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ASSIGNMENT

POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

Political parties are an essential feature in politics and serves as a link between the government and the people. The party in the political process of a given political system is an essential political agency. Politicians developed the idea of political party as a device to help themselves get elected. The first modern electoral democracy was the United States of America where the first parties developed. The Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the world.

A political party performs so many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to establish a single definition. Therefore, there are many definitions of political parties in which few will be mentioned. According to R.G. Gettel, “political party is a group of citizens more or less organized who act as a political unit and who, by the use of political power, aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies”. However, Herman Finer defined political party as “an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political power”. Joseph LaPalombara defined political party as “a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office a person who will control, alone or in coalition, the machinery of government”. Shiverly (2008) defined it as “a political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizable group of citizens into an organization; a chief object of this organization is to ensure that its officials attain power or maintain power. From the above definitions we can say that a political party is a group of citizens, more or less organized, having some agreement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means.

The characteristics of political parties are: to capture governmental power through constitutional means which must be peaceful and lawful, having broad principles of public policy adopted by its organization referred to as party ideology which also serves as the basis for classifying parties as either leftist, rightist, liberal, communist, labor, conservative, etc. It also includes being nation-minded, an organized body, having party manifestoes, and guided by party constitution.

The types of political parties are: Elitist Parties, Mass Parties, Ideological Party, Broker Party and Charismatic Party. Elitist Parties draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country. Mass Parties draws it membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. Ideological Party is formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party. Broker Party is formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society. Charismatic Party is formed or led by individuals with charisma.

The functions of political parties are: political mobilization and recruitment, political education, political representation, interest aggregation, political stability, conflict management and political integration, organization of government, etc.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalist’s movement in the 1920s. According to Ikelegbe, nationalist’s agitators formed groups and associations to organize against colonial misrule. Thus, The National Congress of British West African Territories was formed in 1920, the West African Students Union in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties’ formation in Nigeria was constitutional development.

In early political parties, 1920 - 1950, The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. The elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922 gave rise to the formation of NNDP in 1923. NNDP was led by Hebert Macaulay regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism and was based in Lagos.

Political parties in Nigeria, 1950 – 1966, according to Ikelegbe, 2010; the two major political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951 which are the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). These parties emerged from cultural associations because of the prospects of the 1951 elections, following the Macpherson’s constitution. The Nigerian multi-party system of the first republic gave rise to many political parties apart from the three major political parties which include: Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), the United National Independent Party (UNIP), etc.

In the second republic in Nigeria, the ban on politics was lifted in September, 1978 and following it, 53 political associations sought to contest the 1979 general elections. Five of these associations were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission, which are: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), The Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP), The People’s Redemption Party (PRP) and The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). A sixth party, the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) was registered to contest the 1983 elections.

In the third Republic Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida made public the transition to civil rule decree through which two political parties were registered in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989. Thus, for the first time, Nigeria had a constitutional two party system. The two parties were: The Social Democratic Party (SDP) and The National Republican Convention (NRC) which were established by the government.

In the fourth republic, three political parties were registered in preparation towards the fourth republic in 1998 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) among several political associations that struggled for registration as political parties. The names of the registered parties are: The Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People’s Party (APP) which later changed its name to All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) in 2002 and The Democratic Party (PDP).