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**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

**Introduction**

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. They help to keep governments accountable to public opinions and also help the government maintain its hold in power. Political parties are an important link between the government and people.

**Conceptual Clarification of the Idea of Political Party**

There are different definitions of political parties by political thinkers such as the definition by R.G. Gettel which says, “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.” Herman Finer, on his part, defined political party as “an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of Political Power”. From all the definitions, we infer that 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.

**Characteristics of Political Party**

1. The major feature is to capture governmental power through constitutional means.
2. They always have political ideology.
3. Every political party must be national-minded.
4. It must be an organized body.
5. Political parties must have manifestoes.
6. Political parties are guided by party constitutions.

**Types of Political Parties**

Elitist/Cadre Parties: it draws its membership from the highest echelon of the social hierarchy in a country.

Mass Parties: it draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership.

Ideological Party: it is formed with political ideology or benefits which form the basis of the party.

Broker Party: it draws membership from upper and lower classes of society.

Charismatic or Personality Party: it is formed or led by individuals with charisma.

**Functions of Political Party**

1. Political stability.
2. Political education.
3. Organization of government.
4. Electoral competition and governance.
5. Political mobilization and recruitment.

**Political Parties in Nigeria.**

The National Congress of British West Africa Territories was formed in 1920, the West African Students Union in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934. Herbert Macaulay, H.O. Davies, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and the others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria.

**Early Political Parties: 1920-1950.**

The NNDP led by Herbert Macaulay who was regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism 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. 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 National Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944 and was later renamed as the National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960.

**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 main purpose was combating ignorance, idleness, injustice in the northern region and control of the government in the North.

Problems that Confronted Pre-Independence Political Parties. Political parties:

1. They were without national outlook
2. They placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues.
3. Intra-party and inter-party conflicts polarized them and split them into fractions.
4. Their deflection weakened them and led to their collapse 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 them were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. These were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria People’s Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), Peoples 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.

**Political Parties in the Third Republic in Nigeria.**

General Ibrahim Babangida published the transition to civil rule decree through which 2 political parties where registered in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989. The constitutions, objectives, policies and programmes of the 2 political parties were set up by the military government. The 2 parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), were established by the government. The registration of SDP was approved by the Armed Forces Ruling Council with Chief Tony Anenih as its national chairman while NRC was approved with Chief Tom Ikimi as its national chairman.

**Political Parties in the Forth Republic in Nigeria.**

3 political parties were registered in preparation towards the Fourth Republic in 1988 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). They are: the 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). PDP won the presidential election on 1999 and maintained its stronghold on the presidency for 16 years. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic other political parties have been registered. Some include: All Progressives Congress (APC), Alliance National Party (ANP), Change Advocacy Party (CAP), Fresh Democratic Party (FDP), Grassroots Development Party of Nigeria (GDPN).e.t.c.