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**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA.**

There are various definitions of political parties. R.G. Gettel defined a political party as a group of citizens more or less organized, who act as a political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies. A political party is a group of officials or would be officials who are linked with a sizable 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. There are many more definitions but from the above definitions, we infer that a political party is a group of citizens, more or less organized, having some agreement in broad principles of national policies with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means.

There are various characteristics of a political party, some of which are; to capture governmental power through constitutional means, which can be peaceful and lawful. Secondly, political parties always have a broad principle of public policy adopted by its organization which is called party ideology. Every political party must be national-minded in aims and functions which considers the interest of the nation. Political party should be an organized body because it can only derive strength from an effective organizational structure.

There are five types of political parties and they are: Elitist/Cadre parties- this political party draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country e.g. doctors, lawyers e.t.c.

Mass parties: this political party draws its membership from all sections of yhe society and have a wide membership e.g. labour party, peoples party. They aim at alleviating the suffering of the masses.

Ideological party: this political party is formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party.

Broker party: its membership is formed from upper and lower class of the society. They aim at reconciling the conflicting interest of the rich and poor by carrying out policies of social justice for the interest of all.

Charismatic or personality party: this political party is led by individuals with charisma.

Political parties perform the following functions: 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, goal formation and electoral competition and governance.

Political parties were developed during the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalist movement. They formed groups to organize against colonial misrule. Then 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. The Clifford constitution of 1922 provided for four elective seats in its legislative council while the Richards constitution of 1946 retained the four elective seats and established regional assemblies. The first political party formed in Nigeria is regarded as The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) in 1923. NNDP was led by Herbert Macaulay. The party was based in Lagos. Its political activities and campaigns were aided by a newspaper called Lagos Daily News launched in 1925. The Nigerian Youth Movement was formed in 1934. Promotion of Nigerian unity and national consciousness and the achievement of complete autonomy within the British empire were among the objectives of the NYM in 1938. The National Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944. It was later renamed the National Convention Of Nigerian Citizen in 1960 when some parts of Cameroons broke away from Nigeria. The first political party to be organized to seek total independence for Nigeria is the NCNC. Its first president and general secretary were Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Nnamdi Azikiwe became its president in 1946 after Herbert Macaulay’s death.

Two political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951. These were the Action Group (AG) and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). The main aim of the AG was to provide leadership to and capture political power in the western region. The main aim of NPC was combating ignorance, idleness, injustice, in the northern region and control of the government in the north.

Some problems that confronted pre-independence political parties are: the political parties were without national outlook. They had regional support and ethnic loyalty, the political parties placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues, intra-party and inter-party conflicts in most cases polarized the political parties and thereby splitting them into factions and political party defection weakened political parties during this era.

The ban of politics was lifted in September 1978. The NPN was officially launched in September 1978 in Lagos. The party’s main goal was national unity with the slogan “one nation, one destiny”. Three political parties were registered in preparation towards the fourth republic in 1988 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) among several political associations that struggled for registration as political parties. Alliance for Democracy sponsored and contested elections throughout Nigeria during the 1988 and 1999 general elections. The people’s democratic party (PDP) has its major aim as maintaining and preserving the integrity, unity and sovereignty of Nigeria as one indivisible political entity.