Background

Recent years have witnessed an upsurge in hate speech around the electioneering process in Nigeria, often with conflict implications among political parties, which in turn distorts the electioneering process from being peaceful. Political candidates and followers use words characterised with discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, their political party affiliations, ethnicity, gender or other identity factors. This is often rooted in, and generates, intolerance and hatred among inter-party members that can be demeaning and divisive.

Our Hate speech tracking in August, 2021 generated intense conversation across social media and digital platforms. This is premised on the continued detention of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) Leader, which has prompted IPOB loyalists to engage the social media in agitation for the release of the IPOB leader as a condition for the conduct of the Governorship election in Anambra. Meanwhile, the sit-at-home order jointly enforced by Eastern Security Network (ESN) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East, Nigeria particularly in major industrial zones and other communities of Anambra State sparked off hate speech conversations across social media space as well. Similarly, the agitations for a referendum by IPOB before the November 6 Governorship election to be conducted in the State clearly indicates an early warning sign that calls for precautionary measures to build the capacity of Anambra people against electoral violence. Consequently, the outlined trends of violence are clear early warning signs that may result in voters apathy and electoral violence if not proactively mitigated.

Methodology

1. In August, Search adopted a qualitative and quantitative approach to analyze the discussions of social media users on election related hate speech. Keywords were entered into the software platform used (the top engaging posts and most viewed videos from each search were analyzed). Posts, videos, and pictures that were duplicates and unrelated to elections were excluded.

2. Gender-Based Hate Speech was monitored using the International Foundation on Electoral Systems (IFES) Violence against Women in Elections (VAWIE) Online: A Social Media Analysis tool.

About the Hate Speech Report

Search for Common Ground is implementing the Sustaining Electoral Engagement for Democracy (SEED) project from 2020 to 2025 in seven target states conducting off-cycle elections: Anambra, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo, Kogi, Bayelsa, Kogi, and Edo, in collaboration with the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), National Democratic Institute (NDI), and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Search’s focus is centered on strengthening civic education and countering hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation.

This report analyses hate speech that is context-specific, including monitoring in local languages as an early warning mechanism during the ongoing pre-election phase as activities build up for the election and post-election in Nigeria.
The Hate Speech report tracks hate speech on social media platforms and digital media channels using social media listening tools to produce reports based on real-time monitoring, retrospective monitoring, discourse, and content analysis.

To develop effective risk mitigation plans and strategies as well as creating early warning and conflict prevention processes, Search under the SEED project has tracked five thousand two hundred (5,200) conversations that depicts hate speech on election related issues across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and News Blogs) using key words and phrases like “ethnic group”, “Election ethnic issues”, “non-indigenous people”, “Party primaries” “INEC” “Broom” “Igbo tribe” “Yoruba tribe” “Hausa tribe” The findings are based on the analysis of hate speech in conversations monitored, which were classified by topics and types. In the reporting period, perpetrators and victims of hate speech were also identified.

This report brings together our reflections on the following thematic areas that represent all conversations intercepted within August, 2021

a. Political-based hate speech
b. Insecurity-based Hate Speech
c. Gender-based Hate Speech
d. Ethnic-based Hate Speech

The trend of conversations and hate comments in August 2021 mainly were centered on the Anambra election and sit-at-home order in agitation for the release of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader as a condition for the conduction of the election in Anambra State on 6 November 2021. However, a total number of five thousand, two hundred (5,200) conversations was tracked across the digital and social media platforms in August 2021, of which one thousand, six hundred (1,600) conversations represent 31.8% negative sentiment expressed and two hundred and seven (207) conversations tracked represent the 4% positive sentiment expressed on diverse political issues. This is significantly low compared to the conversations tracked in July 2021 and thus can be attributed to attention being drawn solely to the sit-at-home order imposed in Anambra State rather than concerns on the Electoral Act Amendment Bill on electronic transmission of results that trended in July.

Figure 1.1: Number of conversations tracked and sentiment in August

Figure 1.2: Word Cloud sowing the most used negative phrases in August

The conversations tracked have led to the analysis of the hate speech below:

**Political-Based Hate Speech**

As the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) publishes the names of candidates for the November 6th, 2021 Anambra State governorship election, the month of August witnessed politically-based hate speech that bordered more on attacks and hated comments between political party opponents that could breed conflict ahead of the general election. Below are some of the hate speech targeted at defaming the character of an opponent based on sentiments.
Insecurity-Based Hate Speech

Insecurity-Based Hate Speech tracked in August stems from the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader. Also, the continuous vicious cycle of violence, particularly with the attack and killing of travelers by unidentified armed men on the eastern highways and the emergence of a loyalist militant group forewarning citizens against coming out to vote in Anambra State and Biafra land until the IPOB leader is released indicates that IPOB and other groups are reinforcing efforts to sabotage the electoral process in Anambra State. Significantly, "No Election in Biafra land starting with Anambra State Governorship", a slogan continuously chanted to threaten participation of citizens in the upcoming election in Anambra State, has induced hate speeches and disinformation across the social media platforms, some of which is perceived to be detrimental to the nation's economic stay and security as well as fan the embers of discord. Notably, among the conversations tracked on social media was hate speech targeted at disorganizing the financial system, demanding adequate sensitization to discourage such ideas.

Similar to the report tracked in July 2021, discussion around gender-based hate speech in August, 2021 particularly on the female gender representation in politics seem to be on the decline. Various discussions around the exclusion of women in the political space have prompted a social media user to state in a post as follows:

"we are holding women to a ridiculously higher standard than we hold men. Majority of people who have ruined this country are men but we don’t say if a man contest we would not support him…”

- @Juliana

#PoliticsHEan #SheCanLead
**Ethnic-Based Hate Speech**

Search also identified ethnic-based hate speech in the conversations tracked across the social media platforms. However, the discussion in the post below indicates an extreme antagonism along ethnic lines that can trigger or promote religious and ethnic violence if not abated.

**Early Warning Indicators**

A number of hate speech occasioned by conversations across the social media platforms in August, 2021 indicates Gender exclusion, systemic violence, security threats, political sentiments, ethnic antipathy, voters apathy e.t.c. and may likely snowball into violent conflict if proactive measures are not deployed to address it.

**Figure 1.3: Top Influencers generating the Hate Speech tracked**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencer</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Reach per mention</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Engagement per mention</th>
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**Demography**

The demographic scan above determines the gender that mainly contributed to promoting and propagating hate speech in August 2021. The male gender contributed more to spreading hate speech, misinformation and disinformation than the female counterpart. While the male gender produced 77.9% of the total 5,200 hate speech conversations tracked, the female gender made 22.1% of the entire discussion followed as well. Thus, it is imperative that subsequent programming regarding alternative messaging in response to rumors, misinformation and disinformation for dissemination by Search and other consortium partners (NDI and IFES) should utilize gendered approaches to target men and boys in tackling the root causes of the hate speech and transforming their behavior to prevent electoral violence.

The age distribution in August 2021 is similar to that of July 2021, as youths between the ages of 25 to 34 are still taking the lead with a distinctive leap in producing and engaging with 53.2% of the hate speech conversations. Consortium partners and key stakeholders have to adopt youth-sensitive approaches in programming to mitigate electoral violence. This approach will ensure vibrant, technological and social media-savvy youth demographics transforms from perpetrating hate speech to becoming champions of peace messaging regarding elections.
The map of Nigeria above reveals that most of the hate speech conversations tracked in August 2021 emanated from Abuja as the principal source, with over three thousand (3,000) conversations, followed by Lagos with one thousand (1,000) hate speech conversations tracked. Then Warri/Sapele with two hundred and forty-seven (247). Apparently, from the findings, July 2021 witnessed higher hate speech numbers than August conversations. Thus, the downward trend of hate speech conversation in August can be attributed to the indifferent feeling of the citizens toward the evolving issues around the electoral processes, particularly the Anambra State election. Essentially, the recurring trends in conversation flow around Abuja and Lagos State indicate that social media users in these regions whose conversations are targeted at the general election and the Anambra State election are mostly from the Eastern part of Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

- Advocacy around women participation in politics and governance needs to be strengthened.
- Scaling up citizen education and sensitization to reduce sentiments across ethnic, and tribal lines to de-escalate ethno-political violence.
- Effective and timely implementation of activities geared towards voter’s participation particularly the Anambra Governorship Election in November 2021.