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**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties have been an important feature of politics since the idea was developed. Both in liberal-democratic and autocratic systems of government, political parties served as a link between the government and the people. Political parties were first used in the United States during its first modern electoral democracy. Political parties encourage a mass participation in politics and keeps the government accountable to the public opinion. Political parties has increased the national consciousness among the people.

A political party performs multiple roles in the political process. This makes it tasking to attach a single definition to it. According to R.G Gettel, “political party is a group of citizens more ore less organized, who act as a political unit and who by the use of political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out it’s general policies”. Scholars like Herman Finer, Joseph LaPalombra,Dowse and Hughes gave their on understanding of the term political party. A political party joins people together in a formally organized structure.

Political parties have characteristics that enables it to perform it’s functions. They include; capturing governmental power through constitutional means, having broad principles of public policy adopted by it’s organization, being national-minded, high level of organization, having party manifesto that guide their conduct during and after winning elections and it must be guided by a party constitution that directs it’s members conduct.

Political parties come in different types. Elitist political parties members are from the highest part of social hierarchy in a country. Mass political parties members are from different sections of the society and a wide membership. Ideological political parties are formed with ideologies that form its core. Broker political parties members are from the upper and lower classes of society. Charismatic political parties are formed by an individual with charisma. The functions a that all these types of political parties perform include; political education, political representation, interest aggregation, political stability, organization of government and many others.

The idea of political parties developed in Nigeria, when the nationalist agitators formed groups and associations to organize against colonial misrule. Examples of those group include; The National Congress Of British West Africa Territories, West Africa student Union, Lagos Youth Movement and others. The fulcrum for the emergence of political parties in Nigeria was constitutional development. The Clifford, Richard and MacPherson constitutions all made contributions in providing ways in allowing mass participation in politics. This provided the need for more political parties in Nigeria.

Between 1920 and 1950, Nigeria's first political party was formed. It was called The Nigeria National Development Party and was led by Herbert Macaulay. The Clifford constitution have life to this political party. It was exclusively based in Lagos with no national coloration. Although, it won all the seats allocated to Lagos in the legislative council in three elections. Nigeria Youth Movement was formed in 1934 by a few youth. Their objective was to promote Nigerian unity and national consciousness within the British empire. The National Council of Nigerian and Cameron was the first party to seek total independence of Nigeria.

Action group and Northern People’s Congress were the popular political parties that emerge between 1950 and 1951. They emerged from cultural association following the Macpherson’s constitution. Action Groups emerged from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and was led by Obafemi Awolowo. Their aim was to provide leadership to and capture political power the western region. The Northern People's Congress emerged from Jami'yya Mutanein Arewa. Their aim was combating ignorance, idleness, injustice in the north and controlling the government in the north. The challenges these political parties faces include; lack of national outlook,placed emphasis on personalities rather than issues and others.

In September 1978, the ban on politics was lifted. Many political parties sought to contest in the general elections. The National Party of Nigeria aim was national unity. The Unity Party of Nigeria aim was to provide free education, free health care and job opportunities for all. They acted as a strong opposition to the excess ruling of NPN. The Nigerian People’s party aim was to provide job opportunities and promote economic, social and political equality for all. The Great Nigeria People’s Party aim was to have politicians without bitterness. These parties were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission.

In 1989, General Ibrahim Babanginda promulgated the transition the transition to civil rule decree. For the first time, Nigeria had a constitutional two party system. The two parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) activities were set up by the military government. The SDP parties aimed for more public ownership and control of the economy. The NRC parties aimed for more private initiatives and more state regulations.

During the fourth republic in 1998, three political parties were registered by Independent National Electoral Commission. They include; Alliance of Democracy, All Nigeria people’s Party and People’s Democratic Party. These political parties contested in the 1998 and 1999. The People’s Democratic Party aim was to maintain and preserve the integrity, unity and sovereignty of Nigeria as one indivisible political entity. PDP maintained it’s stronghold in the presidency in Nigeria for sixteen years. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, the number of registered political parties in Nigeria has increase to ninety-three.

The political parties in Nigeria are far from being perfect. There are high level of corruption which has made politics a dirty game. Many politicians has turned political parties into means of expanding their business. This practice must be stopped and the idea of political parties must be rehabilitated for the better practice of democracy in Nigeria.