

Political Parties In Nigeria

Political parties is a liberal-democratic system that helps to keep the government accountable to public opinion; they help the government maintain its hold on power. Political party can also be said to be a political agency which is an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. The first modern electoral democracy was the United States of America, and it was here that the first parties developed. The Democratic party of the United States of America is the oldest party in the world. Political parties in Nigeria began in 1920 following the outspread of nationalism and nationalist consciousness.

The concept of political party being a broad aspect has been tried to be defined by some important political thinkers in history. 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 to control the government and carry out its general policies". Herman Finer, on his part, defined 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". 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. From all the above opinions we infer that a political party is 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.

The characteristics of political parties are as follows:

- i) The major or central feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means.
- ii) Political parties always have a broad principle of public policy adapted by its organisation, which is referred to as party ideology.
- iii) Every political party must be national minded.
- iv) Political party should be an organized body.
- v) Political parties has manifestoes.
- vi) Political parties are guided by party constitution which direct the conduct of party officials.

There are different types of political parties;

i) **Eliteist / Cadre Parties**: This is a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country. The party boasts of members who are intellectuals like doctors, lawyers, lecturers, or people who are business tycoons, traditional rulers.

ii) **Mass parties**: This political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide memberships.

iii) **Ideological Party**: This is a political party formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party.

iv) **Broker party**: This is political party formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society. The basic aim of this type of political party is to reconcile the conflicting interest of the rich and poor by carrying out policies of social justice for the interest of all.

Charismatic or personality party: This is political party formed or led by individuals with charisma. It revolves around the personal qualities of the leader. The functions of political parties includes:

- i) political mobilisation
- ii) political education
- iii) political representation

etc

Political parties in Nigeria was developed as a result of the nationalist consciousness. According to Ikelegbe, nationalists agitators formed groups and associations, to organise against colonial misrule. Thus for this purpose, The National Congress of British West Africa Territories was formed in 1920. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties in Nigeria was constitutional development.

The first political party in Nigeria; The National Nigerian Development party was formed in 1923 by Herbert Macaulay (The father of nationalism) but it was introduced by Clifford's constitution of 1922. It had its base at Lagos. According to Ikelegbe, 2010; two major political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951, they are; The Action Group (AG) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC). These parties emerged from cultural associations. The Action Group emerged from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa which was formed in 1945. The AG was started as the political wing of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1950. The leader of the Action Group was Obafemi Awolowo who was the general secretary of Egbe Omo Oduduwa inaugurated in April 1951. The main aim of the AG was to provide leadership and capture political power in the western region. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) emerged from the Jam'iyya mutanen Arewa. The cultural association was formed in 1949 by Dr. Dikko, M. Yahaya Gusau, Aminu Kano and Abubakar Imam. The Jam'iyya constituted itself into a political party, The Northern People's Congress in October 1951. Their main purpose was combating, idleness, injustice and corruption in the north and control the government in the north.

The second, third, and fourth republic political parties has evolved from second to the fourth republic political parties overcoming most of the challenges that were on their way towards the goal of nationalism and a corruption free democratic Nigeria.