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ASSIGNMENT: Summarize chapter 7 of Salient Issues in Government and Nigeria's Politics.

Introduction

Political parties are an essential feature of politics and an important link between the government and the people. It was first developed in the 19th century by politicians due to the appearance of elections involving large numbers of voters in order to get them and their like minded friends elected but it proved to have many uses as well. The oldest political party in the world is the Democratic Party of the United States of America. Edmund Burke defines political party as a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interests upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed. According to Agbaje (1999), "a political party is a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause which is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices". A political party can then be said to be a group of citizens more or less organised, having some agreement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means.

Characteristics of Political Parties

Political parties always have an ideology which is a broad collection of principles of public policy adopted by the party and serves as basis for classifying parties.

Political parties have party manifestoes which guide their conduct during and after winning elections.

Political parties must be national-minded i.e. must always take into consideration the interest of the nation.

Political parties are guided by party constitution which directs the conduct of party officials and members within and outside the government.

Types of Political Parties.

Elitist parties are political parties that draw their membership from the highest rank of social hierarchy in a country and boasts of members that are intellectuals. Mass parties are political parties that draw their membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. Broker parties are political parties formed with members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society. Ideological party as well as Charismatic party are other types as well.

Functions of Political Parties include political parties provide political education, political representation, political stability, political mobilisation and recruitment.

Political Parties In Nigeria.

Herbert Macaulay, Ernest Ikoli, Obafemi Awolowo and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria. The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was the first political party that was formed in Nigeria after the elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922 came into play. The Nigerian Youth Movement, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon, Northern People's Congress, Action Group were among some parties that existed pre-independence in Nigeria. When the Second Republic came around in September 1978, about 53 political associations sought to contest the 1979 general elections and the Unity Party of Nigeria was among the main parties of the second Republic and it along with the other parties worked towards national unity and economic, political equity. For the first time in 1989, Nigeria had a constitutional two party system which included the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention in the third republic. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) registered three political parties in preparation towards the Fourth republic in 1998 which included the Alliance for Democracy, All Peoples Party and the People's Democratic Party. PDP won the presidential elections in 1999 and maintained the presidency for sixteen years. Since the inception of the fourth republic however, more than a hundred political parties have been registered.

Conclusion.

A high level of corruption is seen in Nigeria's political parties at the moment and this corruption has encroached into the society as party leaders use their parties for purely personal reasons. A reform is needed in order to redirect political parties to their main aim which is to unify Nigeria and promote national development.