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Political parties help to keep the government accountable to the public opinion and maintains its hold on power. They are the line between people and government. Politicians developed the idea of political party at that time as a device to help themselves and like-minded friends get elected, but the party proved to have many uses as well and went on to become a present feature of modern politics.

To R.G. Gettel the political party is a group of citizens more or less organised, who as a political unit and who by the use of political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out its policies. Hughes sees it rather as associations formally organised with explicit and declare purpose of acquiring and maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition with other similar associations, over the personnel and the policy of the government or prospective state.

The major role of the political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Every political party must be national-minded in the sense that it aims and functions are in line with the interest of the nation. The manifesto of the political party guides the conduct of the party during and after election. Political parties derive strength only from an effective organisational structure that is why the political party should be an organised party. Political parties are guided by a party constitution.

The political parties serve various functions. It is the duty of the political parties to be in charge political mobilisation, recruitment, representation, education, stability, integration, conflict management among many other.

The various types of political parties are the elitist or cadre parties ( a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country), mass parties (a political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership), ideological parties (one which is formed one the basis of political ideologies and benefits), broker party (it is formed with members drawn from upper and lower classes of society and aimed to reconcile the conflicting interest of the rich and poor by carrying out policies of social justice) and charismatic party (it is formed from or led by individuals who possess desirable qualities).

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalist movements. Nationalists agitators formed groups and associations, to organise against colonial misrule. 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. NNDP was led by Herbert Macaulay Abd was exclusively based in Lagos. It won all the 3 seats allocated to Lagos in the legislative council in the election of 1923, 1928, and 1933. The Nigerian youth movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan. The objectives of NYM are promotion of Nigerian unity and national consciousness and the achievement of complete autonomy. The party contested for seta in the Nigerian legislative council and Lagos town council in 1938 and won. The national council of Nigerian and Cameroon was formed in 1944. It was later renamed in 1960 to the national convention of Nigerian citizens (NCNC). It was the first political party to aimed at seeking total independence for Nigeria. Its first president and secretary general Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe respectively.

The political parties which emerged from 1950-1951 were birthed from cultural association. The first is the Action Group (AG) which emerged from Egbe Omo Oduduwa which was formed in 1945. AG started as a political wing of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1950 and was inaugurated in April 1951. Its leader was Obafemi Awolowo who was the general secretary of Egbe Omo Oduduwa. It was aimed to provide leadership to and capture political power in western region. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC) emerged from the Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa which was formed in 1949. Jam’iyya constituted itself into a political party, NPC in October, 1951. Its main purpose was combating ignorance, idleness, injustice in the northern region and control of the government in the North. The multi-party system of the first republic gave rise to the emergence of many political parties.

The ban of politics was lifted in September 1978 and 53 political political associations sought to contest the 1979 elections. Five of these associations were registered by the federal electoral commission and they were; National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian People’s Party (GNPP), People’s Redemption Party (PRP) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The NPN launched in September 1978 in Lagos. It was comprised by a host social clubs, tribal unions and associations, former NPC leaders and ex-public officials. The party was aimed as national unity. The UPN was an offshoot of AG it is embodied in its free education at all levels, free health services for all citizens, full and gainful employment for all who are able-bodied and integrated rural development. The won gubernatorial elections in 5 states in 1979 and lost one in 1893. The NNP reincarnated the NCNC. Its members were largely old NCNC politicians and admirers and supports of its leader Nnamdi Azikiwe. Its aim was to work towards full employment for all Nigerians and to promote economic, social and political equality of all sections of the country. GNPP was led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim and it controlled Borno and Gongola.

General Ibrahim Babangida made the transition to civil rule decree through which two political parties where registered in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1989. At this time the constitutions, objectives, policies, and programmes of the two political parties were formed by the military government. The two political parties were established by the government. The party predicated its campaign of progressivism, populism, people’s welfare and change from bad leadership, corruption, underdevelopment and crisis. The party was purported to have won the annulled presidential elections of 12 June, 1993 and controlled both the Senate and the House of Representatives in the aborted third republics. The National Republican Convention (NRC) was the second party and its programme favoured more private initiatives and more state regulations. It paid less attention to free education and other social welfare policies.

The three political parties registered in preparation towards the fourth republic in 1998 by Independent National Election Commission (INEC) are Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People’s party (APP) which in 2002 changed its name to All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Alliance for Democracy sponsored and contested elections throughout Nigeria during 1998 and 1999 elections. It gained political power in six states in the south-west between 1999 and 2003. It also won several State Assembly seats and Local Government elections. The All-Peoples Party (APP) won nine (9) gubernatorial elections in the north west and middle-belt zones during the 1999 elections. It won several State Assembly and National Assembly seats. The People’s Democratic Party (PDP), has as its major aim maintaining and preserving the integrity, unity and sovereignty of Nigeria as one indivisible political entity. PDP won the presidential elections in 1999 and maintained its stronghold on the presidency for sixteen years.

The fourth republic has registered multiple political parties and they are; Action Democratic Party (ADP), African People’s Alliance (APA), Change Advocacy Party (CAP), Green Party of Nigeria (GPN), Independent Democrats (ID), National Action Council (NAC), People’s Coalition Party (PCP), United Patriots (UP), Zenith Labour Party (ZLP), just to name a few. Nigeria’s political parties face some challenges like the extremely high level of corruption, the need for a change of the regulatory framework for the establishment of parties and so which it needs to fix.