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CHAPTER SEVEN

POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

Introduction

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. Political parties help to keep governments accountable to public opinion in liberal-democratic system of government, they also help the government maintain its hold on power in autocratic system of government. Political parties are an essential political agency.

Conceptual Clarification of the Idea of Political Party

A political party performs so many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to establish a single definition. A political party is a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention, for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices. A political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizable group of citizens into organization.

Characteristics of Political Party

1. The major feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means.
2. Political parties always have a broad principle of public policy adopted by its organisation which is referred to as party ideology.
3. Every political party must be national-minded.
4. Political party should be an organised body.
5. Political parties has party manifestos which guide their conduct during and after winning elections.
6. Political parties are guided by party constitution which direct the conduct of party officials and members within and outside government.

Types of Political Parties

1. Elitist/Cadre Parties
2. Mass Parties
3. Ideological Party
4. Broker Party
5. Charismatic or Personality Party

Functions of Political Party

- I. Political mobilisation and recruitment
- II. Political Education
- III. Political Representation
- IV. Interest Aggregation
- V. Political Stability
- VI. Conflict Management and Political Integration
- VII. Organisation of Government
- VIII. Provision of Alternative Government and Policies
- IX. Electoral Competition and governance
- X. Goal Formation

Political Parties in Nigeria

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and the nationalist movements. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties' formation in Nigeria was constitutional development.

Early Political Parties 1920-1950

The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. The party was exclusively based in Lagos and had no national colouration. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934. The National Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944.

Political Parties in Nigeria: 1950-1966

Two major political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951. These were the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The Nigeria multi-party system of the first republic gave rise to the emergence of many political parties apart from the three major political parties.

Problems that Confronted Pre-independence Political Parties

- I. The political parties were without national outlook. They had regional support and ethnic loyalty.
- II. The political parties placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues.
- III. Intra-party and inter party conflicts in most cases polarised the political parties and thereby splitting them into factions.
- IV. Political party defection weakened or led to the collapse of political parties during this era.

Political Parties in the Second Republic in Nigeria

The ban on politics was lifted in September, 1978. Following that, about 53 political associations sought to contest the 1979 general elections. Five of these associations, were registered by the federal Electoral Commission. These were The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People's Party (NPP), The Great Nigerian People Party (GNPP), the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN).

Political Parties in the Third Republic in Nigeria

Nigeria had a constitutional two-party system. The parties, the social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) were established by the government.

Political Parties in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria

Three political parties were registered in preparation towards the Fourth Republic in 1988 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Conclusion

Nigeria's political parties face some challenges such as an extremely high level of corruption and the regulatory framework for the establishment of parties should be changed.