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Department: Medicine and Surgery (MBBS)

Course Code: GST 203

Course: Government and Political Institutions

Date: 16th January, 2021

1. Do a two-page review of chapter 7, “Political Parties in Nigeria”, in Salient Issues in Government and Nigeria’s Politics.

Political Parties in Nigeria

Political parties are a crucial characteristic of politics in the modern-day era. It is an essential link between the government and the masses. The idea of a political party was first developed in the 19th century in retaliation to elections involving large numbers of voters. Politicians at that time developed the idea as a tactic to help themselves and like-minded companions get elected, however political parties have proven to possess many other uses and continued to become an ever-present feature of contemporary politics.

“A political party is a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office, a person who will control alone or in alliance, the machinery of government (Joseph La Palombara)”. There are a number of definitions of political parties because they perform so many functions that it is difficult to create a single definition. Although, Herman Finer defined political party as an organized body with optional membership, its concerted vigour being used in the pursuit of political power. Generally, 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 control political power by a legitimate means.

Political parties have a number of characteristics and features. The prime characteristic of a political party is to capture governmental power by means of the constitution. However, capturing power by brutal and unlawful means cannot be permitted in the domain of a political party. This means that capturing such powers must be in a peaceful and legitimate manner. Another feature of political parties is that they have wide principles of public policy it follows, called a party ideology. All political parties must take into consideration the interests of the nation or country in its objectives and functions. Political parties have a party manifesto which guides the conduct of the party before and after winning an election. They are also guided by a party constitution which guides the conduct of party members inside and outside government.

There are different types of political parties. There are Elitist parties whose membership is drawn from the highest tier of social ranking in a country. It is also known as a cadre party. A Mass party is a political party that draws its membership from all areas of the society and have a wide membership. Ideological party is a party formed with political ideology which is the basis of the party. There is also the Broker party that brings out its members from the upper and lower classes of the society. A Charismatic party is also known as a personality party. It is formed by individuals with charisma.

Political parties perform so many functions in the political process. Some of the functions include: Political mobilization, political education and enlightenment, political representation, political stability, organization and arrangement of the government, goal formation, provision of alternative government, electoral competition, political integration, etc.

Political parties in Nigeria developed after the growth of nationalist consciousness and movements. The nationalists created groups and associations to fight against the misrule of the colonialists. For this reason, the Nationalist Congress of British West Africa Territories and the West African Students Union were created in 1920 and 1925 respectively. The Lagos youth movement was also formed in 1934. The support for the springing up of the parties in Nigeria was constitutional development.

The early political parties in Nigeria within 1920 to 1950 included: The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) which was regarded as the first political party in Nigeria formed in 1923 and led by Sir Herbert Macaulay. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) which was formed later in 1934 led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and J.C. Vaughan. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) which was formed in 1944 but was later renamed the National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960 when some parts of Cameroon broke away from Nigeria. Two major political parties sprung up within 1950 and 1951. They were called the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). These parties emerged from cultural associations. The AG emerged from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and it was led by Obafemi Awolowo. The NPC emerged from Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa. Apart from the major two, other political parties emerged. Some of which include: The Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) led by Late Mallam Aminu Kano, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Late J.S Tarka and the United National Independent Party (UNIP) led by Eyo Ita.

A ban was placed on politics and was lifted in September, 1978. After the ban was lifted, about 53 political groups wanted to contest for the 1979 general elections. Only 5 of these political groups were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. These were: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). A sixth party, the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) was registered to contest in the 1983 elections.

In Third republic Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babagida publicized the transition to Civil rule decree through which two political Parties were registered in accordance with the constitution of Nigeria in 1989. The two parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) were established by the government. In 1998, three political parties were registered in preparation for the fourth republic by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The parties were, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Peoples Party (APP) which was later renamed in 2002 to All Nigeria Peoples Party (APP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). These political Parties contested in the 1998 and 1999 elections.

Since the formation of fourth republic Nigeria, many other political parties have been registered by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). Some of the parties include: All Progressive Congress (APC), Action Alliance (AA), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Hope Democratic Party (HDP), Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH), Kowa Party (KP), Save Nigeria Congress (SNC), United Progressive Party (UPP), Youth Democratic Party (YDP), Zenith Labour Party (ZLP), etc.