CHAPTER THREE

THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

**Decision to Run for President**

“I am writing to intimate you of my resignation from the Peoples Democratic Party, which was conveyed to the Chairman of Agulu Ward 2. Anaocha LGA Anambra, effective Friday 20 May, 2022. Consequently, I am by this letter informing you of my withdrawal for the PDP Presidential Primaries.

“It has been a great honour to contribute to nation-building efforts through our party. Unfortunately, recent developments within our party make it practically impossible to continue participating and making such constructive contributions.

“Our national challenges are deep-seated and require that we each make profound sacrifices towards rescuing our country. My commitment to rescuing Nigeria remains firm, even if the route differs’’

With this letter written to the former PDP former National Chairman, Senator Iyorchia Ayu, Obi left the party which he joined in 2014 after he ended his tenure as governor of Anambra. While some people were still trying to figure his next moves, he joined the Labour on May 27, 2022, just few days after he left his former party , news surfaced that he had joined the Labour Party. Obi confirmed this development on his X handle the following statements.

“Since I resigned from the PDP because of issues that are at variance with my persona and principles, I have consulted widely with various parties and personalities to ensure we do not complicate the route to our desired destination.

“For me, the process of achieving our goal is as fundamental as what one will do thereafter.

“Therefore, I have chosen a route that I consider to be in line with our aspirations and my mantra of taking the country from consumption to production; and that is the Labour Party which is synonymous with the people, workers, development, production, securing and uniting Nigerians as one family.

“I invite all Nigerians to join me in taking back our country.

“Be assured that I’ll never let you down.”

Peter Obi’s decision to run for president in 2023 stemmed from a profound sense of duty and a clear vision for Nigeria's future. With a distinguished track record as the governor of Anambra State and as the vice presidential candidate in the 2019 election, Obi felt compelled to enter the presidential race, believing he could bring meaningful change to the country.

His decision was not made lightly as Obi engaged in extensive consultations with his family, close advisors, and political allies, weighing the significant responsibility that a presidential bid entailed. These discussions were crucial in shaping his resolve, providing him with a well-rounded perspective on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Public sentiment also played a critical role in Obi’s decision. Numerous polls and feedback from grassroots movements indicated a widespread desire for new leadership capable of addressing Nigeria's pressing issues. The country was grappling with severe economic disparity, a healthcare system in dire need of reform, and escalating insecurity. These challenges resonated deeply with Obi, who had long been an advocate for economic development, educational improvements, and better governance.

As governor of Anambra State, Obi had demonstrated his ability to implement effective policies that improved the lives of his constituents. His tenure was marked by significant advancements in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, earning him respect and recognition both domestically and internationally. This success bolstered his belief that he could replicate similar achievements on a national scale.

Moreover, Obi’s candidature was seen as a beacon of hope by many Nigerians who felt disillusioned with the status quo. His vision for the country emphasised transparency, accountability, and a commitment to social justice. He promised to leverage his experience and skills to build a Nigeria where opportunities were available to all and where the government worked tirelessly to uplift its people.

Obi’s presidential campaign was thus fueled by a combination of personal conviction, public support, and a strategic approach to addressing Nigeria's most critical issues. His journey towardss the presidency was not just about political ambition but about a genuine desire to lead Nigeria towards a brighter, more equitable future.

**Campaign Strategy and Key Messages**

Peter Obi’s 2023 campaign was built on a foundation of strategic planning and clear messaging, focusing on several core areas:

**Grassroots Mobilisation**

Peter Obi’s campaign placed a strong emphasis on grassroots mobilisation, recognising the power of direct community engagement. This strategy involved organising numerous town hall meetings and local events to foster personal connections with voters. By actively engaging with communities across Nigeria, the campaign aimed to build a broad base of support. Additionally, they utilised digital platforms to reach remote and urban populations alike, ensuring that the campaign’s message resonated with a diverse cross-section of the electorate. This approach helped create a sense of inclusivity and personal investment among supporters.

**Digital Outreach**

Understanding the significant influence of technology and social media, Obi’s campaign leveraged these tools to their full potential. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were utilised to communicate directly with the electorate, share campaign updates, and engage in meaningful dialogue with voters. Targeted advertisements were employed to reach specific demographics, enhancing the campaign's efficiency in message dissemination. An interactive campaign website was also a crucial component, providing a central hub for information on policy proposals, event schedules, and volunteer opportunities. This digital outreach ensured that the campaign remained accessible and engaging, particularly to a tech-savvy younger generation.

**Policy Proposals**

At the heart of Peter Obi’s campaign were detailed policy proposals aimed at addressing Nigeria’s most pressing issues. The campaign introduced comprehensive plans for economic revival, focusing on job creation, support for small and medium enterprises, and infrastructural development. Affordable healthcare was another critical area, with proposals to improve healthcare infrastructure, increase access to medical services, and ensure that healthcare policies were inclusive and sustainable. Education reform was a major focus, with plans to enhance the quality of education, improve teacher training, and ensure equal access to educational resources. National security was also prioritised, with strategies to combat terrorism, improve policing, and enhance overall safety and security in the country. By presenting clear, actionable plans, Obi’s campaign sought to demonstrate a commitment to tangible progress and a vision for a better future for Nigeria.

**Gladiatorial and Institutional Support**

Obi’s campaign garnered support from key personalities and organisations such as the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group, Afenifere, the pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), the Ohaneze Ndigbo, and former president Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo, in his endorsement of Obi, emphasised the need for selfless, courageous, honest, and patriotic leadership, stating that Obi had an edge over other candidates in terms of character, discipline, and vitality.

Afenifere, led by Pa Ayo Adebanjo, campaigned for Obi, stressing the importance of unity over ethnic divisions. Adebanjo declared that supporting Obi was about the entire nation, not just ethnic allegiance. Chief Edwin Clarke also endorsed Obi, with PANDEF affirming their support despite internal opposition. Ohaneze Ndigbo praised Obi as a transformative leader with the potential to bring significant positive changes to Nigeria.

In summary, Peter Obi’s 2023 campaign strategy was characterised by a comprehensive approach that combined grassroots engagement, digital innovation, substantive policy proposals, and support from key elder statesmen and southern socio-cultural groups. This multifaceted strategy aimed to build widespread support, effectively communicate with a diverse electorate, and present a clear vision for Nigeria’s future.

**Key Campaign Messages**

 The Head of Media of the Presidential Campaign Council of the party, Diran Onifade, told the media that the candidate, Peter Obi, was part of those who produced the manifesto, unlike other parties where the candidates have no idea of the contents of such document. In a 62-page manifesto, the Peter Obi campaign anchored it on seven thematic areas. These are security, production, institutional reforms, the industrial revolution, infrastructural development, human capital development, and robust foreign policy. The document tagged “It’s Possible: Our Pact with Nigerians”

showed that Obi promised to among others:

“Ensure that in policy and practice, governance will be made more inclusive, cost-effective, transformative, and less transactional. No more sharing of the national wealth by a few.”

“Secure and unite our dear nation, and manage our diversity such that no one is left behind in Nigeria.

“Restructure the polity through effective legal and institutional reforms to entrench the rule of law, aggressively fight corruption, reduce cost of governance, and establish an honest and efficient civil service.

“Leapfrog Nigeria into the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) through the application of scientific and technological innovations to create a digital economy.

“Build expansive and world-class infrastructure for efficient powers supply, rail, road and air transportation, and pipeline network, through integrated public-private partnerships, and entrepreneurial public sector governance.

“Enhance the human capital of Nigerian youths for productivity and global competitiveness through investment in world-class scholarship and research, quality healthcare, and entrepreneurship education.

“Conduct an afro-centric diplomacy that protects the rights of Nigerian citizens abroad and advances the economic interests of Nigerians and Nigerian businesses in a changing world.”

“Ensure that in policy and practice, governance will be made more inclusive, cost-effective, transformative, and less transactional. No more sharing of the national wealth by a few.”

By focusing on these core issues, Obi's campaign aimed to address the challenges facing Nigeria and build a brighter future for all its citizens.

**Challenges Faced During the Campaign**

Peter Obi's campaign for president faced several hurdles that could have derailed his momentum. These challenges included:

**Political Opposition**

Established Rivals: Obi faced well-funded and entrenched political parties with experience in mobilising voters and navigating the political landscape. These rivals likely used their resources to portray Obi as inexperienced or lacking the necessary connections.

Policy Attacks: Opponents scrutinised Obi's policies, raising doubts about their feasibility or effectiveness, and tried to frame his platform as unrealistic or out of touch with certain demographics.

**Media Scrutiny**

Negative Coverage: The media spotlight can be harsh, and Obi's campaign faced biassed reporting or negative narratives spun by opponents, focusing on past actions or personal attacks rather than policy discussions.

Misinformation Campaigns: False information spread online and through other channels aimed to damage Obi's reputation and confuse voters. Countering these campaigns and accurately conveying his message was crucial.

**Third-Party Challenges**

As a candidate from a relatively new party, Obi faced scepticism about his ability to win or enact meaningful change. Voters accustomed to the two-party system were hesitant to break the mould.

**Logistical Hurdles**

Rally Organization: Building a national campaign required significant resources for organising rallies, securing venues across vast regions, and transporting supporters. The Labour Party had limitations in this area compared to established parties.

Funding Limitations: Effective campaigning required funding for advertising, travel, and staff. Obi's team had to be more creative in their approach compared to better-funded rivals.

Despite these challenges, Peter Obi's campaign's ability to navigate them and maintain focus on their core message is a testament to their resilience and determination.

**Analysis of the Election Results**

The election results of 2023 were a significant milestone in Nigerian politics, reflecting the dynamic and evolving political landscape. Peter Obi secured a notable percentage of the popular vote, indicating a substantial shift in voter sentiment. An in-depth analysis of these results reveals several key insights:

**Demographic Shifts**

The increased support from younger voters and urban populations highlighted a generational shift in political priorities. Young people, particularly those aged 18–35, demonstrated greater engagement in the political process, driven by a desire for change and a future-oriented outlook. This demographic was particularly receptive to Obi's messages of reform and modernization, which resonated strongly in urban centres where issues such as job creation, technological advancement, and improved infrastructure were top concerns.

**Policy Impact**

The emphasis on economic revival, healthcare, and education resonated deeply with voters, suggesting these issues were pivotal in shaping voter behavior. Obi’s campaign promises to tackle unemployment, improve the healthcare system, and enhance educational opportunities were central to his appeal. The focus on these critical areas addressed the immediate needs and long-term aspirations of many Nigerians, reflecting a widespread demand for tangible improvements in quality of life.

**Regional Variations**

There were marked differences in support across various regions, with Obi performing strongly in the Southeast and metropolitan areas while facing challenges in the North. In the Southeast, his popularity was bolstered by ethnic solidarity and his stance on regional development. Conversely, in the North, longstanding political allegiances and differing priorities made gaining substantial traction more challenging. The regional disparities underscored the complex tapestry of Nigerian politics, where religion, local issues, and identities play a significant role in electoral outcomes.

**Electoral Dynamics**

The results underscored the importance of strategic campaign efforts in swing states and key battleground areas, where the margin of victory was often narrow. Obi’s campaign demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of electoral dynamics, targeting resources and efforts in areas where small shifts in voter turnout could make a significant difference. This strategic approach was particularly evident in states with a history of fluctuating political support, highlighting the critical role of on-the-ground mobilisation and localised messaging.

Peter Obi’s 2023 presidential campaign was a complex and multifaceted endeavour that reshaped Nigerian politics. Through strategic planning, clear messaging, and resilience in the face of challenges, Obi made a significant impact. His campaign not only highlighted the changing priorities and demographics of the Nigerian electorate but also set the stage for future political discourse and action in Nigeria. The lessons learned from this election will likely influence political strategies and voter engagement in subsequent elections as candidates and parties adapt to the evolving landscape of Nigerian democracy.