

## Short Essay on Hate Speech for INACH

I was staying at my best friend's house for dinner when I saw a message popping up on my phone. «OMG; there are people storming the capitol», it said. I was confused at first, took it for a bad joke or a drunk text. After a moment of thinking, I got curious, nevertheless. I switched on the television. I could not believe what I was seeing – crowds of hundreds of people were marching up the stairs leading to the capitol. Shouting, waving flags, holding up right-wing symbols and conspiracy theory slogans, they were. Policemen were stepping back, letting people walk through. The sound of windows being broken with metal bars in my ears, I saw people storming inside the building. The perspective switched to the people who were captured inside, scared to death. The expressions on their faces made me shiver. My best friend and I sat there, eyes wide open, staring at the screen of the TV. The scene instantly reminded me of the movie “the social dilemma” that had warned from social media hate speech leading to massacres and political riots such as the one I was witnessing. Journalists were being attacked, violence was being forced upon others, and people were eventually killed. All that had been caused by America's leading political figure spreading fake news and false facts on Twitter, urging and encouraging civilians to commit a crime against democracy. That was the moment I realized to what extent hate speech and the spreading of it on social media can endanger our upheld democratic values. I was beginning to understand how powerful and how unstoppable comments on social media can be. Once out there, they cannot be taken back, people cannot be stopped from believing them and what is the most concerning to me: lies are taken for facts, they are taken for the ugly truth. Discriminating opinions on minorities take on new dimensions and become life-threatening. Online hate speech has probably become the most powerful mean of endangering entire groups of people, of questioning our democracies, of knocking down constructive discourse.