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Social Media & Conflict



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#DEFYHATENOW | CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL MEDIA & CONFLICT



HOW TO IDENTIFY HATE SPEECH

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Hate speech is a communication that denigrates people on the basis of their membership of a particular group. This can include any form of expression, such as images, plays, and songs, as well as speech. Some definitions extend the concept of hate speech to include communications that foster a climate of prejudice and intolerance – these kinds of communications may fuel discrimination, hostility and violent attacks later on.

”

Source: **DW Hate Speech FAQ** <https://p.dw.com/p/119ku>

The European Court of Human Rights, in a definition adopted by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, considers 'hate speech' as: "all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin."



SOCIAL MEDIA, CONFLICT & COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING IN CAMEROON

By **Besong Bawack Mallet**

The different definitions or perceptions people have about what constitutes hate speech and what differentiates hate speech from free speech has always been an issue with the different stakeholders involved in mitigating the spread of hate speech in Cameroon digital spaces. The activities of some organisations to counter hate speech narratives have been (mis)interpreted by various political actors and diasporas, people from different ethnic groups and socio-cultural backgrounds who view messages and activities of the different institutions as infringing on their human rights, as well as undermining their different identities, integrity or personality. Due to these diverging views as to what constitutes hate speech by different actors, the efforts of organisations and institutions in the digital space through hate speech mitigation often face strong opposition which makes their efforts towards building sustainable peace very

difficult. Nonetheless, the organisations and institutions listed above remain very active in the struggle to eliminate hate online speech in Cameroon, despite all these complexities and drawbacks.

Several organisations play major roles in Cameroon with a focus on combating hate speech through digital media spaces. These organisations carry out social media literacy and awareness campaigns to counter existing hate speech by propagating more positive narratives, like love, social cohesion, tolerance and mutual respect across many digital spaces like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. Some of these organisations and institutions include the Cameroon Digital Coalition, Local Youth Corner Cameroon (LOYOC), Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All (NEWSETA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Network for Community Development (NECOD), STRAWACADEMY, ADEV, Big Steps Outreach Cameroon (BONET), The PCC Peace Office, the Cameroon Communication Council, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education (MINJEC), etc.

Common Digital Platforms in Cameroon

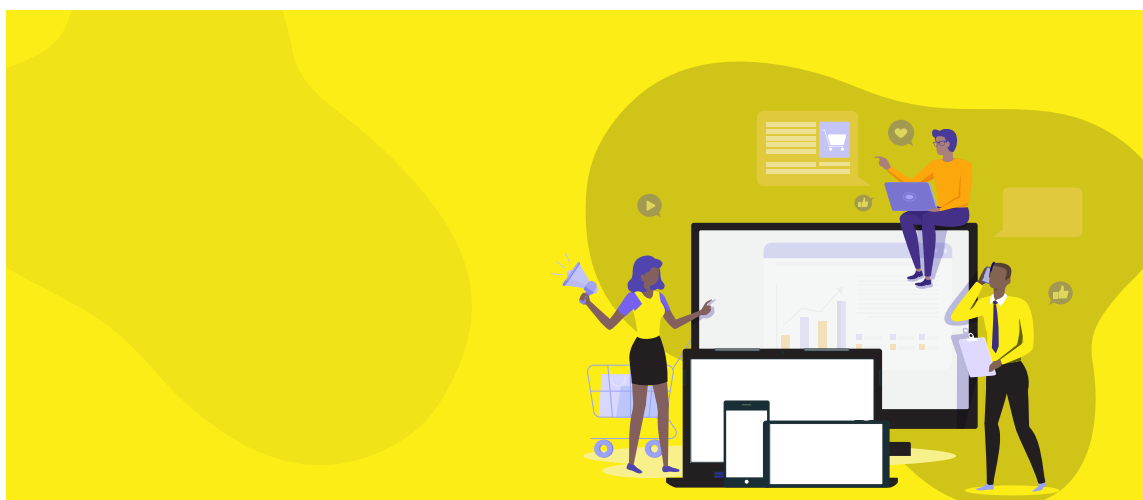
Since the introduction of the internet and subsequent use of social media in Cameroon in early 2000, there has been a steady increase in the number of users per year. By December 2000, Cameroon had 20,000 internet users and by June 2019, internet users in Cameroon drastically increased to 6,128,422 with Facebook alone having more than half of the total number of internet users as subscribers (3,473,000) between 2006 and 2019.¹

In Cameroon, the most widely used social media platform is Facebook, closely followed by WhatsApp. Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat are also gaining steam in the digital media space in Cameroon though still a wide gap compared with the growing rate of Facebook and WhatsApp in Cameroon. Social media in Cameroon is increasingly being used for various reasons including work, entertainment, communication, business, education etc. According to GlobalStats2, between November 2018 and November 2019, Facebook is the most used social media platform in Cameroon with 86.76% subscription, while Pinterest: (7.55%), Instagram (2.17%) Twitter (2.13%), YouTube (1.33%) and LinkedIn (0.01%) have slower expansion rates.

WhatsApp and Snapchat, although not represented in the diagram above, have also come to stay and occupy a huge percentage of the Cameroon digital space in recent times. Thus, these platforms cannot be under looked in the Cameroon social media landscape.



COMMON DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN CAMEROON



<https://defyhatenow.org/common-digital-platforms-in-cameroon-and-their-usage-2/>

Online to Offline: Impact of activities in digital spaces

Hate speech has been visible in Cameroon for decades, even before the introduction of the internet and social media. This phenomenon has been common among politicians, administrators and civil servants as well as children and youths.

In fact, Cameroonians of all walks of life and age have used words which can today be categorised as hate speech and they have done so consciously or unconsciously.³ Offline hate speech has existed in major towns and cities like Yaoundé, Douala, Maroua, Bafoussam, Buea, Bamenda, etc which are much more cosmopolitan in nature but the spread of such dangerous speeches only intensified as people moved from region to region and to a greater extent with the introduction of social media. The effects were only felt by the targeted individuals or groups who in most cases were left with nothing more than frustration and a feeling of anger, hate and revenge. The emergence of the internet and social media increased the use and spread of hate speech in Cameroon as information that before now remained between the perpetrator and the victims was able to spread and affect other individuals or groups, thus increasing its effect as it was seen in different communities and in the conflict situation in Cameroon.

The current Crisis in the Far North, Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon remains complicated because of fake news, propaganda, mis/disinformation and other forms of hate speech disseminated online. Unlike the Bamileke War (also known as *guerre cachée*) between 1955 and 1964, based on grievances of marginalisation (tribalism and cultural divide) and hate against the Bemileke People and anti-colonialisation sentiments and which took place without influence from the availability of the internet and social media in Cameroon.

Digital spaces today have come to act as mediums that transmit the hate speech that once existed offline to go beyond certain limits and exacerbate the feeling of hate and revenge both offline and online. The motives behind the current crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon remain a great challenge as online radicalisation has increased, arguably leading to the current offline violence that is perpetrated by sympathisers of the conflict from different angles.

Videos/images purporting to show abuses on both sides have circulated on social media, fanning tensions already sky-high on the ground in the conflict areas. Propaganda and false news stories proliferate. For instance, the display of beheaded bodies of forces of law and order online only increases frustration and radicalism within the affected community and increases the chances of more violence and likewise, an image or a video showing the brutal killing of a separatist fighter also radicalises both fighters and non-fighters, thus creating a cycle of violence that loops from online to offline.

A case in point that shows how digital spaces have influenced offline reactions and violence is the speech of a top government official, who on the 22 of September 2017 on CRTV radio in Buea made a public statement which sparked huge protest on October 1 2017 and huge counter reactions online.

He said: “very early in the morning, groups of people were seen walking on the streets with the aim to attack public buildings and institutions... we will not continue to tolerate such protests. If the dogs continue to go to the streets to bite, they will meet the security forces.”

This was an act of hate on a group of people who went to the streets to protest against real or perceived feelings of marginalisation of the Anglophones in Cameroon and non-respect of the Anglo-Saxon values in English Cameroon. The public statement of the governor pushed children, youths and the old to the streets on October 1, 2017 for being referred to as dogs and to demonstrate attributes of a dog in revenge as described by the said official and also to commemorate the self-proclaimed independence of ‘Ambazonia’.⁴

This statement and protest marked a turning point in the crisis in the English speaking regions of Cameroon that has today become an armed conflict. The speech radicalised and instrumentalised young people who were met with fury as described by the governor. Statements like this, among many others, have made resolving the conflict in Northwest and the Southwest regions almost impossible.

Also, both sides are using inflammatory/derogatory/offensive rhetoric such as: the military calls the separatists “terrorists,” while the separatists; with many parts of the Cameroonian diaspora; have accused the military of “genocide” and also refer to the them as “La Republique Terrorist Soldiers”. This inflammatory rhetoric, which is mostly spread online, translates into much of the violence that is perpetrated offline.



Policy makers role in mitigating/promoting hate speech

The existence of hate speech on digital spaces and offline is not without the knowledge of policy makers, in fact many of them allegedly perpetrate hate speech at different levels. Some policy makers and politicians in turn have been seen to take advantage of the situation for their own political gains. Some even propagate ethnic differences which form the basis of most conflicts in Cameroon with the aim of polarising the people on the basis of tribes and political affiliation. Some policy makers subject the actions of their people online/offline to misinterpretations.

A clear example of misinterpretation was following the 2018 presidential election in Cameroon when a popular professor and Politian (Bemileke) made a statement that “had it been he had an opportunity to apply to be born as a Bulu5 in Cameroon, he would have done so”, and this was widely interpreted or misinterpreted in different ways. Many politicians and policy makers claimed he was propagating hate speech or tribalism, but others think that he was openly propagating against the high level of tribalism in Cameroon which has played out in the favour of some groups such as the Bulu at the disfavour of other ethnic groups like the Bamileke and others. Also, the political party of the politician has been viewed as being very tribal due to their militancy.

There is an increasing trend of online activities undertaken by government and policy makers. Certain decisions for instance, have been taken following online petitions, online advocacy efforts and comments. We can draw some connection between what people say and do online (in terms of advocacy and civil society engagement) and the reaction of the politicians and policy makers offline. Some offline and offline endeavours have helped shape the political landscape of the country. For instance, when there is any information spread especially online, the Cameroon government reacts through its ministers of communication and territorial administration by organising press conferences or making public statements to clarify to the population on the alleged or real issues exposed, this demonstrates that the government is keen and critically engaged on social media. This may in part explain why the recent bill to criminalise tribalism and hate speech was proposed by parliament and promulgated into law on December 24 2019 by the President of the Republic of Cameroon (Read in ENGLISH and FRENCH) in parliament to respond to these urgent challenges of the government policy of national integration and living together in Cameroon. The law also emphasises severe punishment when the author of hate speech is a civil servant or official of political party, media, non-governmental organization or religious institution and especially when committed via social media, press or television, radio or other means which facilitates public consumption.



Online Safety and Identifying / Mitigating misinformation

Protecting the population from the potential dangers of online engagement and creating awareness on the effective use of digital spaces remains an important issue for civil society and most governments, including the government of Cameroon. The fastest and most far reaching methods of educating the population on the safety of what they read, comment, share and post online has been through media sensitisations and caravans. As much of the content we are talking about is shared on social and digital media, the best action on awareness is also through digital media. This action has been taken by the government of Cameroon along with national and international civil society organisations in Cameroonian. A caravan6 is also a good way of creating awareness if the intention is to reach out to both young and old generations. This strategy was used by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education in July 2019 at Nkolinda, Yaounde.



Children's Access and Citizen Safety Online

Children's presence online in Cameroon happens for several motives including: research, social media networking and online gaming. Though most digital platforms recognise the international law on the protection of children's rights and have limited account creation to 18 years and above, or under 18 years with parental control, most children do not comply with the terms of the platforms but rather falsify their identities to get registered especially on social media platforms. This further makes it difficult to control the presence and safety of children online.

The most effective and efficient way to keep children safe online is to invest in educating them on the critical and professional use of digital spaces. They also need to be made aware of the dangers of (mis) using the internet other than for the reasons for which the platforms were created. If we go on putting child restrictions alone on social media and internet spaces, we risk sending the children to undertake their own adventurous journeys online to discover what parents are holding back. That is why educating children on the DOs and DON'Ts on engaging online is very important and most preferable as it offers opportunities for the children to make responsible decisions on their own.

Engaging schools and students in offline, face to face and media awareness campaigns is also an effective method of educating internet users about the importance of fact checking before coming to a conclusion on what they read, comment, post or share online. This is also a way of determining whether or not any information encountered is true or false, rumour or propaganda.

Sharing educational content offline through billboards, posters, fliers, stickers, and other offline means can also help to keep people more informed of the dangers of absorbing uncritically what they read online and how to be more selective with information they meet on digital spaces.



HATE SPEECH LAWS, GUIDELINES & DEFINITIONS

Hate speech laws are a relatively modern phenomenon that appeared in Europe in the wake of World War II. The idea behind such laws was to curb the kinds of anti-Semitic and racist propaganda that gave rise to the Holocaust. Germany, Poland, Hungary and Austria passed hate legislation decades ago. Many other countries have since followed suit. For example, under Kenyan law, a person commits an offense if they stir up "ethnic hatred". France goes further. Its laws forbid any communication intended to incite discrimination, hatred or harm regarding ethnicity, nation, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or handicap.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a UN treaty, calls on governments to prevent hate speech. Article 20(2) of the ICCPR says: "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law."

The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa considers 'hate speech' to be "material which, judged within context sanctions, promotes or glamorizes violence based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, or mental or physical disability" or "propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence; or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm."

Source: **DW Hate Speech explained** <https://p.dw.com/p/119ku>



HATE SPEECH & VIOLENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

What exactly is online hate speech?

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Hate speech often shows up online, especially on social media. Each platform has its own definition of hate speech and their approaches to dealing with it are evolving.

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HATE SPEECH GUIDELINES



Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards#hate-speech>

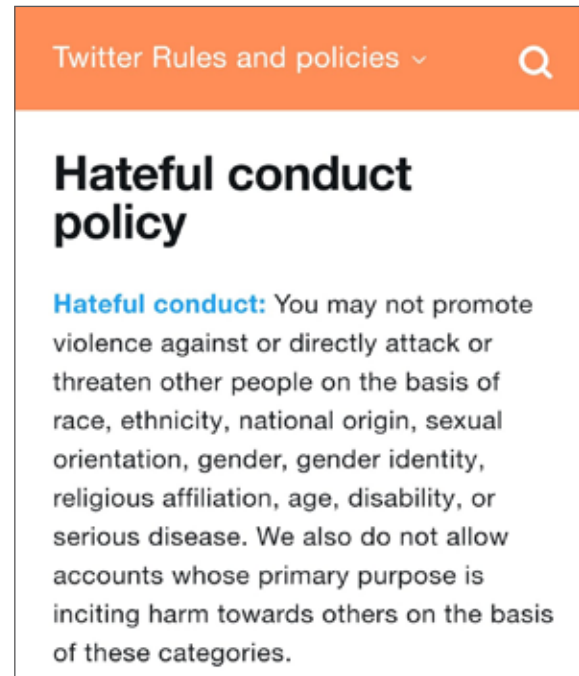
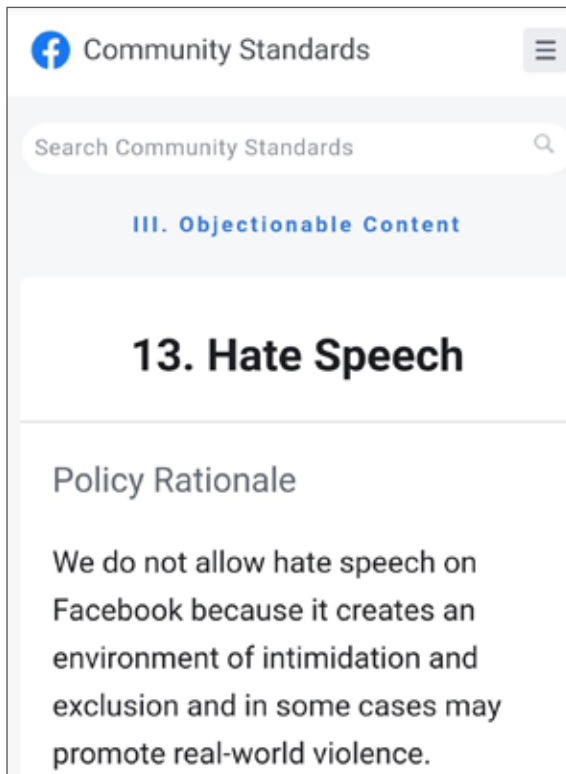
“Facebook removes hate speech, which includes content that directly attacks people based on their: Race, Ethnicity, National origin, Religious affiliation, Sexual orientation, Sex, gender, or gender identity, or Serious disabilities or diseases. We allow humor, satire, or social commentary related to these topics. Sometimes people share content containing someone else’s hate speech for the purpose of raising awareness or educating others about that hate speech. We expect people to clearly indicate their purpose, which helps us better understand why they shared that content. We carefully review reports of threatening language to identify serious threats of harm to public and personal safety. We remove credible threats of physical harm to individuals.”

Twitter

<https://support.twitter.com/articles/18311>



“Hateful conduct: You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or disease. Violent threats (direct or indirect): You may not make threats of violence or promote violence, including threatening or promoting terrorism.”



YouTube

<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2801939>



Hate speech is not allowed on YouTube. We encourage free speech and try to defend your right to express unpopular points of view, but we don't permit hate speech. Hate speech refers to content that promotes violence against or has the primary purpose of inciting hatred against individuals or groups based on certain attributes, such as: age, caste, race or ethnic origin, immigration status, religion, disability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, veteran status.



Whatsapp

<https://www.whatsapp.com/legal?eea=0#terms-of-service>

Whatsapp Terms of Service prohibit, publishing falsehoods and engaging in illegal, threatening, intimidating, hateful, and racially or ethnically offensive behavior.

You must access and use our Services only for legal, authorized, and acceptable purposes. You will not use (or assist others in using) our Services in ways that: (b) are illegal, obscene, defamatory, threatening, intimidating, harassing, hateful, racially, or ethnically offensive, or instigate or encourage conduct that would be illegal, or otherwise inappropriate, including promoting violent crimes; (c) involve publishing falsehoods, misrepresentations, or misleading statements; (d) impersonate someone.



COMMUNITY STANDARDS & HATE SPEECH POLICY

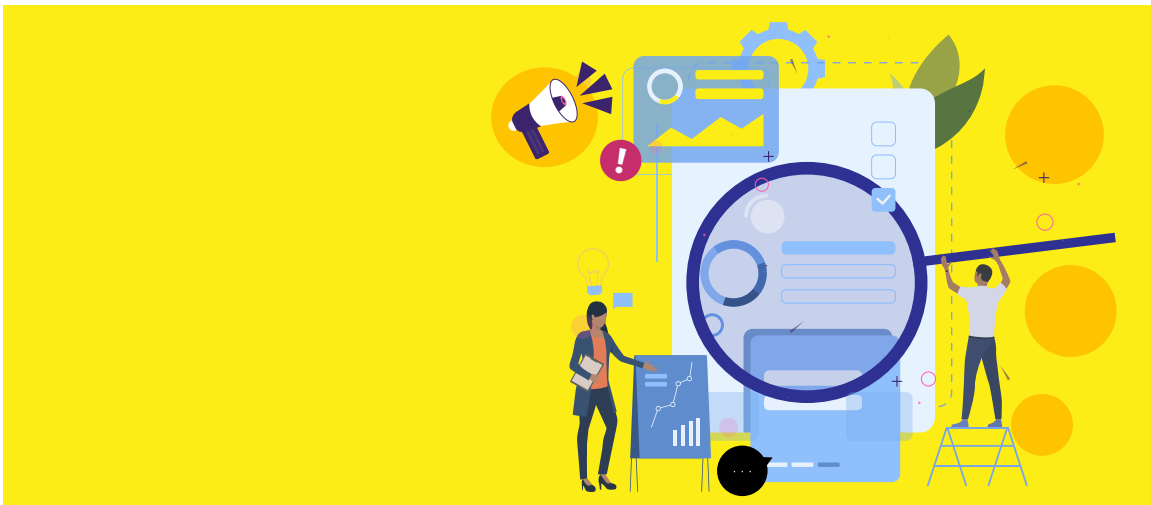


<https://defyhatenow.org/did-you-know-that-facebook-and-twitter-have-policies-against-hate-speech/>



HOW TO REPORT HATE SPEECH

Social media platforms have been criticised for their handling of complaints. They are not always responsive to user concerns and can be slow to address reports of misuse and abuse online, but they do continue to assess new ways to monitor & counter hate speech. Check each platform for their latest reporting tools & guides.



<https://defyhatenow.org/how-to-report-hate-speech-2/>

VIDEO SERIES By Peacetechlab [USB Stick]

Report Hate Speech on Facebook
https://youtu.be/_kRNx1WHAm0

Report Hate Speech on WhatsApp
<https://youtu.be/1PIHuMI0ndQ>

Report Hate Speech on Twitter
<https://youtu.be/tLwgoTgbf8E>

How to report hate speech on YouTube
<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802027>

If you find content that violates our hate speech policy, report it to YouTube for review. Instructions on how to report violations of Community Guidelines can be found on the link above, or watch the video.
<https://youtu.be/45suVEYFCyc>

How to block someone on WhatsApp
<https://faq.whatsapp.com/en/iphone/20950271/?category=5245250>



SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONFLICT IN CAMEROON

A LEXICON OF HATE SPEECH TERMS
<https://www.peacetechlab.org/cameroon-lexicon>

PeaceTech Lab works to reduce violent conflict using technology, media, and data to accelerate and scale peacebuilding efforts. PeaceTech Lab & LOYOC conducted research to better understand the connection between online hate speech and violence on the ground and aims for this Lexicon to serve as a pivotal resource for individuals and organizations fighting against hate speech in Cameroon.

CAMEROON'S DEEPENING CRISIS

A rich and complicated colonial history, poor governance, a deterioration in rule of law, corruption and suppression of free speech and human rights have created a steadily worsening conflict scenario in Cameroon known as the Anglophone Crisis. The crisis has cost hundreds of lives and displaced an estimated 200,000 in the country's Northwest and Southwest regions since it began in 2016. Presidential elections in October 2018 accelerated the crisis and atrocities continue to be committed by both sides.

PUTTING AN END TO A DANGEROUS TREND

Within this context, PeaceTech Lab undertook extensive research to understand the role that online hate speech plays in the ongoing crisis. Rooted in a series of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with expert insights from local Cameroonians, *Social Media and Conflict in Cameroon*, published in October 2018, identifies and explains inflammatory and offensive terms that contribute to the Anglophone Crisis while offering alternative words and phrases that can be used to prevent and stop the spread of hate speech.

Selected Examples: Please note that the sample posts as well as the world clouds not only contain offensive and inflammatory terms, but also obscene terms.

9. FRANCO-FROG

Other spellings and related references: francofrog, crapaud, frogs, franco-fools, franco-fou, francobête
 Related hashtags used on Twitter and/or Facebook:
 #francofools



Definition: This term is a combination of the word 'Franco,' derived from Francophone (French speaking), and 'frog' (the amphibian). It is used to refer to Francophone Cameroonians and associate them with their French colonial heritage. The reference to the French as 'frogs' has murky origins, but was popularized during WWII by British and US soldiers.

In the current Cameroonian context, the use of this phrase draws on certain negative attributes that some associate with French identity or character, such as arrogance, being loud and boisterous, and speaking without really conveying anything of substance. As one survey respondent explains, "les francophones bavardent dans le rien, dans le vide comme les crapauds, des perroquets (Francophones speak, but say nothing like frogs, like parrots)."

Why this term is offensive/inflammatory: This term emerged in response to the use of the term 'anglofou', and thus, is divisive by nature. Although it is dehumanizing and is used to characterize Francophones as arrogant, empty-headed, and noisy, many focus group participants did not consider it a highly inflammatory term. However, all participants recognized that "characterizing an entire group of people as arrogant, empty-headed, and noise-makers is very bad."

Alternative words that could be used: French-speaking Cameroonians, Francophones, my brother or sister of French-speaking expression

2. ANGLO-FOU

Other spellings and related references: anglofou, anglofool, anglofolle, les anglos, anglo fou-fou, anglo fu-fu, anglo-bête
 Related hashtags used on Twitter and/or Facebook:
 #anglofou



Definition: This term is a contraction of the French words 'Anglophone' (somebody who speaks English)

and 'fou,' which is an adjective meaning 'mad' or 'foolish.' It is mostly used by Francophone Cameroonians to refer in a derogatory way to Anglophone Cameroonians (who are mostly based in the Northwest and Southwest regions), implying that they are 'fools,' behave foolishly, or are stupid ("anglo-bête"). As explained by a focus group participant, "If you call me Anglo-fou, it means you are saying I am mad or I am a mad man."

Why this term is offensive/inflammatory: This term is considered particularly offensive when used by a Francophone towards an Anglophone Cameroonian. As one workshop participant noted, it is offensive because it implies that Anglophones are "primitive, uncivilized, like 'villageois' (villagers)". It connotes that they do not know what they do, and are somehow inferior to the French-speaking majority.

It is important to note that this term is rooted in widespread prejudices against Anglophones that stem back to Cameroon's colonial past. The partition into a British and French territory introduced two vastly different administrative, educational, and legal systems, as well as linguistic and cultural differences that persist in part to this day -- long after the merging of the two territories into modern-day Cameroon. This historical division has been fertile ground to misunderstandings, feelings of exclusion, and even animosity, as the Anglophone population has felt marginalized and neglected since independence.

A focus group participant explained how expressions like "Vous les anglo-fou, vous raisonnez à gauche' (you Anglo-crazies, you think on the left)" illustrate this well: "French Cameroonians drove on the right-hand side of the road, while British Cameroonians drove on the left-hand side of the road as in Britain. When Cameroonians of both sides met, there were usually differences in approach from a cultural perspective and these misunderstandings led to the use of the phrase "c'est les gens a gauche (French for "they are people on the left")," referring to the people of Anglophone Cameroon.

This term is used in the current context of the Anglophone crisis to dismiss the issues and grievances voiced by protesters and opposition in the Northwest and Southwest regions. If all Anglophones are 'mad' or 'fools,' their demands and actions are illegitimate and 'foolish.' As stated by another workshop participant, using this term is "...a means to make the Anglophones feel inferior," as well as for "Francophones to characterize their superiority." Many participants shared the view that this widespread prejudice has had a systemic effect. In many contexts, as one noted, "Anglophones are afraid of speaking in English because of the negative reaction it will provoke." It is a divisive term that foments resentment. Alternative words that could be used: Cameroonian, English-speaking Cameroonian or Anglophone, Northwesterner/Southwesterner, my brother of English expression.



ISSUES & RISKS IN RESEARCHING THE LEXICON OF HATE SPEECH TERMS

3) Limited Understanding of Hate Speech Concept

Many of the terms identified in this study as offensive and inflammatory have their origins in old stereotypes and prejudices. As these terms and their impact now find themselves being exacerbated and reinforced in the context of the Anglophone crisis, a systematic conversation around hate speech has only recently begun in Cameroon. Few individuals and organizations are aware of and understand what constitutes hate speech, let alone are able to understand its polarizing and exacerbating role in the context of current Anglophone crisis. This impacted the quality of responses to the survey and well as the discussions during the validation workshops.

4) Sensitivities and Parameters Concerning Hate Speech

In addition to concerns around privacy and security, a number of challenges were encountered during focus group discussions around the nature of hate speech, the deep rooted issues it can evoke (e.g., related to national identity, conflict, prejudice, etc.) and the feelings it can trigger (especially in those targeted by

it). During group discussions, participants did not always exercise caution or consideration for what other participants might feel when they are targeted by an offensive or inflammatory term. This made it difficult to create an open discussion around the definition and context of specific hate speech words and phrases. Facilitators and participants were carefully selected and diligently prepared in advance of discussions. This helped to manage the difficult dynamics encountered when navigating heated discussions and emotionally difficult moments as participants recalled situations when they were the object of offensive speech.

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<https://www.peacetechlab.org/s/Cameroon-Lexicon-PeaceTech-Lab>

<https://www.peacetechlab.org/cameroon-lexicon>



EXERCISE: DEFINITIONS AND MEANING

Consider the definition of words and the potential for harm in their meanings.

When interacting with people, both offline and online, selecting your words carefully is important. Before you write, post, share statements, comments or jokes online, it's advisable to think about the terms you use, as these might offend groups of people.

Ask yourself: "How would I feel if I was part of the group being offended?"

Always weigh the impact your words might have, take time to read through your own text, or statements and if need be take a break and come back later when calmer.

Questions to Consider:

- Understanding of Hate Speech terms and intentions
- What it means and where one might be spreading it unconsciously.
- The need to contemplate the words we use when online and offline.
- The importance of taking precautions and the need to ask oneself questions based on empathy and tolerance both online and offline.



HATE SPEECH AND VIOLENT CONFLICT IN CAMEROON

Report by Local Youth Corner Cameroon (LOYOC) 2019

www.loyocameroon.org

The increase in violent conflict in Cameroon has been captured by available literature as an outcome of poor governance, poverty, discrimination, marginalisation and the list continues. Nevertheless, the role of hate speech, which seemingly has become a community to national problems, has not been satisfactorily examined as a major driver of violent conflict in Cameroon. This phenomenon grew from the days of colonialism, to independence and to the birth of democracy and now today. This paper (research work) examines the nexus between hate speech and violent conflict in Cameroon.

The secondary data used in this report was supplemented with offline and online interviews and surveys, focused group discussions with young people, traditional and religious authorities, social media

influencers, civil society actors and government officials identified from five regions in the four geo-political regions of Cameroon; South West, Far North, Littoral, Centre and North West regions; and diaspora communities. We argue that hate speech, which appears in the forms of propaganda, fake news, and disinformation is destroying social cohesion in Cameroon and becoming very prevalent among politicians during elections as well as civilians against government or citizens that is fanning violent conflict in Cameroon.

The report presents the contradiction between hate speech and freedom of speech. It further demonstrates the process involved in hate speech leading to violence as well as presents examples of commonly used hate terms and the main authors of hate speech in the country.

Our research emphasizes the prevailing influence of hate speech in fuelling the current crisis in the Far North, Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon. We highlight eight positive practices undertaken by young people in Cameroon toward solving hate speech. We suggest that among many recommended solutions that public condemnations of hate speech by government and citizens are not enough. We strongly call for legislation to curtail and penalise users of hate speech.

Keywords: **Hate Speech; Violent Conflict; Propaganda**

LOYOC REPORT CO-AUTHORS: Kweitsu Richard, Besong Bawack Mallet
EDITOR(S): Achaleke Christian Ieke

DEMOCRATIC VALUES & PRACTICES IN CAMEROON

As we strive to entrench democratic values, freedoms and rights have emerged as the positive practices for an ideal form of governance, many countries are enjoying the beauty of these but are grappling on curtailing some of the negative outcomes of the misuse of these democratic practices. Violent conflict ranging from political violence to civil wars and armed conflicts has characterised many countries across the world which lack the structures and capacity to effectively manage the implementation of their democracy. These democratic values allow citizens to question governments in respect of the social contract, speak and protest as well as participate fully in the electoral process. For example, the birth of multi-party politics in Cameroon affected the country's socio-political life with tendency of "tensions, conflicts, blockages and sometimes violence on the part of some actors and political parties" (Ngole, 1996: 6).

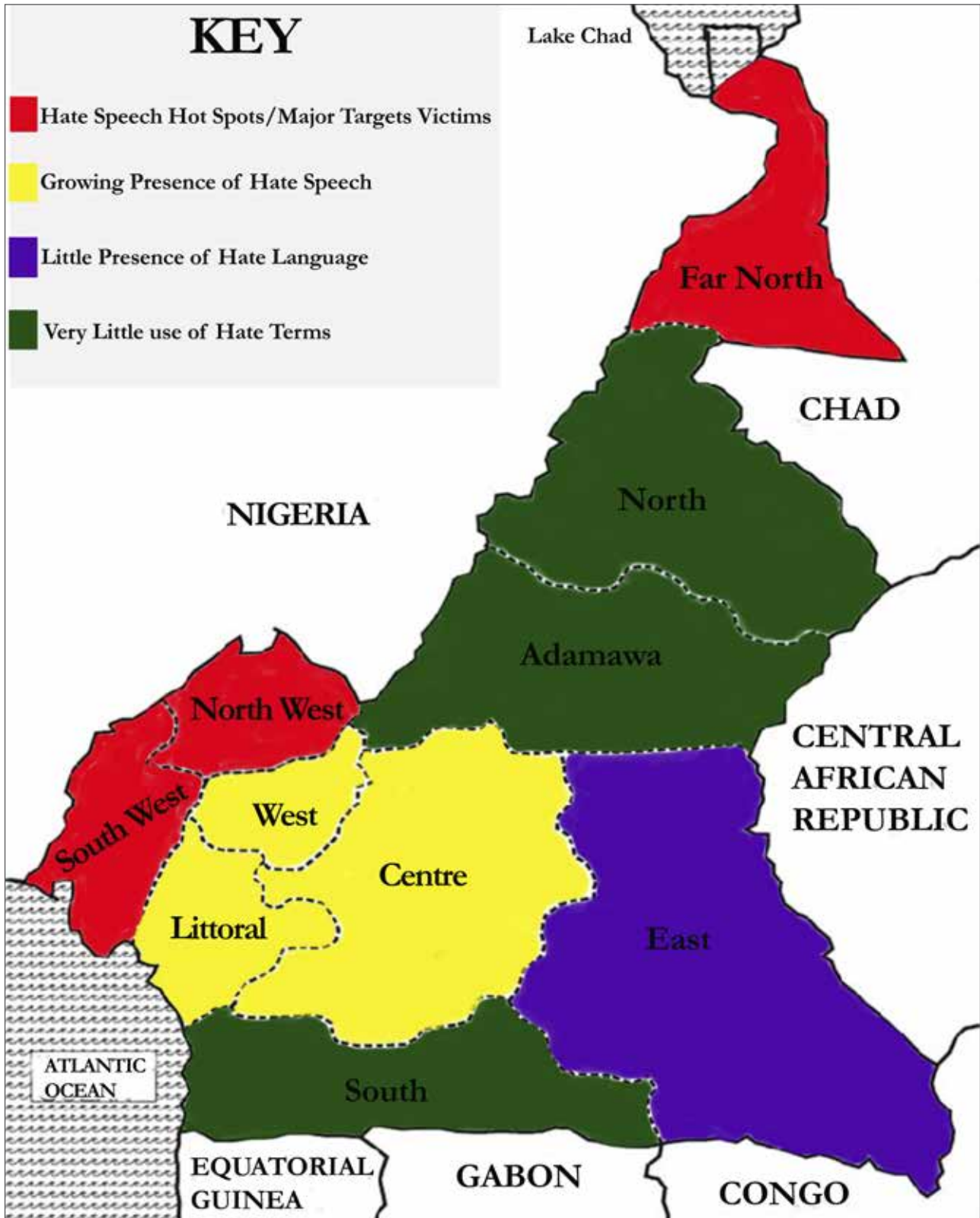
SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Since the independence of Cameroon the socio-cultural diversity ranging from over 200 ethnic groups, several religions and two international languages presented a great opportunity for strength. Unfortunately, over time this dividend has not been properly exploited (Nyamnjoh & Rowlands; 1998). Culturally, Cameroon is divided into four main parts (Sudano-sahel, Grassfield, Sawa and Fang Beti) and linguistically, between the Anglophone (English) and Francophone (French). The population predominantly described as Francophone constitute approximately 80% of the total population with the Anglophone minority constituting the remaining 20%. In all, Cameroon has ten geographical regions (Far North, North, Adamawa, Center, South, East, South, Littoral, Southwest and Northwest) with eight (8) located in the Francophone region and the remaining two (2) in the Anglophone region.

To understand the concept of hate speech in greater depth, this research sampled responses from five (5) regions in Cameroon; comprising the Centre, Littoral, Northwest, Southwest and Far North. This diversity has rather exposed the country to challenges that has grown from public questioning into protest and most recently violent conflict. Violent conflict that can significantly be seen as a major negative outcome of Cameroon's diversity and mis-uses of democratic values has affected the country's unity. According to Human Rights Watch, violent conflicts in Cameroon has recently displaced over 714,100 people, properties destroyed with over 1000 lives lost in the Far North, North West and South West Regions of Cameroon.



MAP OF HATE SPEECH IN CAMEROON BY REGION



Source: Hate Speech and Violent Conflict in Cameroon
Researchers for LOYOC Report



RISE OF HATE SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the devastating offshoots in Cameroons' diversity, which is fuelling this violent conflict, is the rise of hate speech (Eyango, 2018:63). The use of hate speech in the forms of propaganda, fake news, insults by politicians, government officials and civilians is not a new phenomenon in Cameroon.

From the Far North of Cameroon, the terrorist group uses hate speech including; "western education is forbidden" to foment violence on Christians and secular lifestyle. Similarly, some respondents share that the use of hate language on Anglophones by French speaking Cameroonians contributed to the gradual Radicalisation of them and subsequently contributed to the current violence in North West and South West. PeaceTech Lab in the Lexicon of Hate Speech terms in Cameroon describes the effect of hate speech to dehumanize opponents, exacerbate feelings of frustration and hate, and calling for violent action.

The emergence of social media has increased the use and spread of hate speech across Cameroon. Activist of the Anglophone crisis, security forces, government, armed groups and civilians use these platforms to spread hateful messages.

An interviewee shared that;

“

The inability to curtail or check social media has made users of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp to disseminate hate languages, fake news and misinform with the defence of exercising their human right to freedom of expression.

”

Considering the current political instability in Cameroon, it is imperative to understand the concept of hate speech to develop a robust strategic framework to combat it. This research will seek to understand the concept of hate speech within the political, social and economic context of Cameroon from the perspective of young people, provide some commonly used hate terms and phrases. This report is developed with the aim of providing the reader, academia, practitioners and policy makers with an insight on the relationship between hate speech and violent conflict as well as some efforts carried out by young people and recommendations on how to prevent and combat hate speech in Cameroon.

Key Hate Speech Terms and phrases in Cameroon

Hate speech has increasingly become a major problem in Cameroon. In order to be able to capture and confirm the existence and use of inflammatory languages in Cameroon, a survey was carried out through questionnaires in addition to a focus group discussion. Among over 130 people diversely selected based on their understanding of the topic and location, were people from 5 of the 10 regions of Cameroon and a few from the diaspora. Respondents included adults, women and youths from different walks of life, academia, government, social media influencers and celebrities, as well as some students.

The survey was used to understand whether or not respondents from the selected group and geographical location affirm the use and prevalence of messages considered offensive, derogatory or inflammatory on other people or groups.

In Cameroon, several terms could generally be regarded as hate speech in a given context. Decades ago, attention on the impact of hate speech was neglected both in policy and action. This gave legitimacy to users of the terms, thus making receiver victims who felt no one cares about how they feel.

Our findings during this research identified terms as most recurrent both online and offline. These terms collaborate with an earlier compilation by PeaceTechLab in the Lexicon of Hate Terms in Cameroon (reference above). In this research, we reproduce some of these key terms and their resultant meanings

and illustrate with examples how they have contributed to the worsening crisis in the Far North, Northwest and the South West regions of the country. It should be noted that these words are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Selected examples of these terms below.

Example: Cam no go/ Craffi

CAM NO GO is an expression in the “pidgin” language which stands for something or someone who is a visitor or settles somewhere but it/he/she never leaves. The term emerged in 1996 when the then Governor of the South West region of Cameroon in a public speech to refer to settler of his region who hailed from the North West Region. One of our respondents shared that the word was triggered by grievances bored by South Westerners because most of the North westerners who settled in the South West had become very successful, owning lands, properties and working in the plantations. The outbreak of the Anglophone crisis saw the re-emergence of this term as Anglophone critics of the Anglophone crisis claimed the North Westerners residing in their South West are the ones fomenting the violence. This word is widely used among English Speaking Cameroonians and most recently by a wide range of people from both sides of the country to incite infighting by creating a divide.

Also the term **GRAFFI** is usually used on social media alongside “Came no go”. It is derived from the word “grass field” one of the geo-political parts of Cameroon, and has been used to describe people from the Northwest and West Regions of Cameroon. This term is used by both Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians to refer to people from this region basically because of their socio-cultural lifestyle and attitude. “I use it to demonstrate that the person is uncivilised, dirty, greedy, uncultured, and stingy” said one respondent. People from the North West when referred to this way find it offensive because it is mostly used to refer to them as foreigners.

This word is also inflammatory in the way it’s used and the meaning derived from the context. It can also be used to demonstrate that the target is uncivilised, greedy, uncultured, and stingy.

LES BAMENDA

The term has been generally used to refer to every English speaking Cameroonian in a derogatory way. It binds its victims to “Bamenda” a city (regional capital) in the North West region of Cameroon. The word is used to group all English speakers and present them as a homogenous group which is different from French speakers. It is usually used when francophones want to refer to an Anglophone with derogatory characters such as; stupid, low class, backward. This term was identified as the most recurring term used offline which is pejorative to English speaking Cameroonians. One of the French speaking respondents shared that he uses “le Bamenda” to refer to his domestic help and nanny at home. Les Bamenda” is also used to describe an Anglophone who, faced with a situation of injustice or marginalisation, confronts the person involved out rightly, claiming his rights. Under such circumstances, the response usually given is “n’ammene pas votre Bamenda ici” or “nous ne sommes pas à Bamenda ici.”

Prevalence and use of hate speech in Cameroon

In understanding the prevalence of hate speech from the perspective of respondents across the regions of Cameroon, our sample population all confirmed that hate speech is a real deal. Evidence from all the respondents somewhat agreed on this, though we noticed the degree varies by region. The Southwest suffers a higher threat of hate speech. Meanwhile, although respondents in the centre think hate speech is prevalent; their idea of how prevalent the phenomenon is; is relatively lower when compared with the other regions of the country. Many respondents in the Northwest as well as those in the Far North think hate speech is prevalent in Cameroon.

Respondents from all the five regions admitted using words or language that can be considered inflammatory, derogatory or offensive towards other groups. This is most prevalent in the Northwest and the Centre regions where 21 respondents admitted using hate language. In the Far North and the Littoral regions 20 respondents admitted using hate speech closely followed by Southwest Region where 18 respondents equally admitted using hate speech. Very small number in both regions sampled either did not admit using hate words or did not know whether they used such words on individuals or groups other than their own.

Analysing this result across the selected five regions of the country, it can be deduced that hate speech is very prevalent across Cameroon. From the data presented above, more than 54.8% of the respondents across the various regions admitted to using hate speech.

How does Hate Speech lead to Violent Conflict in Cameroon?

While covering a wide range of hate speech terms and speaking to respondents on the process involved, we found out 3 key terms; Derogatory, inflammatory and offensive in the process of hate speech leading to violent conflict.

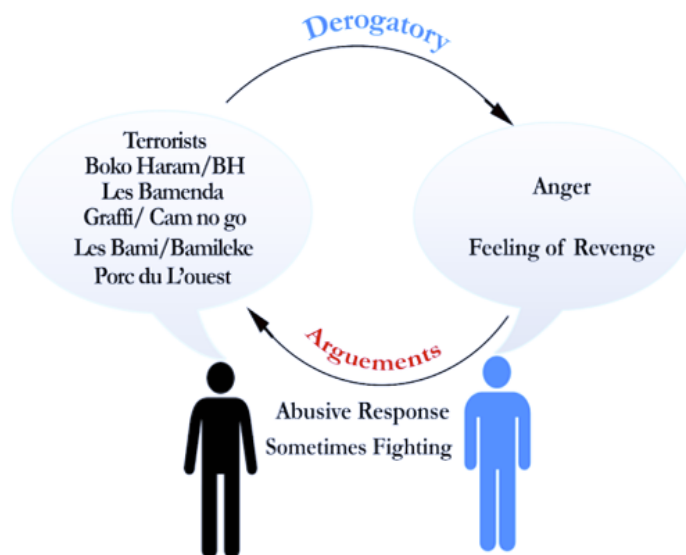


Figure 1: Outcome of a Derogatory Hate Speech

To understand this perfectly, we sampled examples of expressions used online and offline in Cameroon and presented the reactions of respondents to these terms. The sketches below illustrate how damaging the identified hate words can be on an individual or groups.

In Cameroon, acts of violence have been committed both online and offline and they have instigated a lot of physical violence in the space of 5 years. A lot of hate speech and propaganda have been disseminated online through numerous Facebook pages and twitter accounts as well as online and offline TV channels among many other online and offline platforms.

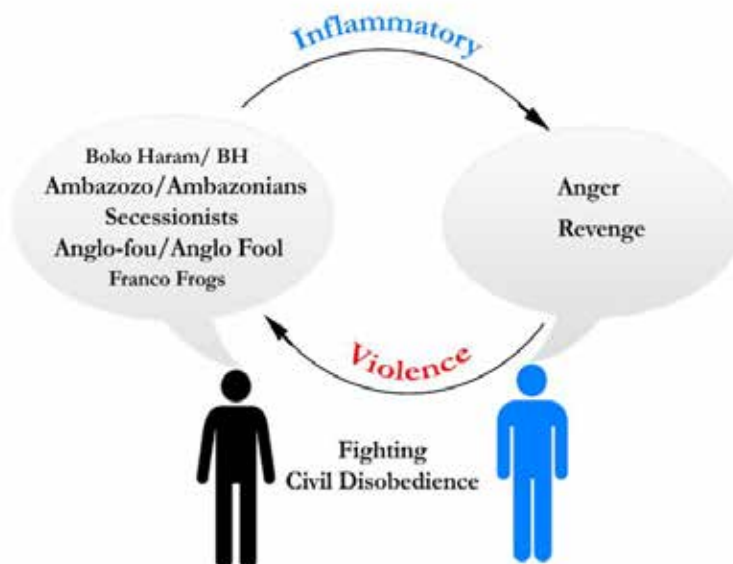


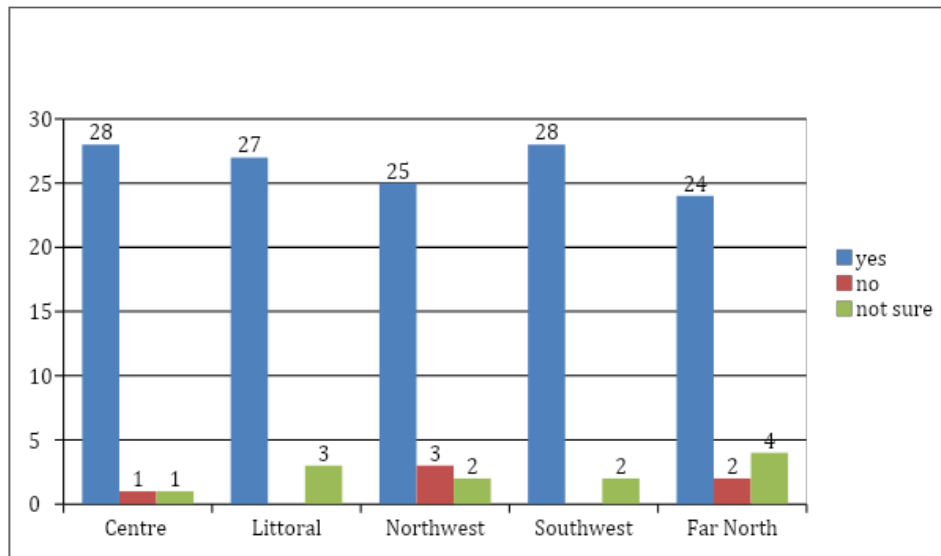
Figure 2: Outcome of an Inflammatory Hate Speech



Figure 3: Outcome of an Offensive Hate Speech

As illustrated in figures 1, 2 and 3 above, radicalisation takes place when hate speech is used on an individual (victim/target) thus increasing the chances of a non-violent person to engage in an act of violence. To confirm this assertion, a survey was sampled to find out if nonviolent people can be instigated to commit violence through hate speech. See figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Can nonviolent people be incited to violence through hate speech?



Source: LOYOC Researchers' generated data, 2019

Respondents across the five regions sampled for the purpose of this research overwhelmingly agreed that hate speech has the potential to incite non-violent people to engage in violent activities. The evidence as depicted in figure 9 above therefore supports the assertion that if measures are not put in place to curb the rise of hate language in Cameroon, it could radicalise non-violent people and possibly make a peaceful resolution of violent conflicts difficult.



LAWS & REGULATIONS ON HATE SPEECH IN CAMEROON

“The hate speech law passed on 24th Dec 2019, is an amendment of Law No. 2016/7 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code for hate speech.”

<https://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/8027-law-2019-020-of-24-december-2019>

SECTION 1: Law No. 2016/7 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code is hereby amended and supplemented as follows: “Section 241: (new) Contempt of race or religion

(1) Whoever commits a contempt, within the meaning of Section 152 of this Code, of the race or religion of one or many citizens or residents shall be punished with imprisonment for from 6 (six) months and with fine of from 5 000 (five thousand) francs to 500 000 (five hundred thousand) Francs.

(2) Where the offence is committed by means of the press or wireless, radio, television or social media or any other means likely to reach the public, the maximum of the fine provided for in subsection 1 above may extend to 20 000 000 (twenty million) Francs.

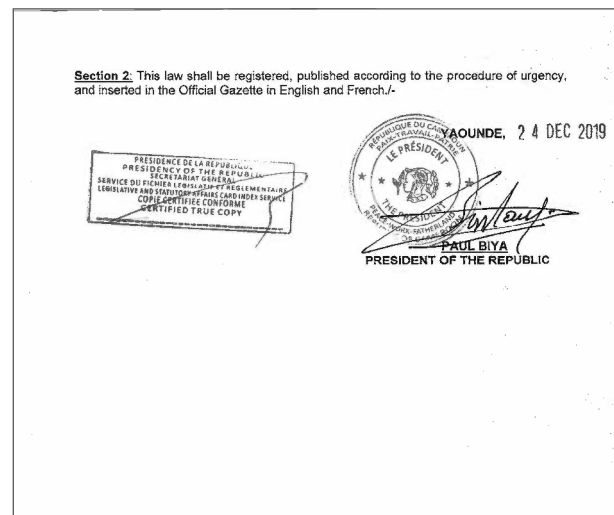
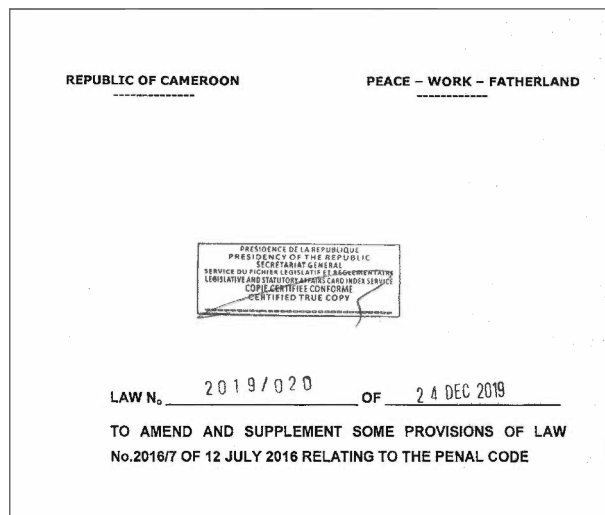
(3) Where the offence is committed with intent to arouse hatred or contempt between citizens, or residents, the penalties provided by the foregoing subsections shall be doubled.

SECTION 241-1: (new) contempt of Tribe or ethnique group

(1) Whoever, by any means, makes hate speech against people or incites them to violence due to their tribal or ethnique origin shall be punished with imprisonment of from 1 (one) to 2 (two) years and with fine of 300 000 (three hundred thousand) francs to 3 000 000 (three million) francs.

(2) Where the benefit of mitigating circumstances is given, the punishment provided for in Subsection 1 above shall not be less than 3 (three) months imprisonment and the fine shall not be less than 200 000 (two hundred thousand) francs. Execution shall not be suspended except in case of diminished responsibility of infancy.

(3) Where the author of the hate speech is a Public Servant as per the provisions of Section 131 of this Code, leader of a political party, of the media, of a Non-Governmental Organisation or a religious institution, the punishment provided for in subsection 1 above shall be doubled and the benefit of mitigating circumstances shall not be given.



PEACEBUILDING AND HATE SPEECH POLICY IN CAMEROON

By Francine Nkolo

Peace is more than the absence of conflict and violence, it is also an important factor to build strong institutions. A peaceful environment is a prerequisite for a prosperous nation, and a necessity for the respect of human rights. That is why the United Nations includes peace and justice among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to achieve a better future for all. However there are many conflicts (religious, historical, socio-political, or ethnical...) that occur not between different countries, but inside a country, i.e. Pakistan, Rwanda, South Sudan and now Cameroon.

Cameroon is in Central Africa, it was once under German rule and after the Second World War was handed over to Britain and France as Mandated and Trust territories of the League of Nations and the UNO respectively. The country was divided in two parts (France: Northern Cameroon and the UK: Southern Cameroon). The two parts federated in 1961 and united in 1972. The English-speaking communities of North-and South-West Cameroon are feeling marginalised.

The Anglophone crisis began in Cameroon in October 2016 with corporatists' demands of lawyers and teachers of North-and South-West Regions, who wanted the effective translation and application of common law and work materials in English. Since the official languages of the Republic of Cameroon are English and French, both languages have the same status. Lacking peaceful communication between the protagonists (Public authorities, lawyers and teachers of these two Regions), along with the spread of hate speech on social media, these claims have transformed since 2017 into an armed conflict.

More than 437 000 people are currently displaced in Cameroon due to the conflict, more than 1800 persons have been killed in English-speaking regions of North-and South-West Cameroon and this number continues to increase. Due to this insecure situation, many Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have taken refuge in big cities like Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam.

Platforms on social media allow a space where people in the country locally or those based in other countries interact by spreading hate speech and fake news on events in the North-and South-west Regions, in order to inflame the conflict. Public speeches broadcast called for the creation of the virtual republic of Ambazonia, whose virtual authorities are calling for secession, amplified by hate speech and violent manifestations videos (burning of Cameroonian flag, burning also schools, houses, hospitals.)

Policy Addressing Hate Speech On Social Media

The same situation was seen in the northern part of Cameroon with the extremist Islamic group of Boko Haram, whose leader uses social media to spread violent videos in which people are killed. Demonstrating that social media networks are not a harmless tool in the hands of citizens. This drives us to ask the question: "How do policy and the laws in Cameroon affect the spread of hate speech on social media?"

According to the United Nations, "The term hate speech is understood as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be demeaning and divisive."

In Cameroon the spread of hate speech was increased by the political system of democratisation that was set up in the 90s. Indeed, the country has proceeded to a complete makeover of their legal instruments. Where freedom of expression and press is concerned, the law N° 90/046 of 19th December 1990 on social communication repealed the order N° 62/OF/18 of 12th March 1962 on the suppression of subversion. These laws had as a consequence the suppression of authorisation, meaning that they enable the suppression of censure and the end of the monopoly of the State on the audio-visual area. So, many private media and radio have emerged, with the aim to freely inform the public in all areas; giving citizens the opportunity to express themselves and openly criticise the government.

This freedom of expression in Cameroon reached its peak with the advent of internet and web influencers. This free communication of ideas has not always been bright for Cameroon, because the citizens do not know how to use their access to media responsibly and this leads to an increase of hate speech not only on traditional media, but also on social media platforms. Hence the need for Cameroon's public authorities to develop and implement public policies and legislation around controlling the spread of hate speech on social media.

In fact there are not yet institutional laws that specifically target hate speech on social media in Cameroon. The National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM) was created by the head of State His Excellency Paul BIYA in April 2017 to ensure that both English and French are used as official languages and with equal status as mentioned in the constitution, so that one community will not feel marginalised. It also works with other institutions like the national Council of communication (NCC), on sensitisation and education on freedom and responsibility of media; the promotion of peace, "living together", democracy and human rights; the promotion of national languages and cultures in all media.

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunication is struggling to sensitise on cyber criminality on media through a government organisation NAICT (National Agency of Information and Communication Technology). This Agency plays a crucial role in the regulation of the use of the internet. It restricted the free flow of information online.

It is for that purpose that the law N° 2010 /012 of 21st December 2010 was adopted in the Cameroonian parliament. It punishes offences related to the use of Information and communication technologies.

Recently (November 2019), a law project modifying and supplementing some dispositions of the law of 12th July 2016 (Article 241) on the penal code of Cameroon were submitted in the national parliament. This law suggests one to two years of imprisonment for those who spread hate speech and incite people to violence with the payment of a fine of 300.000 to 3 million francs CFA. If the perpetrators of the committed crimes are government employees, leaders of a political party, a media manager, NGO manager, or a religious institution, these sentences will be doubled.

However not all citizens are aware of the existence of all these laws, so many continue to incite violence on social media and spread hate speech online. (People are still posting and sharing videos where English-speaking Cameroonians are called "Dogs" on private classic media). Even those who are sensitised to the abuse of the non-repression of these laws since, nobody has yet been punished.

To fight against hate speech, the following suggestions are proposed:

- The Cameroonian Government needs to implement the law that already exists, for it to be effective and efficient
- Civil society and NGOs need to work with the Cameroonian government to let them know the relevance of having a specific law on hate speech
- The Cameroonian Government needs to create an independent follow up on the domain of hate speech on social media;
- The communities need to be sensitised and educated on responsible use of social media to be sure they understand all the risks that can affect people
- The Cameroonian Government needs to target words that are considered as hateful and vicious in Cameroonian context, i.e. “Anglophone”, “frog”, “Bamenda”, “Bamileké”...
- The law based hate speech discussed in parliament needs to be adopted;
- A strategy is needed to resettle and re-empower the IDPs

Ultimately, Cameroon is a complicated country with all its cultural specificities. But these are not to be considered as a source of conflict among the population. The status of bilingualism in Cameroon needs to play positively in the peacebuilding efforts, as the two official languages should effectively be used in equal manner everywhere by every Cameroonian. In this country of about 25 million inhabitants, where more than one million are using social media⁸, it is clearly difficult for public authorities to have effective control on what is posted by people on social media platforms. It is one this way that fake news, hate speech and violent videos which contribute to intensify conflicts are spreading. The Government has a key role to play in setting up a real policy and legislation about hate speech on social media, but also to have a real follow-up. However, legislation is only one approach – that can also be misused against people – and needs to be supported by civil society engagement, critical awareness and education on responsible use of social media.

Keywords: **Peacebuilding - Hate speech - Social media - Cameroon - IDPs.**