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LEVEL:200

MATRIC NO:19/MHS01/092

COURSE: GST 203

**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties are an essential feature of politics, political parties are an important link between the government and the people, it was first developed in the nineteenth century in response to elections with large numbers of voters. According to R.G. Gettel, 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. However due to the many tasks in the political process, it is difficult to establish a single definition.

The characteristics of political party include; they capture governmental powers through constitutional means, they have manifestos which guide their conduct during and after winning elections, they are guided by party constitution which direct the conduct of party officials and members within and outside government, they must be national-minded, they should be an organized body which derive strength from an effective organizational structure. There are different types of political party which includes the cadre or elitist parties which draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country, the mass parties which draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership, the ideological parties formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party, the broker parties formed with its members drawn from the lower and the upper classes of the society while the charismatic or personality party is formed or led by individuals with charisma. The functions of political parties are political education, organization of government, political stability, electoral competition and governance, conflict management and political integration.

The Political parties in Nigeria developed from the growth of nationalist’s consciousness and sentiments and national movements and the formation of group and organization against colonial rule. The formation of political parties emerged in constitutional development, in the Clifford constitution of 1922 four elective seats in legislative council, while the Richards constitution of 1946 retained four elective seats and regional assemblies and the MacPherson’s constitution established regional executive councils and provided them for a system of indirect elections to the much largely Nigerian legislative houses.

Between the period of 1920 to 1950 NNDP was the first political party that was formed in Nigeria, it was introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922 was led by Herbert Macaulay who was regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism and during that time NCNC was the first to seek for total independence of Nigeria and Nnamdi Azikiwe became its president in 1946, the parties formed during this period were the three major parties, . Problems that arise during the pre-independence political parties are that the political parties are without national outlook, they place emphasis on personalities rather than issues, intra party and inter party conflicts polarized them and split them into factions and political party defection weakened and led to the collapse of political parties during that era. The political parties were active during the different republics in Nigeria.