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# **PARTY PRIMARIES IN NIGERIA AND THE ELECTORAL CHOICE OF PARTY MEMBERS: THE STUDY OF EMERGENCE OF PARTY CANDIDATES IN ANAMBRA STATE.**

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## **Abstract**

This research work attempts an in-depth appraisal of Political Party Primaries and Electoral Choice of Party Members in Nigeria with Anambra State as a case study (2003-2010). The study reveals that the political parties' nomination of candidates for different elective positions in Anambra State did not reflect the electoral choice of members of the parties. It was established that such factors as god-fatherism, economic power, 'son-of-the-soil' syndrome etc militated against the ability of the parties to nominate candidates based on free and fair voting formula. In view of the above revelations, the study recommends among others that an agency should be set up to monitor political parties' nomination processes to ensure free and fair voting rooted in internal democracy. This among others, will safeguard the rights of the party members in choosing party candidates for a better democratic outcome in Nigeria in general and Anambra state in particular.

**Keywords: Political Party, Primaries, Electoral Choice, Democracy, God-fatherism**

## **Introduction**

At all times, democracy reminds one of the imports of elections. Elections are democratic desideratum and are more pronounced within the rooms and corridors of party politics. Obviously, no free and fair election can take place without party credible candidates who are usually the incontestable competitors within the political space. The emergence of a candidate under any political platform worldwide is a function of party primaries. However, this may not be truly realised without a credible process rooted in internal

democracy within the parties. Hence, a mistake at this fundamental level in the process of party politics is dangerous, destructive and crises-ridden.

In polities with the stigma of electoral aberrations like Nigeria, party nomination processes have been confronted with series of impositions, inconsistencies, instabilities and primitive selection of candidates for the assumption of political offices, which in true sense contradicts the value of party internal democracy and the essence of democracy in general.

Democracy in our contemporary times is made meaningful through an indirect democracy or representation democracy. It takes a bottom-to-top process in that it starts with party primaries where the people at the barest locality would be at liberty to participate in the nomination of a credible candidate that will represent their interest in government at various levels (federal, state and local). This is where political party comes in to provide a viable platform for the actualisation of political dream and aspirations of their desired candidate. While those who are unpopular resort to unscrupulous scuttling of the electoral process, thus, giving rise to all sorts of socio-political vices and at that stage, Ake (1996) argues that political factor becomes the greatest impediment to development in Nigeria. They make the essence political party meaningless by resorting to sole hijack and privatisation of the political parties for capital accumulation and maximization. The 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria in section 221 clearly conferred the authority of electoral (election) conduct in the hand of the political party against any other association, whatsoever. But the craziest thing to be obtained in our recent season of political and democratic dispensation spells political parties in Nigeria as an anathema of politics.

In this study, it will be imperative to state that the nature of party nomination in Nigeria has assumed a contentious form and dimension in that the politics of electoral primaries in Nigeria has not truly reflected the choice of the electorates, but that of a class who are concerned about their personal financial aggrandizement. In Anambra State, which stands as our focal point and case study, the story of the politics of party primaries can never be underestimated. The reason is that various political parties (PDP, APGA, PPA, etc) in the state have in one way or the other thwarted the democratic process of party nomination against the principles of party internal democracy. This has to a large extent rendered the

essence of popular representation null and void and of no effect. It was necessitated by the desire to control power through which the resource meant for the development of the state would be siphoned into private pockets. The mind-boggling question is, why is party nomination imperative? And whose interest do party primaries represent? These and more issues will form the basis of our academic discourse.

In other word, we will attempt the major factors that affect the style of party nomination in Nigeria with Anambra State as our focal point. We will in subsequent sections examine the major experiences of some political parties in Anambra State (like PDP, APGA, PPA, etc) who have suffered the fate of abuse in the process of party nominations and its adverse reflection on electoral choice. To that extent, we will also look at what stands to be the panacea to the drumming issues of party nomination and its impact on electoral choice in Anambra State.

### **Contextual and conceptual analysis**

The emergence of a candidate under any political platform worldwide is a function of democracy through party primaries. Candidates of various compositions and calibre are given the room to contest for who will bear the party flag and run for electoral office under the platform. The essence is to give the masses room to choose who represents them and who will speak for them in a defined democratic arrangement. It is believed that democracy is the prevailing global practice based on its content that it provides a government that is practically instituted by the people, thus, the desire for candidatures to emerge from the grassroots through party nominations under primaries.

Basically, in Nigeria, the process of nominating candidates under political parties has been a very controversial issue over the years among the big political parties. In 1979 and 1983 election, just at the presidential level, it was practically a hand-pick process where the rights of the people to decide whom their representatives become were scuttled, paving way for a demonstrable imposition of candidates on the people. At this point in history, this line of political behaviour began to provoke some bizarre notions among the people on where the right to choice resides, whether in the hands of the few or in the people. It is against this background that one begins to question the import of party nomination and electoral choice. Party nomination is a process where candidates emerge under a political party platform to contest in the actual election through the

instrumentality of people's votes. It starts from ward level then to local level to state level and then to federal level. At this stage, the impact of the card-carrying members of the political parties is weighed and its imperative measured. The implication is to ascertain where the political pendulum swings, whether to the side of the few individual who have the magic wand (wealth) to subvert the electoral process or to the people who decide on who represent them.

In Anambra state and most states in Nigeria, there have been series of electoral manipulations of party candidates under the party primaries in the process of nominating candidates. This kind of attitude owes much to the formative influence of the Nigerian state otherwise called colonialism, constant and protracted military involvement in heating up the polity and the sharp divide between the rich and the poor (Oddih, 2000) and (Onu, 2000). For example between 1998-1999, the process of party nomination and the conditions under which the major three political parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) contested was different compared to what we have today owing to the scepticism that surrounded the process that is, military handing over to civilians with the fear of what prevailed or transpired in the botched Third Republic of President Ibrahim Babangida in 1993.

That does not rule out the fact that party Kingpins, political stalwarts and god-fathers etc., did not emerge to play some imperative roles in deciding who becomes their anointed godsons and daughters. This, we shall explore, in our subsequent section under party experiences, but the point we are trying to establish here is that the right of the masses has been hijacked systematically and transferred to a few individuals who depend on the wealth of the state for their existence. To that extent, we are tempted to employ the reactionary theory of representation which is an elite theory but because it has no provision for public control, that is, not interested in policy making, it thereby undermine democratic procedure, thus, our preference for the adoption of conservative theory of representation which is more progressive for it grants a measure of public control without encouraging popular participation in the process of government. It is also an Elite Theory because, it allows the people to choose their representatives from an elite group (Gaub, 2003:431-432). Its chief exponents are Edmund Burke (1729-97) and James Madison (1751-1836).

The adoption of this framework is consequent upon the fact that the party nomination in Nigeria does not in any way reflect the interest of the masses who are the electorates. Instead, it reflects the major interest of the elite-a separate class that concerns its priorities within their circle (a defined circle). The Radical School is of the view that the party nomination is concerned with the fact that the masses should be the major decider of the candidates to be nominated within the various political parties. In Nigeria, the radical view cannot stand because our polity is so much possessed with unimaginable suppression of the weak, the masses, when it comes to electoral matters.

The ugly scenario, which has to a large extent compounded the power and sovereignty of the Nigerian state, finds its explanation on the emergence of a class that hijacked the party structure and begin to dictate political pace for the party. The reason for the desire to monopolise political power emanated from the most bizarre political arrangement we inherited from our colonial master. At independence, the desire to become relevant in a weak economy assumed an unscrupulous struggle for power, which led to politicians perceiving politics as warfare.

The bizarre political arrangement emerged when high premium was placed on state power, thus relegating politics to a war contest. That explains the fact why the essence of the masses was relegated to the background and the elite assuming a front row in determining the scheme of things. Thus, in so many ways, it has degenerated into the worse form of politics with its attendant ugly experiences include the following;

- Politics of materialism
- Politics of prebendalism
- Politics of god-fatherism
- Poverty and lack of assessment capacity

Without belabouring the obvious, it is now explicit to connote that the nature of party nomination in Nigeria especially, Anambra state is characterised by weak political structure and that has, to a large extent, hampered the essence of electoral choice in Anambra state.

## **The experiences of Party Primaries in Anambra state**

Nigerian political system has a history of illegal acquisition of voters' cards by some political parties (WANEP, 2007:21). The essence is to create conditions for the over-registration of certain persons and simultaneously under-register other persons and groups. The favoured group have their votes multiplied while others are basically disenfranchised. During the PDP registration of its members in Anambra state, some prominent and wealthy elites in the party paid and registered for hundreds of people (assumed to be fictitious names) (Vanguard, January; 2005) and (Okoye, 2008; 38). They collected the party identity cards for these names and brought in foreigners and none party members with these cards to vote during ward congress. The above scenario is not the exclusive of PDP in Anambra state; some other political parties are into the worse form of the game. They not only indulge in vote buying, but engage in unscrupulous writing of electoral results (primaries) against the popular choice and demand creating acute subordination of the financial members. Some of the political parties include:

- Peoples Democratic Party 1998-2009
- All Progressive Grand Alliance 2003-2009
- Progressive Peoples Party 2008/9

To that extent, the above will be given explicit and exemplary exploration and explanations in other to capture its academic import in details.

## **Peoples Democratic Party Experience in Anambra State**

This section shall be subdivided into several eras to give an explicit understanding and profundity of the proposition. In this study, their dynamism in political manipulations shall be revealed to really ascertain the nature and process of party primaries and how the masses stand to contribute meaningfully in making their choice of candidates.

### **1998 PDP Primaries in Anambra State**

The political situation that greeted the 1998 Anambra ward, local and state nomination of electoral candidates was one that was highly inexplicable. Two reasons may be attributed to it:

- a. the long fought battle by the masses to wrestle power from the military
- b. the emergence of political god-father who assumed the role of a major financier of PDP in Anambra-Sir Emeka Offor.

The implication of the above submission remains the fact that a lot of people were very sceptical over the handing over of power to the civilian by the military in 1998 going by what transpired in 1993 under General Babangida. Despite the fact that he wasted huge public fund in conducting the election that saw M.K.O Abiola emerging as the winner of the presidential race, he went on and cancelled an election that was termed the freest and fairest in the history and geography of Nigeria. He subsequently faced an unending incarceration, which also cost him his life. It is the fear and scepticism that emanated from the action that really put everyone on his or her feet with inexplicable expectation. The level of political involvement was reduced to a parochial level and the emergence of a political godfather by name Sir Emeka Offor was made possible. .

Offor in so many dailies and on air claimed to be the one that single-handedly sponsored the election of Dr C.C. Mbadinuju (right from primaries to the actual contest) into power in what was tagged “a battle between the godfather and the godson”. The emergence of Mbadinuju as the party flag-bearer was amazing to everyone considering the involvement of the big wigs in the likes of Prof. A.B.C. Nwosu, Dr. Aneze Chinwuba, Chief Abel Akwanya, etc., who had good party organizations and structures that can earn them victory any day, despite N2.5 million non-refundable fee to the party.

The worrisome situation was that he used his unimaginable wealth to buy the party candidature against the will of the masses, which made it possible for the National Headquarter of PDP to acknowledge the result submitted by Offor’s camp (Okoye, 2008).

### **2002 PDP primaries in Anambra State**

The Peoples Democratic Party nominations (primary election) in Anambra State in 2002 was an issue that was more or less influenced by many factors within the hierarchies of the party other than the majority of the people(s) (the ranks and files of the party) as the *vanguard of party’s internal democracy*. The unfortunate scenario that clouded the situation was that ranging from the national assembly nominations to state assembly and gubernatorial nomination, the whole exercise was trailed with protests and intimidations (Alumona, 2003). The whole exercise was fraught with irregularities. The manipulations of PDP primaries in Anambra State by the political king pins who claimed to be god-fathers were very glaring during the state primaries. In 2001, Chris Uba had remarkable entry into the presidency on account of the appointment of his elder brother, Andy Uba as



the Special Assistant to President Obasanjo on Domestic Matters. Vanguard (January 1, 2002:7) reports that it was easy to pull this stunt because Andy Uba is married to Mrs Stella Obasanjo's sister, who is a special assistant in the office of the first lady. Indeed, there are indications that for some unknown reasons Andy Uba appeared to be exercising more influence within the presidency than his sinecure position entitled him to. It is on that premise that the unassumable powers of Chris Uba found expression. That is why he single handedly presented three candidates for senatorial election: Ugochukwu Uba his elder brother, Mr. IG Abana and Mr Emma Anosike against the those that won the nomination at the primaries which include Ben Obi, Joy Emordi and Nicholas Ukachukwu, thus, splitting the party into more factions as a result of contending interest found among the party elites (Nnanna, 2005).

Again, the emergence of Ngige as the gubernatorial flag bearer was an amazement to everyone. The extent of political somersault that saw the transfiguration of Dr. Ngige into a gubernatorial Dr. Ngige was made possible under the instrumentality of Chris Uba's political manoeuvrings. The whole exercise was an erosion on the party internal democracy. This is because the place of legitimacy was shifted from the masses to a few individuals (the elites) in the party.

### **2006 PDP primaries in Anambra State**

The drama of PDP primaries in Anambra state in 2006, which preceded the 2007 general election that resulted in a power tussle between a duo of familiar similarity (Chris and Andy Ubah). This time, it was a war over supremacy of who becomes the godfather of Anambra State and controls the scheme of things in Anambra politics. Chris Uba had the rigging structure at state level while Andy Uba had the backing of PDP at headquarter level. At the end of the game, political dominion went to Andy Uba who systematically monopolised PDP structure in Anambra state over the period it lasted. The essence of party nomination through the masses was reduced to a zero level, as the import of electoral choice was seriously bartered. No other candidate was allowed to make any input in the electoral primaries owing to the heavy federal presence in the party. It then makes dominion of the Uba's so enormous in the state with their heavy financial endowment. The level of political and material waste that characterised the era will be very hard to take away from the minds of the electorates. The reason boils down to the fact that at that stage in Anambra state, political conditions became the major impediment

to development. The socio-economic values of the state became so porous and weak that developmental drive seems impossible.

### **2009 PDP Primaries in Anambra State**

In 2009 PDP primaries, the controversy that trailed the party nomination assumed a concatenating proportion owing to the fact that PDP has assumed a dominating role in determining who stays in power and who goes. The amusing episode commenced with the emergence of forty-seven candidates vying for party nomination under PDP alone. The issue of determining whom the party flag bearer becomes became an uphill task. It thus, resulted in a battle of the titans. The issue and essence of popular candidature was relegated to the background in that the role of the masses and card-carrying members of the party were undermined. At this stage, the character of politics became so negative that it was taken to a level of political warfare. It is in line with the above that the National Working Committee of the PDP in their decision picked Prof. C. Soludo to run under the PDP platform. In support of the decision of the Central Working Committee of PDP, its national auditor, Mr. Samuel Orton argued that Soludo's candidature followed due process. He maintained that according to the party constitution, when there are difficulties and crises in choosing party candidate, the central body has the overriding power to determining who becomes the party flag-bearer (Duru, November 10, 2009). This line of action was fiercely contested by the multitudes of candidates for the primary; its futility became an aberration that led to so many of them moving to other political parties for cheap nomination and selection. They include, Mrs. Uche Ekwunife to PPA, Andy Uba to LP, Mr Nicholas Ukachukwu HDP, etc. Against this backdrop, one begins to question the essence of legitimacy, legality and popular candidature and the import of the masses other than expediency. The reason remains the same all the way, because the state is a means of capital accumulation and consolidation. Win power, you win everything; loose power, you loose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing, nothing better than winning (Ake, 1996). It is on this note that we turn to examine All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA).

### **The APGA Experience**

The situation in APGA is not different from what is obtainable in other political parties. The same scenario is playing itself out everywhere. The level of political participation has really gone down because, the impact of the masses in choosing who represents them

has been truncated by the avaricious and self-centred traits of our political elites. This is a total hijack on the political structure, party and institution, which has continued to endanger the internal democracy of the political party.

In 2002, there was a serious hijack of APGA political structure by Mr. Peter Obi after he lost in 2002 gubernatorial primaries where he hardly got two percent (2%) of the vote cast against Chief Ralph Okey Nwosu who got 80% of the votes cast and contributed immensely to the development of the party at the grassroot level and one Mr. Gabriel Okey, who came from US got 12% (Ureports, October 6, 2009). But Obi with his heavy financial inducement came in and influenced the party leadership to ignore the primary, of which he got. Despite people's protest, the leadership of the party did not feel perturbed. It thus, became the harbinger of the leadership crisis that bedevilled the party, with Victor Umeh heading Peter Obi's faction and Chekwas Okorie heading the INEC recognised faction. The crisis escalated when Mr. Obi failed to live up to the promises made to the party. By implication, the import of party internal democracy was stalled and popular participation was put on the line, thus making mockery of the whole effort of democratising Anambra State. And in such a crisis situation, development cannot thrive.

### **2009 APGA Primaries**

In the heat of the leadership crisis that factionalised APGA between the various factions as we mention abinitio, the Okorie led faction maintain an unbending stance that Governor Obi will not be allowed to contest under the platform of APGA. If not for the timely intervention of Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu, the candidature of Mr. Obi could have been a mirage. This is because the Okorie faction has made concluding plans to conduct primaries among three candidates who have picked the governorship form after the payment of non-refundable fee of N5 million was made. But at the eleventh hour, Mr. Obi in his style made a systematic turntable, with Ojukwu asking Anambrarians to grant him his last wish by voting in Mr. Obi as the governor of Anambra State come 2010 gubernatorial election. Such plea from Ojukwu is a serious democratic error and political aberration capable of jeopardising development in the state.

### **Progressive Peoples Alliance primary in Anambra State 2009**

The Progressive Peoples alliance (PPA) is also another political party that had a controversial primary. A situation where people have been working hard to contest and

within two weeks, someone emerged from another political party and hijacked the party structure and metamorphosed into an anointed daughter. A typical example that best explained this situation played itself out when Barr. Emeka Etiaba who worked assiduously to resurrect a grass root structure and support for PPA. Suddenly, Hon Uche Ekwunife emerged from PDP without relinquishing the post she got under the platform of PDP as a house representative member. She bulldozed her way into the party and clinched the position of the party flag bearer for gubernatorial election after a controversial circumstance that led to the emergence of Soludo as the PDP gubernatorial flag bearer. The situation off-staged the expectation of the people that Etiaba will emerge as the party's candidate among the five contestants because of his serious grass root campaign. They include; include Engr Okey Chikwendu, Dr. Okey Eze, Evangelist Kenneth Chukwemeka and Hon. Ekwunife who came later (Ureports, 2010). Thus, in that case, one questions the Ekwunife's emergence with 458 votes a miracle of sign of popularity.

Thus, from all indications, it is evidenced that the character of political class and party nomination in Nigeria especially, Anambra state, which is our focal point, is one that is characterised by unchecked political hijack contrary to popular decision and vote. In every election that has been held in Nigeria, both primaries, local, state, and general election, what is obtainable is rigging of an advanced order. For it has moved from mere thuggery to hijack of electoral result sheet before election after which ballot box will go a separate way against the result sheet that will be heading for the INEC office for official acceptance.

### **The consequences of the political conditions**

In all, we have to a large extent tried to establish the nature of party nomination in Anambra State and the choice of the electorate. We were able to gather that across the parties we examined, it is a reflection of a recurrent decimal. It shows that our politics is never a legitimate competition for the selection of those who will manage our agenda, instead a struggle to capture and privatise as enormous power resources, no legality and no public realm. For example Ake (1996) and Nnoli (2003) opine that we are a polity of takers rather than givers. What we dearly love to take is state power and being strangers to one another and adversaries, we necessarily take it as private property. It signifies that the Nigeria structures are detrimental to democracy since politics is mainly about the

control of state power. This amounts to the negativity of the character of the state, which lacks autonomy and is prone to abuses. This character of the state rule out politics of moderation and mandates a politics of lawlessness and extremism for the simple reason that the nature of the state makes the capture state power, irresistibly attractive. Thus, it has created the absence of enabling conditions for democratic participation at the grassroots, making popular will a political anathema in Nigeria with particular reference to Anambra State where series of unimaginable drama continues to unfold.

The issue remains the fact that the elite in Nigeria have been burdened with false expectations and hallow promises of being what they can never be. Then the masses in their confusion identify with them, nursing the illusion that they stand to be the messiah they see. But the preposterous is that the elite have no interest in transforming the state. It is all evident everywhere, when they inherited power from the colonial master, when they (military) took over power from the civilian and then the civilian from the military and whenever there is a period for political contest and election. Now, according to Ake (1996; 12) “in the face of the global resurgence of democracy, they bend democracy into a strategy of power, using election to disempower the people. And they are succeeding. For example, Nigeria is reeling from the antics of a political elite, which is as allergic to democracy as it is neurotic in the pursuit of power...when the people revolted on June 12,1993 voting against ethnic, regional and religious parochialism-all those things which the elite use to divide and manipulate them-a monumental crisis ensued”.

What the above represents is that the take over of political power which now resides with the elite has continued to unleash dangerous signals and actions on the Nigerian polity. That is why in every electoral primaries in Anambra state, the contestants all way resort to the employment of all forms of unscrupulous devices to capture power. Killing, arson and house burning are not ruled out in this process, though some advancement have been made by state to place a bone on the neck of a dog (politicians) in order to hand it. This has been made possible through various forms of politician set-ups. And where everybody wants absolute power, the state is at war; war without end and the underlying socio-political dynamics remain the same. In such a war situation, there is no development, no democracy other then regression. Thus, what remains is power and contestation for power-power supplanting rights, permitting the strong to take what they can, and leaving the rest to suffer.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this study, we have tried to establish the fact that the process of party nomination in Anambra State is a complicated one in that the process of primary (s)election is characterised by political somersault, which places dominion on the part of the elite. Right from fourth Republic till now, the political equation in Anambra state has consistently remained the same, punctuated with various forms of political fist. We traced the causative influence of the character of politics in Anambra state to the kind of structure inherited from metropolises which promotes selfishness against general will. And with their emergence into power, they placed high premium on state power making it so attractive that it became every man's bride. Though theoretically speaking, it was argued that the power resides with people, but arriving from this academic voyage, it is nothing but a half-truth and half-baked falsehood. Thus, having x-rayed the various experiences of different political parties (PDP, APGA, PPA) at different eras, it was gathered that the process of political nomination is a defilement on the electoral choice.

This ugly situation has created a two-way situation that the burden of political primaries in Anambra state is a result of weakness on the part of the elite and that of the masses. On the part of the elite, there is a total hijack of the electoral process using their intimidating financial base. That is why the impoverished masses remain an easy and pliable tool in the hands of the moneybags who can do anything to capture state power by all means. Through that way, they have reduced the essence and import of the masses towards party nomination to the level of a shadow. On the part of the masses lies the greater problem. We corrupt those who are stronger by allowing them every indulgence, including the liberty to abuse us. We have no will and courage to resist power; our inclination is to worship it. We think nothing of submitting to all manner of indignity to getting those in power to notice us or to throw us some crumbs. *Even without the crumbs, we still ache with desire to please them* (Ake, 1996). Thus, from the above submissions, we can now posit our recommendations as follow: there should be a concerted effort to ensure party internal democracy by making sure that the general interest is enshrined and protected by the party constitution. Through that way, equality and popular representation will be promoted and sustained. On the part of the masses, there is serious need to reduce the extent of material worship. The perception of materialism among the people of Anambra state finds expression in the level of poverty and lack of assessment capacity that

belabours the masses. Unless the issue of poverty is solved, the solution to the total domination by the elite in the state will ever remain a mirage.

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