



## Hate Speech Fuels Genocide Historical Evidence

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Hate speech is the act of targeting an individual or group based on their inherent identity-based characteristics. It is manifested in many forms that often lead the individual to commit acts of violence and extreme racist behavior, contributing to the spread of turmoil that threatens peace and social security. The factors contributing to the spread of this discourse vary from one country to another, depending on the existing circumstances (social, political, religious, etc.) in a given region.

Violent groups that use this discourse adopt a variety of rationales to market and pass on their ideology, which raises several important questions for researchers and specialists, regarding the motives of sympathizers of “perpetrators” and how these groups use this incendiary speech against an individual or group of individuals within the same State.

In an attempt to answer these questions, here are some examples from a historical perspective in which hate speech leading to violence has spread in some countries.

### Multiple Concepts

There is no particular definition of hate speech, especially in the context of the freedom of speech and expression. In today’s world, communication and media technology have provided a variety of platforms for disseminating incendiary content that incites hatred and disdains the other. Exposure to these types of content causes serious damage to democratic values, peace, and political stability, and contributes to the spread of hate crimes and violence, and even genocide .

“Hate Speech” is a kind of offensive expression targeting a group of people that are identified with inherent characteristics, such as race, religion, or gender, which threatens the social peace of the community. The United Nations defines it 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 convicted on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”

There is a very fine line between hate speech and violent crimes. Hate speech often leads to such attacks, and perpetrators are keen to win sympathetic supporters and push them to act against one or more targets through hate content .

As established by the previous definitions, the victims of hate crime often belong to vulnerable segments of society, possessing inherent characteristics which motivate the offenders to commit violence against them .

### **Motivations of Sympathizers**

To understand hate incidents and acts of violence that arise as the consequence of incendiary speech, which disturbs the cohesive fabric of society, it is necessary to examine a CNN report issued in 1993 as a case study made by two social scientists, Jack McDevitt and Jack Levin, who examined 169 files of hate crimes at the Boston Police Department. The report found four categories of hate crime perpetrators :

First: Thrill-seekers: These perpetrators are usually immature, driven by the excitement and drama of their actions, and they consist of bored and drunk dangerous young men. Often, they have no logical reason for their acts, but they derive excitement from targeting vulnerable members on the grounds of their racial, ethnic, gender or religious backgrounds. McDevitt explained that 70% of these thrill offences were assaults and vicious beatings of victims .

Second: Defenders: The attackers present themselves as defenders to protect their neighborhood, workplace, religion, community, or country. They target specific victims and desperately justify their acts. Sometimes, they are motivated by a particular event, such as a Muslim or black family moving into their neighborhood .

Third: Avengers: They commit hate crimes in revenge, in response to personal enmity, terrorism, etc. The “avengers” usually act alone and target members of the ethnic, racial or religious groups in an act of revenge, even if the victims had nothing to do with it. In some cases, they might travel to the victims’ territory to conduct retaliatory attacks. A significant example of Avengers could be seen after the 9/11 attacks when hate crimes against Muslims increased by 1600%. A similar spike occurred after the Paris attacks in 2015 .

Fourth: Mercenaries: They are the deadliest of the four. Their mission is war against target groups or members of rival races or religions. They target symbolically significant sites and high-value figures to gain maximum attention and they go to great lengths to justify their acts of excessive violence. Their hate crimes and violence resemble terrorism in nature and rhetoric .

## Historical Precedents

In recent history, the world has witnessed massive incidents of violence, including human atrocities and genocide in several countries driven and fueled by hate speech. At the same time, social media played a pivotal role in providing digital platforms to spread incendiary discourse coupled with disinformation, hateful slogans, and extremist ideology, leading to large-scale violence. Here are some examples of violent crimes resulting from hate speech:

### Cambodian Genocide

Cambodia was established in 1953 as a constitutional monarchy under Prince Sihanouk, who was later toppled by a US-backed coup in 1970, when the Khmer Rouge movement of Pol Pot led a vast propaganda campaign to mobilize the rural population and seize power. When it took power, it launched a massive campaign to build a society consisting exclusively of toiling masses of peasants, threatened all that had to do with Western influence, and forced urban residents to work on agricultural projects .

As a result of propaganda campaigns and hate speech, many minority communities became their enemies, particularly ethnic Chinese, Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims. Other less clearly defined groups were targeted, such as those who wore spectacles or spoke foreign languages, and those who stopped working in agriculture under the pretext that they are cultured or educated .

It is estimated that from 1975 to November 1978, some 1.25 million Cambodians died from Khmer Rouge crimes, and the genocide of Cambodian minorities ended after the Vietnamese army intervened and overthrew the Pol Pot regime in 1978.

### Rwandan Genocide

The Rwanda genocide was the result of an organized campaign of mass murder that happened over 100 days in April-July 1994. It resulted from decades of hate speech that exceeded ethnic tension by spreading unfounded rumors and dehumanizing the ethnic Tutsi community. Hate propaganda broadcast by various media outlets incited the Hutu,

who represent over 80% of the population, to kill the Tutsi minority, who are better off in socio-economic and political terms. Hate messaging and anti-Tutsi propaganda escalated and in the period of three months, more than 800,000 people of the Tutsi minority were killed. The victims included children, women, and men and around 250,000 women were raped.

### **Srebrenica Massacre**

In early 1992, Bosnian Serb forces targeted Srebrenica to gain control over the territory in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their primary objective was to annex this territory and to incorporate it into the adjacent Republic of Serbia. In Serbian majority areas, constant propaganda campaigns were launched in the media against the Bosnian Muslim community, portraying them as violent extremist enemies plotting against the Serbs. In July 1995, Serbian forces killed 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and children. It is estimated that during the Bosnian genocide, over 100,000 people were killed, and 20,000 went missing. The three-year war ended eventually because of Western pressure on Serbia. However, survivors among Bosnia's ethnic Muslim community are profoundly scarred.

### **Myanmar Hate Crimes**

The genocide of the Rohingya Muslims is a significant example of a “campaign of hate”, where grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law have been committed in northern Myanmar's Rakhine State. Hate speech, incitement of violence, and misinformation, along with derogatory and dehumanizing language against the Rohingya Muslim minority of Myanmar have been linked to the genocide and extreme violations of human rights in Myanmar in 2012–2017.

According to medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), at least 6,700 Rohingya, including at least 730 children, were killed after the violence broke out, while 288 villages were partially or totally destroyed by fire in the northern Rakhine state. By August 2018, over 725 Rohingya had fled to Bangladesh. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council, released a report documenting the large-scale hate propaganda led by State officials, politicians, and military and religious leaders. It also found systematic atrocities, such as killing, gang rape, torture, and forced displacement .

## Conclusion

History is filled with horrific crimes committed out of hatred and contempt for the other, which threatened social values, political stability, and peace. Therefore, this hostile discourse must be countered and conflicts that could result from it must be prevented, such as: armed conflict, extremism, and terrorism. Authorities should restrict the use of social media to promote hate speech, slogans, and content. However, a balance must be kept between hate speech and protecting the freedom of speech. The United Nations, international forces and human rights organizations should play an influential role in protecting vulnerable individuals, groups, and minorities from violence, atrocities, and genocide based on their religion, race, ethnicity, gender, or color.