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Review on Chapter Seven: Political parties in Nigeria

The chapter discusses political parties giving various definitions; describing its origin; characteristics; types; functions; and discussing its appearance in Nigerian politics from 1920 till date.

Although there are multiple scholarly definitions of a political party, it can simply be defined as a group of citizens, more or less organized, having some agreement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by constitutional means.

Their functions include: political mobilization, political education political representation, interest aggregation, political stability, conflict management, organization of government, provision of alternative government, electoral competition, and goal formation.

Characteristics of political parties as explained in the chapter help to further elucidate the above definition. The major characteristic is to capture governmental powers through constitutional means **only**. Others include; presence of party ideology; National-mindedness; Organization; presence of party manifestoes; and presence of party constitution which direct the conduct of party officials.

There five types of political parties discussed in the chapter namely; Elitist parties (which draws members from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country.); Mass parties (draws members from all sections of society.); Ideological parties (formed with political ideology); Broker parties (formed with its members drawn from both upper and lower classes of the society with intent to reconcile conflicting interest of the rich and poor); and charismatic parties which are led by individuals with charisma.

Based on this information and looking at Nigeria’s political history, it can be said the political parties in Nigeria are a blend of Charismatic, elitist and ideological parties. This can be further analyzed by diving deeper into the history of Nigerian political parties as done by the author.

Nationalist movements such as the National Congress of British West Africa Territories formed in 1920, the West African Students Union in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934 which were formed to organize against colonial misrule are said to be the precursors of political parties in Nigeria.

The elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922 led to the formation of the Nigerian National Development Party(NNDP) in 1923 which was regarded as the first political party in Nigeria and was led by Herbert Macaulay, the father of Nigerian nationalism who later went on to be the president of the National Convention of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC), the first political party to seek total independence for Nigeria.

The Action Group(AG) and the Northern People’s Congress(NPC) were two major political parties formed between 1950 and 1951. The Action Group’s main aim was to capture political power in the western region while the Northern People’s congress was formed for the main purpose of combating ignorance, idleness and injustice in the north.

These pre-independence political parties although functional had their challenges. They were without national outlook, they placed emphasis on personalities rather than issues, conflicts within and between parties polarized the political parties and split them into factions. Also, political party defection weakened or collapsed political parties in that era.

Following the lift on the ban on politics in 1978, about 53 political associations sought to contest for the 1979 elections but only five were registered by the federal electoral commission. The five parties successfully secured a few authoritative positions and won a plethora of gubernatorial elections.

The third republic of Nigeria brought about the introduction of a two party system. These parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). Unlike the SDP, NRC’s programs paid more attention to private initiatives and state regulations while focusing less on free education and social welfare.

Towards the fourth republic in Nigeria, three political parties were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). However, since the inception of the fourth republic, many more political parties have been registered by INEC. Currently, Nigeria officially has 18 political parties as 75 parties have been de-registered by election body.

The extremely high level of corruption in politics and the greediness and selfish will of party rulers to use politics and political parties to further their business interest have been the main reasons Nigerian political parties are no longer directed towards fostering the development of Nigeria. This trend needs to be arrested in order for progress to be made.