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POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

According to R.G. Gettel, “political party is a group of citizens more or less organized, who acts as a political unit and who by the use of political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies.” Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. In liberal-democratic systems, they help to keep governments accountable to public opinion and even in an autocratic system of government, they help the government maintain its hold on power. Political parties are an important link between government and other people. The political party first developed in the nineteenth century in response to the elections involving large voters. The first modern electoral democracy was the United State of America, and it was here the first parties developed following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalists. The major feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Every political party must be national-minded i.e. in aims and functions, it must take into consideration the interest of the nation. Types of political parties are; Elitist parties, Mass parties, Ideological parties, Broker party, Charismatic party. Also political party performs; Political education, Political mobilization, Political stability, Political representation etc.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements. According to Ikelegbe, nationalists agitators formed groups and associations, to organize against colonial misrule. In the early political parties (1920-1950) The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. NNDP was led by Herbert Macaulay who was regarded as the father of Nigerian Nationalism. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. JC. Vaughan. The National council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944. It was later renamed the National convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960 when some Cameroons broke away from Nigeria. The NCNC was the first political party to seek total independence for Nigeria.

From 1950-1996, Two major political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951. These were the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). The Action Group (AG) began from the Egbe Omo Odudwa and it was formed in 1945. The Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) emerged from the Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa and it was formed in 1949. The Nigerian multi-party system of the first republic, gave rise to the emergence of many political parties apart from the three major political parties.

In the Second Republic, the ban on politics was lifted in September, 1978. Following that, about 53 political associations sought to contest in the 1979 general elections. Five of these associations were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. These were The National Party on Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People's party (NPP), The Great Nigerian 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 had a constitutional two party system. The two political parties were set up by the military government. The two parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). After it was established by the government Party officials were elected afterwards. The registration of SDP was approved by the Armed Forces Ruling Council with Chief Tony Anenih as its national Chairman. The National Republican Convention (NRC) was registered through the approval of Armed Forces Ruling Council with Chief Tom Ikimi as its national chairman.

In the Fourth Republic, three political parties were registered in preparation towards the Fourth Republic in 1998 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The names of the registered parties are; the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People's Party (APP) which in 2002 changed name to All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP)

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, however, other political parties have been registered by INEC