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Patron-Client Politics and the 2023 Governorship Election in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study empirically examines the interplay between patron-client politics and the dynamics of the 2023 governorship election in Enugu state, Nigeria. Until the 2023 governorship election, political domination and repeated arm-twisting of other political parties by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its extended powerful party machine (the Ebeano political family) almost rendered the state a one-party state since 1999. The objectives of the study are to ascertain whether Peter Mbah's association with the Ebeano political dynasty contributed to his emergence as both the PDP flag bearer and governor of Enugu state, on the one hand; and to ascertain the role of Peter Obi's personality cult in the competitiveness of the 2023 gubernatorial election in the state. Utilizing the patron-client theory, the study investigates the manner in which patronage network exerted influence on electoral dynamics and voters' behaviour during the gubernatorial contest. The mixed methods approach, encompassing qualitative interviews, archival scrutiny, and questionnaire survey analysis, was adopted. The findings show that the Ebeano leaders were not as key to Mbah's poll victory as they were to his emergence as the party's flagbearer; and that Peter Obi's personality cult injected unprecedented competitiveness to the 2023

gubernatorial election in Enugu state. The study recommends mitigating the less desirable effects of patron-client politics and promoting more equitable, transparent and democratic political process in Nigeria through appropriate legislations and emphasis on civic/political education in schools.

Keywords: Patron-client politics, Governorship election, Ebeano political dynasty, personality cult, Labour Party, PDP, Enugu state.

Introduction

Patron-client politics has no known universally acceptable definition. Often, its meaning is tied to the prevailing contexts within which it is being explored. This may have explained why Osumah (2010, p.277) equates it with “godfatherism” in the context of Nigerian politics. It has also been approached as a relationship between and/or among players of unequal resources, status, etc., and which is founded on guaranteed loyalties concerning political issues (Lemarchand, 1972). For the purposes of this study, the concept and phenomenon of patron-client politics is conceived of as a specific modality of influence and power relations in which a superordinate (patron) nurtures and succors a

subordinate (client) for political ends concerning which the latter is either by sheer conscience or contractual obligation expected to reciprocate in terms agreeable between the two. In this connection, Biermann (2024) identifies four constitutive attributes of a typical patron-client relations, viz: collaborative resource reciprocation, unequal power/hierarchical relations, quasi-formal obligation, and relative permanence. Two perspectives to the role of patron-client politics in democratic experiment and democratization exist, viz: anti-democracy perspective and pro-democracy perspective. The former (anti-democracy perspective) conceives of patron-client relations as a phenomenon that has trampled on the basic principle of

democracy and encouraged the failure of necessary structures and institutions to act decisively at correcting the anomalies. Viewed from the anti-democracy perspective, therefore, patron-client politics anywhere is not just antithetical to democratic consolidation (Udeogu & Onwuanabile, 2022), but a manifestation of a societal decay and a pestilence to the practice of a true democracy (Osumah, 2010). On the other hand, the pro-democracy perspective views patron-client relations as a necessary stage in the maturation of a democracy during which foremost and reputable political leaders groom future leaders by inculcating in them the requisite political sagacity and trainings while also providing them with platforms for leadership, from micro to macro-leadership positions. In its traditional conception, which aligns with the pro-democracy perspective, patron-client connection can be supportive in the building of democracy and promotion of the values of good governance as it repudiates arbitrariness, extremism, oppression, crass opportunism, insensitivity, irresponsibility, arrogance and corruption (Osumah, 2010). The connection can engender systematic application of rules in the recruitment of

political leadership and management of the affairs of the state for the fulfillment of common welfare (see Rasak, Ake & Reji, 2017). Indeed, the philosophy of the patron-client in the traditional sense was driven by the desire to perpetrate democratic style and values of governance. However, when the patron-client connection assumes negative transformation as it is in the contemporary politics in Nigeria, it becomes dysfunctional to the interest of the whole (Balogun, 2020; Rasak et al, 2017).

Patron-client politics or clientelism is not new in Nigerian politics. The phenomenon was instrumental to the collapse of the democratic experiments and some authoritarian regimes in Nigeria. Yet, it remains prevalent in Nigeria's nascent democracy since its inauguration in 1999. The 2023 governorship and House of Assembly election in Enugu State presented an opportunity for the experimentation of these two perspectives of patron-client politics. The Ebeano family, led by former Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, played a prominent role in Enugu State politics, particularly during his tenure as

governor from 1999 to 2007. The Ebeano family has been influential in Enugu's political landscape and was often considered a patronage network. In the stature and character of a patron, the Ebeano family, provided political support to various individuals and groups in Enugu State. These supports came in the form of financial assistance, endorsements, and resources to help clients secure political positions. The patrons, in this case, the Ebeano family, were known for allocating state resources, including government contracts, appointments, and other benefits, to loyal clients (Mumeh, 2024; Mumeh, 2022). In return for the patronage and support, clients were expected to demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the Ebeano family. This loyalty was often crucial for clients to maintain their political positions and receive continued support.

In the wake of the 2023 general elections, the interest of the Ebeano political dynasty came face to face with the pervasive 'Obidient Movement'. The latter was a political movement galvanized by the supporters of Mr Peter Obi, the Presidential candidate of the

Labour Party (LP) for the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The Movement was a melting pot for all aggrieved Nigerian youths who were enthralled by Obi's leadership personality, and at the same time disenchanted with bad governance and poor leadership delivery in Nigeria. Referring to the Movement, no less a figure than Mr Obi himself posits that, "guided by the principles of adaptive and transformative change, progress, discipline, and democratic values, the Obidient Movement advocates for fairness, equity, inclusivity, and justice" (2024, para.3).

Thus, the 2023 gubernatorial and state assembly election in Enugu became a straight fight between the 'Obidient Movement' and the Ebeano political network. While PDP fielded Barr. Peter Mbah, the LP mounted Hon. Chijioke Edeoga, generally believed to have been unjustly edged out of the PDP primaries. In what many described as a show of shame during the primaries, Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani was captured on camera harassing Hon. Chijioke Edeoga in a heated argument.

Study Location and Methods

Enugu State is located in the South-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The capital of the defunct Eastern region is known for its coal deposits and has a rich cultural and historical heritage. The state capital is Enugu, which is an important urban center and a hub for commerce, education, and government activities. Enugu State is typically divided into three senatorial districts for the purpose of representation in the National Assembly. These districts are named after their respective senatorial headquarters: Enugu North, Enugu East, and Enugu West. Enugu state is also subdivided into seventeen Local Government Areas, which are the third tier of government in Nigeria. These LGAs serve as administrative units for local governance, and each is headed by an elected Local Government Chairman. With the GPS coordinates of 6° 27' 35.8704" N and 7° 32' 56.2164" E, the state is bordered to the north by Kogi and Benue states, to the east by Ebonyi state, to the south by Abia state, and to the west by Anambra state. Enugu state, unlike the neighbouring states, has had a relatively peaceful political cum electoral history since 1999. Being a homogenously populated state and dominated mostly by farmers and

civil servants, it contrasts with such states as Anambra and Abia, which in addition to possessing related features, are also popular for bustling commercial activities that add lustre to their hetero-metropolitan outlook. These demographic (geographical and cultural) features of Enugu state make it easier for a powerful leader, having successfully established himself as a force, to draw legions of politically conscious people to himself, with little or no strong opposition. This arguably explains the success of the Ebeano political family and the patronage politics it has midwived in the state since 1999.

Each of the three senatorial districts in Enugu state constituted a cluster for data collection. The researchers employed the mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in data gathering. A comprehensive questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data regarding perceptions, behaviours, and experiences related to patron-client politics in 2023 governorship elections in Enugu state. This questionnaire encompasses inquiries aimed at capturing respondents' perspectives on the research

objectives. Open-ended questions were included to allow respondents to provide qualitative insights, ensuring a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. As sourced from INEC's official website, (www.inecnigeria.org 2024), there were a total of 2,112,793 registered voters in the state representing politicians, party officials, civil society leaders, and voters within relevant constituencies. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula with a margin of error of 5%.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{2112793}{1 + 2112793 (0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{2112793}{1 + 2112793 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{2112793}{1 + 5281.9825}$$

$$n = \frac{2112793}{5282.9825}$$

$$n = 400.297$$

$$n \approx 400$$

Therefore, using the Taro Yamane formula with a 5% margin of error, a sample size of approximately 400 registered voters was found suitable for achieving a 95% confidence level. For this same reason, a simple random sampling technique became appropriate for the study. This technique was suitable for the study because it ensured that every registered voter in the population had an equal chance of being selected for the sample. This reduced the risk of bias and ensured that the sample was representative of the entire population. The questionnaires (400 in number) were

Given:

- Population size (N): 2,112,793
- Margin of error: 5% (0.05)

Using the Yamane (1967) formula:

administered in-person, prioritizing confidentiality to encourage candid responses. Additionally, demographic information was collected to facilitate subgroup analyses and ensure the inclusivity of diverse perspectives within the sample.

Apart from the questionnaires through which the researchers generated quantitative data, the researchers also identified and interviewed 10 key informants with expertise or direct involvement in the state's governorship elections randomly drawn from the three senatorial districts at the ratio of 3:3:4. These informants/respondents included campaign managers, party leaders, and electoral officials. A semi-structured interview guide was developed, comprising open-ended questions aimed at exploring in-depth the role of institutions in shaping patron-client relationships. The interviews were conducted in person and via video conferencing to allow for probing questions and follow-up discussions, thereby eliciting rich qualitative insights. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed, ensuring accuracy and confidentiality, and analyzed

thematically to identify recurring patterns, themes, and key findings. We made use of tables, Pie Charts and Chi-square tool for the analysis of data collected through questionnaires, while content analysis was utilized for critical evaluation of the information gathered from the interview and other qualitative sources.

Discourses on Patron-client Politics and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria

Patron-client politics has been a pervasive aspect of African political systems, particularly in Nigeria, where it has continued to play a significant role in shaping political behaviour and governance. The relationship between patrons and clients involves the exchange of material resources, services, and benefits in return for loyalty and support (Sarker, 2008). This exchange goes beyond tangible goods, encompassing promises and obligations that further solidify the bond between patron and client (see Iwuoha, 2021; Kopecky & Spirova, 2011; Nichter, 2008; Sayeri, 2011). These relationships are structured hierarchically, extending from national to local levels, and involve intermediaries. Modern patron-client systems are more

personalized, goal-oriented, and include political influence, lobbying, and interactions among various interest groups (Iwuoha, 2021; Sayeri, 2011). In the African context, the system is deeply embedded in societal structures, influencing political decision-making and voter behaviour (Iwuoha, 2021).

The origins of patron-client politics in Nigeria have been shaped by various factors, as noted by different scholars. Rasak et al. (2017) trace the roots of godfatherism to the First Republic, when prominent political leaders like Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Obafemi Awolowo cultivated loyal “godsons” to advance the developmental goals of the nation. Unlike modern godfathers, these early figures were seen as benevolent and progressive. In contrast, Balogun (2020) highlights that patron-client relations have a much deeper history, dating back to pre-colonial agrarian communities, where landlords and peasants formed early systems of dependency, much like the modern patron-client relationships seen today. Osumah’s (2010) submission aligns with Balogun (2020), demonstrating that patron-client relationships in Nigeria have deep

historical roots, originating in pre-colonial times and continuing through the colonial period into post-independence administrations.

Clientelism, though universal, is often seen as a defining feature of Third World politics, where it is particularly detrimental to development (Omobowale & Olutayo, 2011). In these settings, the prioritization of personal loyalty and obligations over institutionalized governance leads to a stagnation of progress. This form of politics detracts from meritocratic systems, perpetuating inequality and stifling socio-economic advancement. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2002), as cited in Balogun (2020), concur with Omobowale and Olutayo (2011), by defining clientelism as a complex network that binds elite patrons to their followers through the distribution of material resources like jobs, money, and administrative positions. In Nigeria, this system of obligations has entrenched a governance model where political loyalty is valued above national interests, reinforcing a cycle of dependency and patronage that undermines broader democratic principles. Building on the preceding argument, Klopp (2012)

describes clientelism as a practice where the state offers preferential treatment to a select group in return for their political support, particularly during elections. This arrangement has led to claims that the modern state is complicit in perpetuating patron-client relationships, thereby reinforcing social and economic inequalities.

In terms of democratization, patron-client politics in Nigeria is characterized by enduring and multifaceted relationships that significantly influence the country's democratic and governance structures. Osumah (2010) notes that such dynamics are not exclusive to Nigeria, appearing in various political systems globally. He further posits that pecuniary motivations and primitive tactics for resolving disputes make this system a defining element of Nigeria's recent political history. With the advent of multi-party democracy, Omobowale and Olutayo (2007) highlight that patronage politics remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's political landscape. Influential figures have exemplified how patronage is utilized to secure political support by providing essential resources to the poor, who often act as enforcers and political

assets. This practice ensures that patrons maintain significant influence over political processes, making them indispensable to any governing administration (Omobowale & Olutayo, 2007). Again, because patrons see their supports as investments, they live in perpetual expectation, sometimes making it difficult for parties and candidates to deliver on their campaign promises and manifestoes (see Ilo & Udeogu, 2016).

It is, therefore, not strange that Fagbadebo (2020) associates patron-client relations with lawlessness by emphasizing that the phenomenon contributes to a Hobbesian state of nature in Nigeria, where might dictates right, leading to political instability and the use of coercion as tools for maintaining power. These dynamics results in the oppression of the public and the manipulation of legislative processes by political elites for personal gain, thereby undermining democratic principles and governance. In the same vein, Rasak et al. (2017) discusses the deep-rooted clientelistic structures established during Nigeria's early post-colonial period. Political elites, often referred to as "godfathers", controlled state offices and

amassed significant economic and political power. These patrons dispense resources and privileges to a dependent client base, fostering a class division that perpetuates socio-economic disparities, stifles equitable development, and opposes any political restructuring that may undercut patron prebendalism (Udeogu, Aguiyi & Ejiofor, 2019). The clientelistic framework ensures elite dominance and prioritizes patron interests over public welfare, thereby impeding national progress and maintaining socio-economic inequalities (Rasak et al., 2017).

The true position is that patron-client politics has had and continues to have profound effects on the Nigeria's democratic governance and socio-political landscape. The practice undermines democratic values by negating principles such as accountability, transparency, and political maturity. According to Osumah (2010), factors such as political decay, weak party structures, and an imperial presidency contribute to the entrenchment of patron-client relationships, which erode democratic institutions and weaken the governance

framework. The erosion of public trust is another significant consequence of patronage politics. Rasak et al. (2017) emphasize that the compromise of electoral rules and the frequent disobedience of prescribed norms lead to a loss of trust between the government and the governed. This erosion of trust, in turn, weakens democratic institutions, fosters mutual suspicion, and undermines effective governance and democratic stability (Fagbadebo, 2020; Omobowale & Olutayo, 2007; Osumah (2010).

The criminalization of politics in Nigeria is another critical issue linked to patron-client relationships. Omotola (2007) notes that political patronage has become distributive, with patrons manipulating political processes for personal gain. This criminalization is evident across various sectors, including academia, law, and religion, where patrons exert control and influence, often through coercion and vote-buying, which exacerbates political violence and instability (Omotola, 2007). On another hand, cultural and socio-religious influences also play a role in perpetuating patron-client politics. Oyeboode (2013) argues that the veneration of elders and ancestors, which

has historical roots in Nigerian culture, has been co-opted into the political realm. This legitimization of patron-client relationships negatively impacts societal well-being and democratic governance by reinforcing the power and control of political patrons.

Furthermore, patron-client politics fosters corruption and rent-seeking behaviour, which undermines policy implementation and economic development. Balogun (2020) highlights how political elites misuse their power to award contracts and distribute resources based on personal connections rather than merit. This practice deepens poverty for those without patrons, exacerbates ethnic divisions, and undermines election credibility, leading to decreased voter turnout and general distrust in the electoral process. Balogun's (2020) position strengthens the contributions of Fagbadebo (2020), Omobowale and Olutayo (2007), and Osumah (2010), by demonstrating that patron-client relationships weaken Nigeria's democratic governance. Still in this regard, Jimoh and Nurudeen (2023) opine that clientelistic relationships weaken the democratic freedom of the populace to

elect their representatives freely. Moreso, the economic implications of patron-client politics are also significant. In addition to poverty as indicated by Balogun (2020), Rasak et al. (2017) argue that the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of political elites perpetuates economic inequality. This clientelistic framework results in a system where elites control both political and economic power, stifling equitable development, widening the gap between the rich and poor, and leaving the low income earners scampering for alternative means of adaptation and survival (Udeogu, Ibuot, Nwokedi & Okonkwo, 2024; Balogun, 2020; Rasak et al., 2017).

Taking somewhat radical departure from the preceding narratives, Iwuoha (2021) and Morgan et al. (2010) offer perspectives on patron-client politics in Nigeria that diverge from the conventional views, challenging some established narratives about the dynamics of these relationships. Iwuoha (2021) challenges the traditional view of patron-client relationships in Nigeria, which typically portrays patrons (ruling elites) as the primary holders of power and

control, while clients are seen as subordinate beneficiaries. Contrary to this perspective, Iwuoha argues that indigenous oil block awardees wield substantial influence over patrons by using economic power and election funding to shape decisions. This suggests a more complex power dynamic where clients, not just patrons, hold significant control, challenging the traditional view of a simple patron-client hierarchy. Morgan et al. (2010) provide an empirical examination of how patronage relationships impact educational attainment within households. Their study explores whether these relationships function as a form of social capital that can facilitate upward social mobility, which contrasts with the traditional view that patron-client relationships mainly reinforce existing social inequalities. The “social resources” perspective suggests that patronage ties could potentially provide significant benefits, including improved educational opportunities for clients’ children. However, the study’s findings support the “social constraints” perspective, indicating that patron-client relationships might actually perpetuate status immobility and reinforce social

hierarchies rather than promoting mobility (Morgan et al., 2010).

As deduced from popular scholarly contributions, patron-client politics in Nigeria has far-reaching effects on democracy, governance, and development. It undermines democratic values, erodes public trust, criminalizes politics, perpetuates cultural influences, fosters corruption, exacerbates economic inequality, and destabilizes electoral processes. To address these challenges, Haruna and Jumba (2011) suggest a multifaceted approach, including electoral reforms, dialogue-based political engagement, adherence to the rule of law, and youth empowerment. These measures are essential to break the cycle of patron-client relations that currently dominates Nigeria’s political landscape.

As interesting as the foregoing discourses are, the question of whether patron-client relations played any role (and in what dimensions) in the 2023 Enugu State Gubernatorial election remains unaddressed. Filling this knowledge gap is vital given that there are local conditions that tend to vitiate or strengthen some arguably established

positions just as there are chances for variability of political behaviours incumbent upon local idiosyncratic peculiarities.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion:

Peter Mbah's Association with Ebeano Political Dynasty and the Emergence of PDP Flag Bearer/Governor of Enugu State

The Ebeano political dynasty, led by former Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, wields considerable influence in Enugu State politics. As Mbah vied for the PDP ticket, endorsements from key figures within the Ebeano camp carried significant weight, signaling both internal party cohesion and broader grassroots support. Initially, as a creation of the Ebeano political machine, Peter Mbah received significant backing from Sen. Chimaroke Nnamani, which helped him secure the PDP nomination for governorship election in Enugu State. Nnamani's endorsement was seen as crucial in rallying the Ebeano loyalists and the broader political structure to support Mbah's candidacy.

Outside Sen. Nnamani, weighty endorsements of Mbah also came from such other political figures within the Ebeano family. One such endorsement came from Chief Ikeje Asogwa, a prominent Ebeano leader and stalwart of the PDP in Enugu State. Others were Senator Fidelis Okoro, another influential Ebeano leader, Hon. Nnanyelugo Aneke, a respected member of the Ebeano political family and a former member of the Enugu State House of Assembly, Chief Ugochukwu Okeke, a seasoned politician and grassroots mobilizer, Dr. Ifeanyi Udeze, a prominent healthcare professional and community leader, Chief Emma Agu, a renowned philanthropist and community leader, just to mention but a few. These endorsements by Ebeano leaders underscored Mbah's standing within the party and bolstered his credibility as a consensus candidate capable of uniting disparate factions within the PDP. Moreover, they served as a rallying cry for party loyalists and grassroots supporters, galvanizing momentum behind Mbah's candidacy and consolidating his position as the frontrunner for the PDP ticket. As endorsements from Ebeano leaders

poured in, Mbah's candidacy for the PDP ticket emerged unchallenged, solidifying his status as the sole flag bearer for the party in the gubernatorial race. The statements of endorsements by Ebeano leaders played a pivotal role in shaping Peter Mbah's undisputed candidacy as the sole flag bearer for the PDP in the gubernatorial election in Enugu State. These endorsements, coupled with Mbah's coalition-building efforts and grassroots support, solidified his position as the frontrunner within the party and positioned him as a formidable contender in the broader political arena.

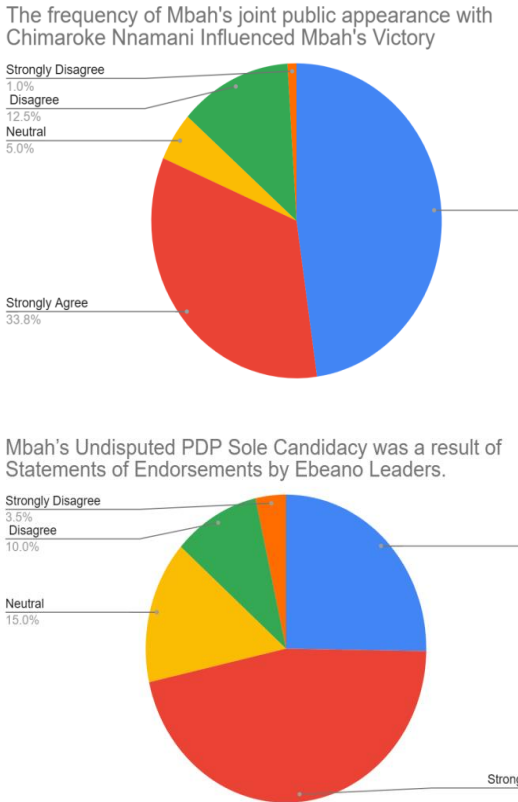
The opinions of our respondents were sought on whether Mbah's public appearance with Chimaroke Nnamani as well as whether statements of endorsements by Ebeano Leaders had any significant contribution to Mbah's Victory in PDP primaries and sole candidacy. One of the interviews, a PDP leader, had this to say:

Of course, the strategic alliance between Peter Mbah and Chimaroke Nnamani was pivotal in solidifying Mba's support base and securing his victory in the primaries. Their joint public appearances galvanized

party members and instilled confidence in Mbah's leadership capabilities.

Another added that the joint public appearances of Peter Mbah and Chimaroke Nnamani "served as a powerful symbol of unity within the PDP in Enugu State. It not only bolstered Mbah's credibility as a candidate but also showcased the party's strength and cohesion in the face of opposition". As shown in figure 1, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents believe that Mbah's public appearance with Sen. Chimaroke Nnamani was a plus to the latter's victory at the primaries.

Figure 1: Endorsements & Public Appearance with Ebeano Leaders and Mbah’s Victory



Source: Field Survey 2024

Figure 1a shows that 81.6% (47.8% and 33.8% Agree and Strongly Agree, respectively) of respondents variously agreed that Mbah’s joint public appearance with Chimaroke Nnamani had a positive impact on his victory in PDP primaries. This indicates a significant portion of respondents who

believe the statement is true. While only about 13.5% of the respondents variously disagreed, 5% was neutral. Similarly, Figure 1b shows 71.6% (25.3% and 46.3%) of the respondents variously agreed that Statements of endorsements by Ebeano Leaders made for Mbah’s undisputed PDP sole candidacy, while 13.5% and 15% of them were in disagreement and neutral, respectively.

Although the unparalleled role of Ebeano’s prime leader, Sen. Chimaroke Nnamani, in the emergence of Mbah in the PDP primaries has been noted and acknowledged, Chimaroke Nnamani ended his political alliance with Peter Mbah before the 2023 elections. The fallout was significant enough that Nnamani distanced himself from the PDP’s gubernatorial campaign in Enugu State, which was led by Mbah. Further complicating their relationship, Nnamani actively campaigned for Bola Tinubu, the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), which was in direct opposition to the PDP’s interests at the national level. This move by Nnamani was seen as anti-party activity and led to his suspension from the PDP. Despite Nnamani’s previous political

weight as a former governor and his initial role in the senatorial race, his opposition to Mbah and subsequent campaigning for another party's presidential candidate suggested that his actions were more likely to alienate some voters rather than consolidate support for Mbah.

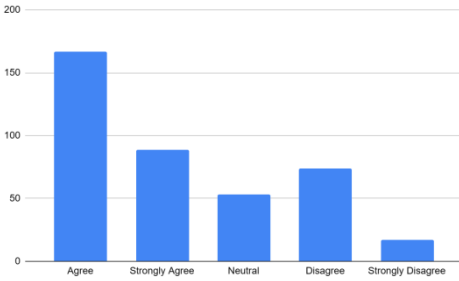
It was against this backdrop that the opinions of participants were sought vis-à-vis the role of Ebeano political bloc in the eventual declaration of Peter Mbah as the governor of Enugu state following the hotly contested elections. Respondents variously isolated the later role of Ebeano leader (Chimaroke Nnamani) from the roles of other estranged Ebeano political associates. Indeed, there was a sense in which the respondents were responding. With severance of relations with Chimaroke Nnamani, Mbah continued to secure endorsements and supports from prominent political leaders in the state who are or were associates in the Ebeano family. One of such figures was the former Gov. Sullivan Chime, who succeeded Gov. Chimaroke Nnamani: While giving his endorsement to Mbah in his Enugu residence, Chime made it succinctly clear that:

We were all part of the Ebeano family because from 1999-2007, it was like there was no other political party in Enugu. The governor then chose to have everybody answer Ebeano. So everybody that held public office in Enugu state, including me was part of the Ebeano family. There's hardly any person, who was in politics then and in politics today that has nothing to do with Ebeano" (Chime, cited in *The Sun Newspaper*, 6th March, 2023, para.4).

As evident in figure 2, a bulging majority of the respondents are convinced that Peter Mbah's association with past and present Ebeano political associates are strongly connected to his emergence as the governor of the state.

Figure 2: Ebeano Political Associates and Mbah's Emergence as State Governor

Peter Obi’s Personality Cult and the Competitiveness of the 2023 General Election in Enugu State



Source: Field survey 2024

It was in this latter sense that excludes Nnamani while including former associates that the descriptive statistics were garnered. 88.7% of respondents variously agreed that the emergence of Mbah as Enugu State governor was not without the blessings and support from the Ebeano-without-Nnamani political associates. The implication is that while Nnamani withdrew his support for Mbah, other associates of the Ebeano stepped in to fill the vacuum in such a way that the impact of the absence of the Ebeano founder and maximum leader was not felt.

Peter Obi’s emergence as a prominent figure in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria has been a significant development, characterized by a distinct personality cult around him and competitive electoral dynamics. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate for the Labour Party in the 2023 elections, has cultivated a strong following that transcends typical political alignments, often referred to as ‘Obidients’. Beyond being a counterforce to the Ebeano family, the ‘Obidient Movement’ led to massive mobilization of support from Nigerians at home and in the diaspora in addition to resulting in the political fortunes of several young and hitherto unpopular politicians that vied for different political offices in the 2023 general elections under the auspices of the LP (Mokuye, Onwunyi & Okonkwo, 2023). Although believed and seen to be motorized by a groundswell of enthusiastic youths/young Nigerians, the Movement drew its membership from all works of live and across age groups. In an attempt to categorize the membership of

the group, Mokuye et al (2023) lists as subgroups, disenchanted professional/intellectuals, influential celebrities, aggrieved #ENDSARS activists, Igbo nation enthusiasts who saw Mr Obi's presidential ambition as the fruition of the long awaited Igbo presidency, and Diaspora Nigerians, who saw in Mr Obi a man that embodies all it takes to reproduce in Nigeria the kind of sane systems they have abroad.

The movement is not just a reflection of support for a political party, but a salutation of the persona of Peter Obi himself and his leadership principles. Here are key elements of this phenomenon: Obi's appeal is largely based on his reputation as a pragmatic and financially disciplined leader, especially noted during his tenure as the Governor of Anambra State. His public persona as an anti-corruption crusader resonates deeply with a populace weary of endemic corruption. The 'Obidients Movement' has been particularly vibrant on social media platforms, where young Nigerians advocate for systemic change. Obi's adept use of these platforms helped him build a grassroots movement that felt

more organic and broad-based than traditional campaign strategies. Obi's focus on revamping the economy through industrialization and support for small to medium-sized enterprises attracted a broad spectrum of supporters, from young entrepreneurs to unemployed youths: Unlike many of his contemporaries, Obi managed to garner support across different ethnic groups in Nigeria, which is pivotal in a country often divided along ethnic lines.

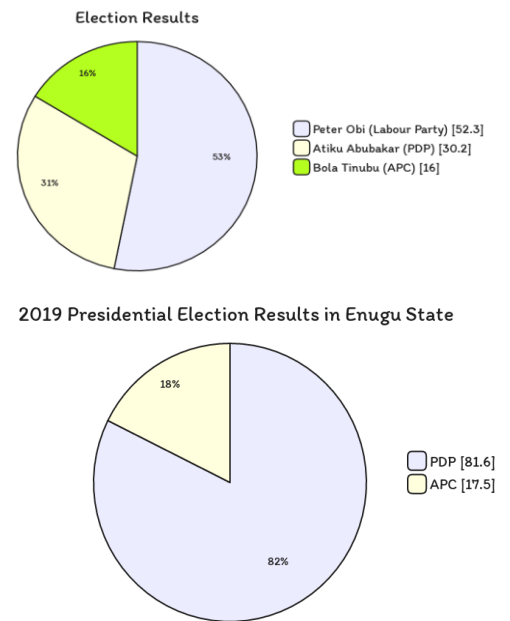
Enugu State, a stronghold of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), witnessed increased political competition in 2023 due to several factors: Peter Obi's Labour Party made significant inroads into traditional PDP territories. The resonance of his anti-corruption message and his promise of economic rejuvenation appealed to many voters who were looking for alternatives to the status quo. The presence of multiple strong candidates from the major parties, including the All Progressives Congress (APC) and PDP, and the emergence of Labour Party as a serious contender, fragmented the vote share that traditionally went to dominant parties, particularly PDP. The 2023 elections saw

unprecedented mobilization of the youth, many of whom were first-time voters enthusiastic about bringing change through the electoral process. Peter Obi’s campaign effectively capitalized on this demographic. The electorate in Enugu, as in much of Nigeria, became more sophisticated, responding more to issues and candidate profiles than to party loyalty alone. Economic issues, in particular, took precedence due to the prevailing economic hardships.

Peter Obi’s track record of good governance, established during his tenure as the Governor of Anambra State, has significantly influenced his political appeal and contributed to the competitiveness of the 2023 general elections. As Governor of Anambra State from 2006 to 2014, Peter Obi was noted for his fiscal prudence, emphasis on education, and health sector reforms. The effect of Obi’s governance record was observed in the electoral dynamics of Enugu State during the 2023 elections. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Enugu State saw a voter turnout of 45%, which was higher than the national average of

34.75% in 2023. Our respondents attributed this increase to the heightened political engagement driven by Obi’s candidacy. In the 2023 presidential elections, Peter Obi won a significant portion of the vote in Enugu State, showcasing the cross-party appeal he holds due to his perceived integrity and governance style. As Figure 3 shows, the results reflect a dramatic shift in voter preference in a traditionally PDP-dominated state.

Figure 3: Election Results from the 2023 general polls



Source: INEC, 2024

Obi's campaign was particularly effective in mobilizing young voters, who are generally more responsive to governance-related issues due to the current socio-economic challenges in the country. A comparative analysis with previous electoral cycles illustrates the impact of Obi's candidacy. The shift from these figures to those of 2023 highlights the degree to which Obi's Labour Party disrupted the traditional political alignment in Enugu State. Peter Obi's governance record and the transformational image derived from his tenure in Anambra significantly influenced the electoral outcomes in the 2023 general elections in Enugu State as in elsewhere. His approach to governance, coupled with a strong anti-corruption stance, resonated with a wide electorate base, particularly among youths, which translated into substantial electoral gains for the Labour Party and introduced a new level of competitiveness in the state's political landscape.

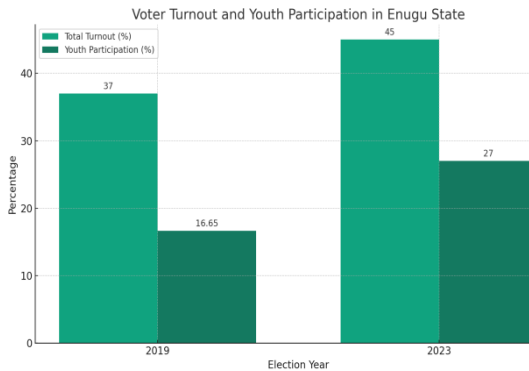
Similarly, Peter Obi's reputation for financial prudence and fiscal responsibility, honed during his tenure as

Governor of Anambra State, significantly shaped the political landscape in the 2023 general elections in Enugu State. His emphasis on transparent and accountable governance resonated deeply with the electorate and had a cascading effect on how election monitoring was conducted. This study explores the link between Obi's fiscal management legacy and the robustness of election monitoring efforts in Enugu State, supported by relevant statistical data.

Furthermore, Peter Obi's leadership style, characterized by its youthfulness and dynamism, significantly impacted the 2023 general elections in Enugu State by expanding political participation among various demographics, particularly young voters. This influence was not merely due to his policy proposals but also his approach to governance and campaigning. Peter Obi's approach resonated particularly well with younger demographics due to his use of modern campaign techniques, including social media outreach and engagement with youth-centric platforms. This approach not only broadened his appeal but also made political participation more accessible and engaging for young voters.

Obi's campaigns were marked by energetic rallies and an emphasis on interactive platforms. He also focused on real-time feedback loops which utilized technology to gauge voter sentiment and respond to it swiftly, thereby increasing political engagement. As shown in figure 4, voter turnout and youth political participation in Enugu state recorded a noticeable bulge in 2023.

Figure 4: Voter Turnout and Youth Participation in Enugu State



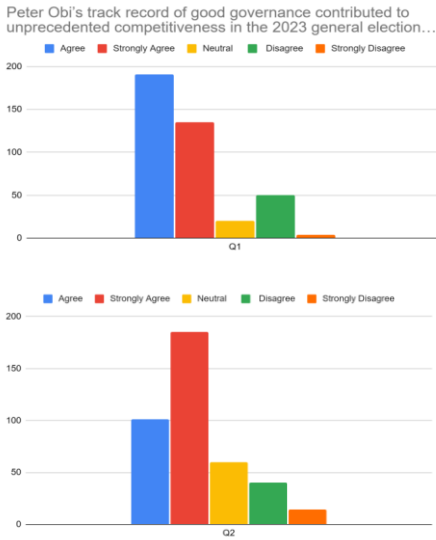
Source: YIAGA Africa (2023)

Figure 4 shows that there was a significant increase in voter turnout and youth participation in elections in Enugu state in 2023 as against 2019 general

elections. Respondents conceded that Peter Obi's youthful and dynamic leadership significantly influenced the landscape of the 2023 general elections in Enugu State by enhancing political participation, particularly among the youth. This shift not only reflects in voter registration and turnout rates but also in the overall credibility and integrity of the election process prior to the delays in election results announcement. Figures 5a and 5b graphically corroborate the above observation.

Figure 5a: Obi's track record I

Figure 5b: Obi's record II



Source: Field Survey 2024

Figures 5a and 5b show the impact of Peter Obi's track record of good governance and financial prudence/fiscal responsibility on the unprecedented competitiveness in the 2023 general elections.

It is evident from Figure 5a that there is a strong association between the unprecedented competitiveness in the 2023 general elections and Peter Obi's track record of good governance as a significant majority of respondents, 84% (sum of Agree and Strongly Agree), consented that Peter Obi's track record of good governance significantly increased

unprecedented competitiveness in the 2023 general elections. Conversely, only a small proportion of respondents, 5.2%, disagreed with this assertion. Additionally, 10% of respondents indicated a neutral stance. Notably, there were very few respondents, 0.8%, who strongly disagreed with the statement. These findings suggest a prevalent sentiment among respondents that Peter Obi's track record of good governance significantly increased unprecedented competitiveness in the 2023 general elections.

Also, Figure 5b reveals that there is a relationship between Peter Obi's Financial prudence and robust election monitoring in the 2023 general election in Enugu State. A substantial proportion of respondents, 27.6%, agreed (A) that Peter Obi's financial prudence initiated robust election monitoring in the 2023 general elections in Enugu State. A smaller percentage, 18.1%, disagreed (D) with this statement. A further 7.9% of respondents indicated a neutral (N) stance. Conversely, a significant portion of respondents, 28.9%, strongly agreed (SA) that Peter Obi's financial prudence initiated robust election monitoring in the

2023 general elections in Enugu State. Lastly, 17.6% of respondents strongly disagreed (SD) with the assertion. These findings suggest that there is a diverse range of opinions among respondents regarding the role of Peter Obi's financial prudence on the robustness of election monitoring in the 2023 general elections in Enugu State. However, a notable portion of respondents expressed skepticism, with a majority either strongly agreeing or agreeing that Peter Obi's financial prudence initiated robust election monitoring in the 2023 general elections in Enugu State. In the final analysis, therefore, what the foregoing goes to affirm is that whereas Barr. Chijioke Edeoga of LP may not have been declared the winner of the 2023 governorship election in Enugu state, the personality of Mr Peter Obi is believed to have inspired the 'Obidient Movement', which in turn provided a strong and unprecedented counterforce to the hitherto brazen election of 'anything goes' in Enugu state since 1999.

Conclusion

The study synthesized informed insights into the dynamics of patron-client politics in Enugu State, demonstrating its

profound influence on political trajectories and electoral outcomes. Available qualitative data highlight the significance of the Ebeano political dynasty, led by former Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, in shaping Enugu State's political landscape. The Ebeano family was identified as a prominent patronage network, providing support, resources, and endorsements to individuals in exchange for loyalty and political backing (Mumeh, 2024; Mumeh, 2022). The data analysis corroborates the literature, indicating that Peter Mbah's association with the Ebeano political dynasty played a crucial role in his emergence as the PDP flag bearer and subsequently as the governor of Enugu State. The findings from the questionnaire responses and key informant interviews reveal that through such engagements as joint public appearances, endorsements from Ebeano leaders, and campaign sponsorship, members of the Ebeano political family were variously instrumental to the emergence of Peter Mbah as the PDP flag bearer and subsequently as the governor of Enugu State. These findings align with the literature, underscoring the instrumental role of the Ebeano political

dynasty in shaping Mbah's political trajectory through endorsements, resource mobilization, and grassroots support. This finding is in synch with the study's first objective of ascertaining whether Peter Mbah's association with the Ebeano political dynasty contributed to his emergence as both the PDP flag bearer and governor of Enugu state.

Similarly, the literature review highlighted the significance of personality cults in Nigerian politics, where charismatic leaders often garner unwavering loyalty and support based on personal appeal rather than party ideology or policy platforms (see Iwuoha, 2021; Sarker, 2008; Scott, 1972). Peter Obi's personality cult was identified as a potential factor influencing the competitiveness of the 2023 gubernatorial election in Enugu State. The data analysis provided insights into the impact of Peter Obi's personality cult on the electoral landscape. Obi's personality and charisma which motorized the 'Obidients Movement' were believed by the respondents to have electrified mobilization of grassroots support, the challenging of established power structures, and subsequently

shaped the electoral outcomes. Again, the foregoing aligns with the study's second objective of ascertaining the role of Peter Obi's personality cult in the competitiveness of the 2023 gubernatorial election in Enugu state. Although the LP governorship candidate (Hon. Chijioke Edeoga) later lost at the court, the controversial poll results showed a tightly contested election, adjudged unprecedented in the state since 1999. In view of the dichotomous roles of patron-clientelism as noted in the introduction and their empirical manifestations evident in this study, strengthening democratic institutions and promoting political pluralism and participation in Nigeria through appropriate legislations and emphasis on civic/political education in schools are passionately recommended.

Limitation(s) of the Study

Efforts by the researchers to directly interview such primary/important political actors like Mr Peter Obi, Sen. Chimaroke Nnamani, Gov. Peter Mbah and Barr. Chijioke Edeoga, whose wealth of experience in state politics and in the 2023 elections would have enriched our database towards offering a more

nuanced perspective to the study's findings, proved abortive.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are a few issues that follow from the findings of the study which would benefit from future research, and they include:

1. The Obident Movement, as an emergent social movement, arguably still appears more like an amorphous organization. Further research might undertake an in-depth exploration of the organizational structure, fundamental objectives, and long term vision of the group. This would help ascertain the degree to which the movement can constitute an organic and formidable political bloc capable of influencing the political/electoral fortunes of political aspirants and/or parties to which it chooses to lend its support or to throw its weight against.
2. There seems to be a dismembering factionalism within the Ebeano political family since the electioneering campaign days of Governor Peter Mbah. It would therefore be beneficial to further explore the challenges of the Ebeano family, especially in the light of the fact that the political group and its founder were arguably losing political relevance before their much-taunted resuscitation by the then Governor of Enugu state, Gov. Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (*Daily Post*, 21 January, 2019).

<https://dailypost.ng/2019/01/21/jonathan-emmanuel-chimarokes-political-revival-gov-ugwuanyis-show-love/>

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