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**CHAPTER 7: POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties are essential features of politics in the modern age of mass participation. Political parties are an important link between government and the people (Dickerson and Flanagan, 2002). The political party is an invention that first developed in the nineteenth century in response to the appearance of elections involving large numbers of voters. Politicians developed the idea of political party at that time as a device to help themselves and like-minded friends get elected into political offices or positions.

There are as many definitions of political parties as the political thinkers. According to R.G. Gettel “political party is a group of citizens more or less organized who act as a political unit and who by the use of political power aim at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies. Herman Finer, on his part, defines political party as “an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of Political Power”. Joseph LaPalombara defined Political party as “a formal organization whose self –conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office person who will control alone or in coalition, the machinery of government”. However 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 essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention , for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices. 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. Dowse and Hughes (1972) see political parties associations formally organized with the explicit and declare purpose of acquiring and maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition with other similar associations, over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or prospective state.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICAL PARTY**

Some of the characteristics of political parties include;

1. The major or central fearture of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means, and this must be done through the use of peaceful and lawful means.

2. Political parties always have a broad principle of public policy adopted by its organization, which is referred to as party ideology.

3. Every political party must be national-minded.

4. Political party should be an organized body, because it can only derive strength from an effective organizational structure.

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

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

**TYPES OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

There are different types of political parties which include; Elitist/Cadre Parties, Mass Parties, Ideological Party, Broker Party and Charismatic or Personality Party.

**FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTY**

The functions of political parties include the following; Political mobilization and recruitment, political education, political representation, political stability, conflict management and political integration, organization of government, provision of alternative government and policies, electoral competition and governance and goal formation.

**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements (Ikelegbe, 2010). 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, Herbert Macaulay, H.O. Davies, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria.

**Early Political Parties 1920-1950**

The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party in that was formed in Nigeria. The elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922 gave rise to the formation of NNDP in 1923. NNDP was led by Hebert Macaulay regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. Other parties were later formed after the 1923, 1928 and 1933 elections, such as; The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 and led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan. And The National Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) in 1944, but later renamed The National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960.

**Political Parties in Nigeria: 1950-1966**

Two major political parties were emerged between 1950 and 1951. These were the Action Group (AG) and the Nothern People’s Congress (NPC). The AG was led by Obafemi Awolowo, while the NPC was led by Aminu Kano.

**Political Parties in The Second Republic In Nigeria**

The ban on politics was lifted in September, 1978. Following that about 53 politics associations sought to contest the 1979 general elections. Five of these associations were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. These were; NPN, NPP, GNPP, PRP and UPN.

Political Parties in the Third and Fourth Republic

After the transition to civil rule, two political parties were registered in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989. The two political parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), both established by the government.

In the fourth republic, three political parties were registered in preparation for the 1998 general elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the registered parties were the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People’s Party (APP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). The People’s Democratic Party won the Presidential elections in 1999 and maintained a stronghold on the presidency for sixteen years. Since the inception of the fourth republic, however other political parties have been registered by INEC and Nigeria now has over 70 political parties.