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CHAPTER 7- **POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. In liberal democratic systems, they help to, they help to keep governments accountable to public opinion; even in autocratic system of government, they help the government maintain its hold on power. In either case, political parties are an important link between government and the people.

Political party is not defined by one person or in one way but there are as many definitions as the political thinkers. Different political thinkers have defined political party from different points of view and from all their definitions; we know that a party joins people together in a formally organized structure. In all, we can define a political party as “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.”

Political parties possess certain characteristics, of which the major one is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Also, they have broad principles of public policy adopted by its organization which is known as party ideology. In addition to this, every party must be national minded, that is, in aims and conduct, it must take into consideration, the interest of the nation. A political party must also be an organized body because it can only derive strength through an effective organizational structure. Importantly, a party must have party manifestoes that guide their conduct during and after winning elections and of course they are to be guided by party constitution which directs the conduct of the party officials and members within and outside government.

There are different types of political parties such as Elitist/Cadre parties, Mass parties, Ideological parties, Broker party and Charismatic or personality party. Political parties have some important functions in the nation and they are as follows; 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 and goal formation.

Some political parties were formed in pre-independent Nigeria, but they had some challenges; They were without national outlook, they had regional support and ethnic loyalty, they placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues, intra-party and inter-party conflicts in most cases polarized the political parties, thereby splitting them into factions and their defections weakened or led to the collapse of political parties during this era.

There are now lots of political parties in Nigeria and they face some challenges, one of which is the high level of corruption which has made politics a competitive business. Most party leaders see their political party activity as a means to further their business interests and there is need to arrest this trend and make political parties to be directed to fostering cohesion among Nigerians and engineering the development of the Nigeria