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**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties are an essential feature in modern politics and are an important link between the government and the people. It was developed in the 19th century due to the elections involving a large number of voters. Politicians came up with the idea to help themselves and like-minded friends to get elected. However, it proved to have more uses and went on to become a necessary feature in politics. The Democratic Party which was formed in the United States of America is the oldest political party in the world. By the 1820’s there were well organized parties.

R.G Gettel defines political party as “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 politics”. Herman Finer defines political party as “an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political party. A political party performs so many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to pin point a particular definition of political party. A political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizeable group of citizens into an organization to ensure that its officials attain or maintain power.

**CHRACTERISTICS OF A POLITICAL PARTY**

* The major feature of political parties is to capture governmental power through a peaceful, lawful and constitutional means.
* Every political party must be national minded.
* Political parties should be an organized body, because it can only derive strength from an effective organizational structure.

**TYPES OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

* Elitist/Cadre Parties; This is a political party that draws membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country.
* Mass Parties; This is a political party that draws in its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. Their manifestoes aim at alleviating the suffering of the masses.
* Ideological Party; This is a political party formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party’
* Broker Party; This is a political party formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society. This aims at reconciling the conflicting interests of the rich and the poor.
* Charismatic/Personality Party; This is a political party formed or led by people with charisma.
* Functions of a political party include; Political education, Conflict management, Organization of government, Interest Aggregation, Political stability, and so on.

In Nigeria, nationalist agitators formed groups and associations to organize against colonial misrule. For this purpose, 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. David, Ernest Ikoli and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria. The Nigerian National Development Party was regarded as the first party that was formed in Nigeria. The elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922 gave rise to the formation of NNDP in 1923. It was led by Herbert Macaulay, the father of nationalism in Nigeria and exclusively based in Lagos. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by and was led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsaya and Dr. J.C Vaughan. This party aimed at the promotion of Nigerian unity and national consciousness and achievement of complete autonomy within the British Empire. The National Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944 but was later renamed in 1960 to National Convention of Nigerian Citizens after some parts of Cameroon broke off from Nigeria. It was the first political party to seek total independence for Nigeria. It campaigned strongly against the Richard Machpherson of 1946 between 1946 and 1948 and was led by Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe respectively.

Two major political parties emerged in 1950-1951, namely Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) and Action Group (AG). The Action Group emerged from Egbe Omo Oduduwa and was formed in 1945 as a pan Yoruba cultural society. It was led by Obafemi Awolowo and aimed at providing leadership and capturing political power in the Western region. NPC emerged from Jam’iyya Muntanein Arewa and was formed in 1949 by Dr Dikko, M.Yahaya Gusau, Amino Kano and Abubakar Imam. Its main aim was combating ignorance, idleness and injustice in the northern region and control of the government in the North. The Nigerian multi-party system of the first republic gave rise to the emergence of so many political parties. Pre-Independence political parties confronted problems such as; political parties being without national outlook, political parties placing much emphasis on personalities rather than issues, and so on.

In the second republic, the ban on political was lifted in September 1978 and out of 53 political associations that sought to contest the 1979 elections only 5 were approved. Namely, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), The Nigerian Peoples’ Party (NPP), The Peoples’ Redemption Party (PRP) and The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). In the third republic, General Ibrahim Babangida promulgated the transition to civil rule decree through which two political parties where registered in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, namely, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). In the fourth republic, three political parties were registered in 1988 by INEC. Namely, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP).

Since the fourth republic, INEC has registered a good amount of political parties. As things stand now, Nigeria’s political parties are battling corruption which has made politics a competitive business and the regulatory framework for the establishment of parties need to be changed so that new parties do not have to form coalition of the wealthy for the basis of their registration. There is a serious need to amend these issues so political parties can be focused on promoting unity among Nigerians and improving the country.