parties' right to power. Some of the fragments presented below demonstrate how politicians employed linguistic resources of pronominal, metaphor, Nigerian Pidgin English, labelling among others to project ethnicity as the basis for hegemonic control of power in Nigeria's democratic domain.

Extract 1

"Then when you look at it in terms of well, do – me – I – do - you, rub my back and I rub yours, **the North has rubbed more backs than its back has been rubbed**. Even if you are talking about the years in power from 1999 till date, **Obasanjo** did eight years; **Jonathan** six that is 14; **Umaru** two, and now Buhari eight years. So, I am being owed, even in the number of years, four years. Ango Abdullahi, (16th February, 2023), www.theguardian.com

Extract 2

The PDP has a Presidential candidate who not only **betrays** the calls of **the South** in his party, he also **insisted** on not just being the Presidential candidate, but also **insisted** on having a national chairman from **the North** and a DG presidential campaign from the North. That is the PDP of today, **not the national party** of before **but a regional party**, that simply wants to serve the interest of one part of the country at the expense of another. @Femi-Fani Kayode (10th January, 2023)

Extract 1 is a persuasive speech produced to explain why a Northern candidate deserved to be elected as president in the election. Ango Abdullahi, a northern political leader, employed the Nigerian English pidgin (NPE): "Do — me — I - do — you" and the metaphor "rub my back and I rub yours" to depict the agreement of power rotation among the three major ethnic groups in PDP with regards to who gets elected as the president. The metaphor of physical health: "the North has rubbed more backs than its back has been rubbed" projects the northern politicians, and by extension, the region as victims in the agreement of who is nominated as the presidential candidate in PDP. Ango Abdullahi's metaphoric assertion of the north being owed is therefore meant to strategically represent northern politicians as dominated rather than being the oppressor. Therefore, extract 1 positioned the northern region as the victim in an unequal political power relation with the south. The argument, which is supported with the use of number: 8, 6, 14, tacitly contradicted the idea of northern domination of Nigerian politics (Eze, 2022), and justified Atiku's ambition to be elected into the office of the president.

Argument of ethnicity is also projected by Kayode Fayemi, a south western politician in extract 2 to frame Atiku Abubakar as greedy and self - centred. Linguistic resources of adjective "greed"; nouns such as insensitivity, covetousness and verbs such as destroying and lie are deployed to frame Atiku as a presidential candidate who disregarded his party's constitution of zoning the presidency to the south due to self-interest. The PDP grappled with the internal challenge of zoning during the campaigns for the party's primaries. Party members from the south

argued that Atiku's insistence on being the party's flag bearer was a threat to the agreement on power rotation which was designed to maintain unequal power sharing between the north and the south. Discourse in form of character assassination was thus circulated during the campaign to represent Atiku as a domineering northern politician.

Extract 3

Tinubu thinks like **MKO Abiola,** he has acceptability in the North and that would win him election, but Tinubu forgets that Abiola never said" **I don't believe in one Nigeria**". And Abiola has no record of **intimidating Northerners using OPC**. #IwillnotvoteBAT. Twitter (@Abdul-Aziz Naibi Abubakar, 22nd January, 2023)

Extract 4

MKO Abiola **extended** his political base to Northern Nigeria, but Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu is **a regional dictator**. Prince Muhammed Kadaade, February 13th, 2023, tribuneonlineng.com.

Extracts 3 and 4 reflect the influence of ethnocentric ideology on the delegitimisation of opponents. In the extracts, Tinubu, the APC presidential candidate, was presented as despotic and undemocratic in a discourse that centred on an interethnic political power relationship. Tinubu was juxtaposed with the late Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola (MKO), the acclaimed winner of the 1993 presidential election in Nigeria. The linguistic resource of naming and history were exploited to allocate the blame of Tinubu's rejection as a presidential candidate by northern politicians on his character traits rather than his ethnic descent. In extract 3, the mental process verb intimidating and the phrase: a regional dictator, represented Tinubu as oppressive and undemocratic in inter-ethnic relationship with northerners. The text therefore implicated a bleak future for northerners if Tinubu emerged as president of Nigeria in the election.

Extract 5

On this day **57** years ago, **Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa** was **killed**, that was on January 15th, 1966. That was the last time someone from the **North-eastern** part of the country led Nigeria. After 57 years, is it not time for that injustice to be righted? Let us all make effort to heal that wound on Saturday 25th February, 2023, by voting another person from the North-eastern part of Nigeria, as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Vote **Waziri Atiku Abubakar** as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to end that chapter and open a better one. @Dino Melaye (15th January, 2023).

Extract 6

"Since President Muhammadu Buhari from the **North** is spending eight years, then it is the turn of the **South** to produce the next president for another eight years". Rotimi Akeredolu, (29th December, 2022), https://www.vanguardngr.com

Historical argument was deployed in extract 5 to portray Atiku and the north east of Nigeria as marginalized. The repeated use of number (57 years) and material process verb: killed aided in the projection of north easterners as oppressed citizens in Nigeria's politics. This was intended to gain the electorate's sympathy on the grounds of argument of unequal power relations with regards to distribution of power among the ethnic groups. In extract 6, the strategy of enumeration and ethnic argumentation were used to legitimise the candidacy of Tinubu, a southerner. Figures (eight years) was used to argue for a southern president in 2023. These extracts reflect the use of ethnocentric ideology to (de)legitimise the in-group's/out-group's right to political power. The text producers expressed political bias for the presidential candidates, not on the basis of competence, but on the basis of ethnicity. The extracts therefore indirectly polarised citizens along the typical insider/outsider lines on ethnic basis. Extracts 5 and 6 are examples of discourses that sometimes engender tension in the country

during campaigns because they project self and the in-group as victims of other ethnic groups' political domination.

Extract 7

"What the average **Northerner** needs is somebody who is from **the north**, who also understands that part of the country and has been able to build bridges across the country". This is what the Northerners needs, it doesn't need a **Yoruba** or **Igbo** candidate, **I** stand before you as a Pan-Nigerian of northern origin". Atiku Abubakar (October 15th, 2022, https://www.vanguardngr.com

Extract 7 is drawn from Atiku's address to the Joint Elders Forum in Kaduna. He deployed the strategy of naming: Yoruba and Igbo in an exclusive/inclusive discourse to represent his major opponents as outsiders in the political affairs of the north. In this way, he attempted to legitimise his candidature on the basis of ethnic descent which qualified him as the person that the northern electorates should vote for as the other candidates: Tinubu (Yoruba) and Obi (Igbo) are not part of the northern caucus. He further used the pronominal "I" to project self as the ideal northern candidate who deserved the support of the voters in the region.

Ethnic Supremacist Ideology

Some of the speeches examined, demonstrated Nigerian politicians' projection of ethnic superiority as the basis for arguing for the right to power. Some of the fragments presented below demonstrate how politicians employed linguistic resources of pronominal, material processes, metaphor, population strength, among others to project ethnic superiority as reason why a candidate should be preferred as the president in the 2023 general elections. The extracts presented below show how politicians employed linguistic resources of pronominal, metaphor, naming and threatening acts to project ethnic dominance on the basis of population and hegemonic control of power.

Extract 8

"But nobody will give you any credit, you are working hard, you are sweating now. **We** want you to **sweat** well now for this party until you deliver victory. "Until Bola Tinubu becomes the president of Nigeria, we will not give you but **a soaked sliced bread**." Bola Ahmed Tinubu, (January 12th, 2023), https://www.vanguardngr.com

Extract 9

The votes of **Nasarawa Local Government** of the state alone, is more than the votes of the entire **South East** combined. Muhammad Garba, (December 4th, 2022), https://www.vanguardngr.com

In extract 8, Tinubu's discourse seemed to suggest that asymmetrical power relations exist between citizens of other parts of the country and those from the eastern region with regards to access to political power. Tinubu produced a discourse of a Master-versus-Slave relation through the use of the pronominal *we, you*, directives: *work hard, sweat*. Discourse of threat is enacted with the use of the conjunction: *until* which introduced the condition: Bola Tinubu becomes the president of Nigeria under which south easterners will have access to national resources. Tinubu also used a diminutive metaphor of food: *a soaked sliced bread* to represent the resource that would be allocated to the eastern region. This discourse could be regarded as a threat to the negative face of the eastern electorate, because it infringed on their freedom to choose a candidate of their choice. This extract portrays unequal power relations between the political class and the electorates from politically marginalised regions in the country.

In extract 9, Muhammad Garba, a Commissioner for Information in Kano State as at the time of the campaign projected the South eastern voters as politically insignificant in the choice of who emerges as president in Nigeria. This was achieved through a comparison of the votes of Nasarawa Local Government with that of the entire South East. Nasarawa Local Government is one of the local governments in Kano state, with a projected population of one million,

sixty thousand, two hundred and forty-seven (1,060,247) people (Mohammed & Yau, 2021). Kano State has a total of forty-four (44) local government areas which is the highest in the entire country. Conversely, the South East as a region has ninety-five (95) local governments areas in which some of the States have between six and ten local government areas. Extract 9 is a typical example of politicians' deliberate projection of ethnic relevance to the outcome of presidential elections during campaigns based on population. Thus, the discourse which some scholars (e.g. Fawehimi, 2018) has described as the 'weaponisation' of Nigeria's census since 1963 is sometimes deliberately produced during campaigns to signal northern supremacy and background south eastern/minority groups' relevance in Nigeria's political sphere.

Extract 10
      Peter the Poo and Datti the Daft do not know that the term "Obidients" was first used to describe the **black cotton-picking** field of 18th century America by their **White owners**. Today's Obidients are **spiritual kids** of those slaves: this explains their **zombie like behaviours**. Twitter (@Femi Fani - Kayode (17th December, 2022)

Extract 10 demonstrates the use of derogatory labels by Nigerian politicians to project the opponents as insignificant political actors. The text producer, Femi Fani-Kayode, a former minister of aviation in Nigeria projected Obi and his running mate, Datti as unintelligent through the discourse. The name *Pooh* (a cartoon character) and the adjective *daft* were deployed to depict Obi and Datti his running mate as foolish political actors. In addition, racial discriminatory discourse in form of metaphor of agriculture "black cotton-picking" was deployed to belittle the supporters of the LP presidential candidates who are popularly known as the *obidients*. The speaker deployed historical allusion to blacks who served as dehumanised slaves during the slave era in the 18th century America to insinuate that Peter Obi's supporters were mentally subjugated. The phrase: "White owners" in the extract

symbolised the slave masters who maltreated the blacks during the period and indirectly projected the unequal power relations between Obi and his supporters based on mental subjugation. Their supporters were thus metaphorised as "spiritual kids". In all, the extract caricatured Obi as an unintelligent politician who was being supported by a group of mindless Nigerians.

Extract 11

As a **Northern Minority**, ask yourself what you gain by voting for a Labour Party that does not even have candidates for hundreds of legislative seats in Northern Nigeria. Voting for such a party will be like **renting a house with no roof. Rain and sun will beat you**. @Reno Omokri (24th January, 2023)

In extract 11, the author used the phrase "Northern Minority" to label the North Central Nigerians as politically powerless. This strategy was used in a discourse that was produced to discourage some ethnic groups in the north from voting for Peter Obi. The label thus, depicted these groups as politically insignificant, based on their population. The label also served as a warning against the outcome of minority groups' support of Obi's candidacy. The author metaphorically described the consequence of voting for the Labour Party's candidate in the form of a face threatening act: "it will be like renting a house without roof. Rain and sun will beat you". His use of the metaphor of weather suggested the possibility of intensified marginalization of northern minority groups after the elections. This extract reflects Northern minorities' complaint of being marginalized by major Northern ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa and the Fulani who are more dominant in the North (*Premium Times*, May 27, 2014).

Ethnocentric Ideology of Discrimination

The form of persuasive discourse circulated during the campaigns demonstrated the way Nigerian politicians use ethnic arguments to entrench the image of group's right to sustain hegemonic

control of political power. To achieve this, politicians deployed the force of logic to validate their argument of ethnic descent as candidates'/parties' right to power. Some of the fragments presented below reveal politicians' use of naming, material verbs and criminalization of political opponents to express ethnic discrimination during the campaign.

Extract 12

   Peter Obi chose to visit **Kano** on Sunday and **decided** to use Sabon Gari Stadium, where the **Igbos** reside, the stadium is surrounded with churches**, CAN schools and hospitals**. Imagine being in Kano for a political campaign but you can't hide your **religious/tribalistic bigotry**! #ObiDattiinKano. (@Abdul-Aziz Naibi (22nd January, 2023)

Extract 13

   A vote for Peter Obi, who put **Biafran flag** on his hero beer, who **obeys** the IPOBs sit-at-homes, who **defended** the IPOB on Channels TV Interview, and **defended** ESN at an Arewa event, is a vote to end Nigeria. Reject **IPOB** by rejecting their **surrogate**, Peter Obi. (@Reno Omokri (18th January, 2023)

Extract 12 was drawn from a speech made by Abdul-Aziz Naibi Abubakar, a northern PDP supporter who criticised Obi for choosing Sabon Gari, a part of Kano where majority of the Igbos in the state reside, for his presidential rally. This discursive move is achieved through the use of naming *CAN*, *Igbos*, *Kano* and the behavioural process, *decided*. The discourse therefore projected Obi as tribally and religiously prejudiced because it implied that the rally predominantly targeted members of his ethnic group. This extract has grave implications for politicians in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Nigeria because it framed Obi as a discriminatory politician who would not run an inclusive government if elected as president.

   Similarly, extract 13 was produced to frame Obi as an unapologetic Biafran supporter. The author criminalized Obi as a

secessionist who was sympathetic to the secessionist agenda of some Igbos. The author achieved this negative framing through the use of naming: "Biafran flag", IPOB" and "ESN" which are labels connected with some eastern Nigerian secessionist advocates. In addition, the verb "defended" was employed twice to suggest that Obi was positively disposed to eastern Nigerians' bid to secede from the country and form their independent republic. Finally, the noun *surrogate* was used to suggest that Obi had plans to facilitate the realisation of a Biafran Republic when he is elected as president. The extract reflects the inter-ethnic suspicion about the eastern Nigerians' commitment to the nation that is sometimes reflected in the country's public discourse. The idea of Igbo secession and perhaps the disintegration of the country is a sensitive matter that has pervaded the nation's public space since the 1960s (Nweke, 2023). It has become more foregrounded since the emergence of IPOB, ESN and other groups that have continued to agitate for the creation of a Biafran Republic since the country's return to democratic system of government. This framing of Obi, a presidential candidate from the south east, is likely to engender suspicion in the electorates from other regions of the country for him.

Ideology of Marginalisation

Some of the campaign discourse produced during the electioneering process reflected minority groups' resistance of major ethnic groups' deliberate move to exclude others from having access to the office of president. To achieve this, metaphor, material process and negative adjectives among others were deployed to represent past political leaders from dominant ethnic groups as inefficient.

Extract 14

"Let us go to the marginalized zone in this nation. **Who has said people from that zone must not rule**? When others have come **over and over** again and **misruled** and destroyed the whole country and turned it into this **Broad way of terrorism**. **Banditry**, all of them **conspired** and it was a coalition of **frustrated, retired people.** And they

want us to vote for them." Paul Enenche, 15th January, 2023, https://www.vanguardngr.com

Extract 14 above is a campaign discourse of resistance produced to challenge the hegemonic control of power by some major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The text producer used the label marginalised zone to refer to the Eastern region of Nigeria. The adjective, marginalized, ideologically represents Eastern Nigerians as victims in the country's political affairs. The author also strategically alluded to the incapability of northern political leaders to govern the country well. This was achieved through the use of nouns such as *terrorism*, *banditry*, and material process verbs *misruled*, *destroyed* and adjectives *retired* and *frustrated* which projected negative character traits for northern political leaders. This discourse was therefore intended to delegitimise northern politicians' right to Nigeria's apex political office of president. The discursive move reflects scholars (e.g. Onwubiko & Ugorji, 2021; Onuora *et al*, 2024) argument of the marginalisation of south eastern Nigerians in the country's politics. In addition, it supports their assertion that language has been instrumental in the entrenchment of political marginalisation of some ethnic groups in the country.

Conclusion

This study adopted the critical discourse analysis of ethno-political ideologies in hate speech circulated during Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections. This was done with a view to making clear Nigerian politicians discriminatory and derogatory discourse produced to win the support of the electorate during campaigns. The paper was able to establish that Nigerian political campaign discourse is an avenue through which divisive ethno-political hate speeches are disseminated during electoral campaigns in the country. The findings showed that linguistic resources such as pronominal, nouns, adjectives, material, behavioural and mental processes, metaphors, labelling among others were deployed to express inter-ethnic hatred in campaign speeches. In addition, discursive strategies of criminalisation, (de)legitimisation,

ethnic argumentation and negative framing of political actors were employed in the campaign speeches to express asymmetrical power relations among Nigeria's citizens based on ethnic descent.

Recommendations

In light of the far reach of technologically aided media, this study recommends that the INEC and the government ensure that inclusive discourse is used by Nigerian politicians and their supporters during campaigns. This can be attained if citizens who breach the INEC electoral law on hate speech are prosecuted in order to attain the SDG goal of peaceful and inclusive Nigerian society by the year 2023.

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