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Government assignment
Chapter 7: Political parties

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. In a democratic system they help to keep the public involved in who they are choosing for the seat and in an autocratic system, they help to keep the government's hold on power. So this, it is clear that political parties are very important as they appear to be the link between the government and the people in both the autocratic system and the democratic system.

Dickerson and Flanagan, 2002 said this.

The political party is an essential element in politics as it crops up all aspects of politics. It is an invention that developed in the 19th century, as elections came to be having a large amount of voters involved in the elections. Politicians and those that aspired to be politicians created these parties to deal with gaining the love of these large amount of voters.

It thus stuck through the years, even up till today.

The first country with a democratic system to have a political party was the United States of America and by the 1820s, more organized parties had been formed. The Democratic Party is the first party to be formed and it was formed in the United States of America.

The political parties appeared all over Europe.

The development of political parties in Nigeria will be discussed further down this review.

But what is a political party?

There are many definitions given as to what is a political party and what it comprises of.

According to R.G Genel, a political party is a group of citizens more or less organized who act as a political unit and through the use of political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies.

According to Herman Finer, a political party is an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political power.

A political party is a group of officials or would be officials who are linked with a sizeable number of citizens into an organization with its main objective to make its officials gain political power.

Characteristics of political parties

- 1) A political party has party manifestos.
- 2) Every political party must be national minded i.e it must take in the interests of the people (the interests of the people must be of utmost priority).
- 3) A political party must be an organized body as it derives strength from an organized structure.
- 4) Political parties are guided by a party constitution.
- 5) The main aim of political parties is to allow its members to gain political power.

Types of political parties

- 1) Charismatic or personality party: This is a political party formed or led by individuals with charisma. It revolves around the personal qualities of the leader.
- 2) Mass parties: They derive their membership from all sections of the society and thus have a wide membership. They usually aim at alleviating the sufferings of the people e.g workers party, people's party, labor party.
- 3) Elitist/Cadre parties: They comprise of individuals in the highest social hierarchy in the society. They boast of individuals with the highest intellect or honest people e.g doctors, lawyers.
- 4) Ideological party: It is formed with political ideologies.
- 5) Broker party: It is formed from the upper and lower classes in the society. It aims at achieving social justice between the rich and the poor.

Functions of the political party

- 1) Political education
- 2) Political representation
- 3) Internal aggregation
- 4) Political stability
- 5) Government organization
- 6) Goal formation

Formation of political parties in Nigeria

According to Ikelegbe, political parties were formed to organize against colonial misrule. Thus for this purpose, the National Congress of British West African Territories was formed in 1920, the West African Students Union party was formed in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934. Herbert Macaulay, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ernest Okoli were the precursors of political parties in Nigeria.

Early political parties(1920-1950)

The Nigerian National Developmental Party is regarded as the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. The elective principle formed by the Clifford constitution of 1922 gave rise to the formation of NNDP in 1923. NNDP was led by Herbert Macaulay who is regarded as the father of Nigerian Nationalism. The party was based in Lagos. It won all the three seats allocated to Lagos.