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CHAPTER 7

Political parties are an important link between government and the people. It was invented first in the nineteenth century due to the response of large numbers of voters during the elections. The first modern electoral democracy was the United States of America, and it was here that the first parties developed. In Britain, 1867 was the first year in which there was a reasonably widespread extension of the votes.

Political parties according to Joseph LaPalombara can be defined as “a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office a person who will control alone or in coalition, the machinery of government.” A political party is a group of officials who are linked with a sizeable group of citizens into an organization; a chief object of this organization is to ensure that its officials attain power or maintain power according to Shively, 2008.

A political party possesses some characteristics of which include: To capture governmental power through constitutional means; To serve as a basis for classifying parties as either leftist, rightist, liberal, communist etc; They must be national-minded i.e. in aims and functions; it must take into consideration the interest of the nation; They should be an organized body; They must have party manifestoes which guide their conduct during and after elections; They are guided by party constitution which directs the conduct of party officials and members within and outside the government.

Political parties have different types. Elitist parties draw its membership from the highest echelon hierarchy in a country i.e. intellectual. Mass parties draw its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. Ideological parties are formed with political ideology or benefits which are the party's bases. Broker parties draw its members from upper and lower classes of the society with the aim of reconciling the conflicting interest of the rich and the poor by carrying social justice interest for all.

Functions of political party include: political mobilization and recruitment, political education, political representation, interest aggregation, political stability, conflict management and political integration, organization of government, provision of alternative government and policies, electoral competition and governance, goal formation etc. Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements. 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 Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria.

Early political parties 1920-1950: the Nigerian Development party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. The 1922 constitution led to this formation. It was led by Herbert Macaulay who is regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. The party won all the seats allocated to Lagos in the legislative council in 1923, 1928 and 1933 elections. Their campaigns were aided by the Lagos Daily News launched in 1925. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by a group of young men led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J. C. Vaughan. This party won elections to the Nigerian Legislative Council and Lagos Town Council in 1938. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) were formed in 1944 but later re-named The National Convention of

Nigerian Citizen due to Cameroon's breaking away. It was the first to be organized and seek total independence for Nigeria. Its first president and secretary were Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikwe respectively.

Political parties from 1950-1966: the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in 1950 and 1951. The main aim of the AG was to provide leadership and capture political power in the Western Region. The NPC came in October 1951 with the main purpose of combating ignorance, idleness and injustice in the northern region and control of government in the North. Smaller parties existed during this period, one of which was Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). Formed in August 1950, it was led by late Mallam Aminu Kano. Another party, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Late J.S. Tarka was founded in 1955. The United Nation Independent Party (UNIP) led by Eyo Ita was a Splinter party from NCNC and in cooperation with Action Group. Pre-independence political parties faced some issues of which include the following: they were without national outlook, they placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues, inter-party and intra-party conflicts kept splitting them and lastly party defection weakened or led to the collapse of political parties during this era.

Second republic political parties: Ban on politics was lifted in September 1978. Five out of fifty-three were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission and they include: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People's Party (NPP), The Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), The People's Redemption Party (PRP), and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP) was registered in the 1983 elections. The NPN was officially launched in September 1978 in Lagos. The party won presidential elections and ruled for 4 years and 3 months. The party won gubernatorial elections in 7 states in 1979. The UPN won gubernatorial elections in five states in 1979 and lost one of them in 1983. The NPP won gubernatorial in three states. GNPP won and controlled two states.

Third republic political parties: General Ibrahim Babangida promulgated the transition to civil rule decree through which two political parties were registered in accordance with the constitution in 1989. The parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). The SDP registration was approved by the Armed Ruling Forces Council with the national chairman Chief Tony Anenih. The NRC was registered with the approval of the Armed Forces Ruling Council and Chief Tom Ikimi as the national chairman.

Fourth republic political parties: Three political parties were registered in preparation of the fourth republic by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC). The registered parties include: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) later the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The AD sponsored the elections during 1988 and 1999 and gained power in 6 states. The APP won 9 gubernatorial elections during 1999 elections. The PDP won the presidential elections and maintained its stronghold for 16 years.

In conclusion, Nigerian political parties have faced their difficulties but their presence in the society is an important factor to increase political awareness and political participation.