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**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

According to Dickerson and Flanagan (2002), political parties are an important link between government and the people. Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. A political party performs so many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to establish a single definition. However, from all the different opinions of various political thinkers, it can be inferred that a political party is 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 a Political Party**

1. Political parties capture governmental power through constitutional means.
2. Political parties always have broad principles of public policy adopted by its organisation, referred to as party ideology, which serves as the basis for classifying parties.
3. Every political party must be national-minded (take into consideration the interest of the nation in its aims and functions).
4. A political party should be an organised body as it can only derive strength from an effective organisational structure.
5. Political parties have party manifestos that guide their conduct during and after winning elections.

**Types of Political Parties**

1. Elitist/ Cadre Parties
2. Mass Parties
3. Ideological Parties
4. Broker Party
5. Charismatic or Personality Party

**Functions of Political Parties**

Some functions of political parties include:

1. Political education
2. Political representation
3. Political stability
4. Organisation of government
5. Electoral competition and governance

**Political Parties in Nigeria**

**P**olitical parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and national movements. Constitutional development was the fulcrum for the emergence of parties’ formation in Nigeria. This included the Clifford constitution of 1922, the Richards constitution of 1946 and the Macpherson’s constitution.

**Early Political Parties**

The Nigeria National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party formed in Nigeria and was led by Herbert Macaulay, who was regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. Other parties formed during this period were The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934 and The National Council of Cameroon (NCNC), formed in 1944 and later renamed to National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960, which was the first political party organised to seek total independence for Nigeria.

**Political Parties in Nigeria from 1950 – 1966**

Two major parties were formed during this period. The first was the Action Group (AG), whose main aim was to provide leadership and to capture political power in the western region. The second was the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), formed in 1961, whose main purpose was combating ignorance, idleness, injustice in the northern region and control of the government in the North.

**Political Parties in the Second Republic in Nigeria**

The ban on politics was lifted in September 1978 and out of 53 political associations that sought to contest during the elections, the Federal Electoral Commission registered five of them. These associations were the Peoples’ Redemption Party (PRP), The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), officially launched in September 1978, The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian Peoples’ Party (NPP), which was reincarnated from NCNC, and the Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP), which was led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim.

**Political Parties in the Third Republic**

Due to a decree promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida, for the first time, Nigeria had a constitutional two party system. The two parties, which were established by the government, were the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the National Republican Convention (NRC).

**Political Parties in the Fourth Republic**

In preparation towards the Fourth Republic in 1988, the Independent National Electoral Committee (INEC) registered three political parties. These parties were the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People’s Party (APP), which changed its name to All Nigeria’s People Party (ANPP) in 2002, and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

However, since the inception of the Fourth Republic, other political parties have been registered by INEC, and Nigeria now has several political parties. Some of them are Action Democratic Party (ADP), Labour Party (LP), People’s Progressive Party (PPP), United People’s Congress (UPC), and All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).