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A Review of Chapter 7: Political Parties in Nigeria

Political parties aid mass participation in politics regardless of the type of system present in the society. In a liberal-democratic system, they make sure the government remains accountable to public opinion and in an autocratic system they help the government maintain its power. The prospects of political parties were first established in the nineteenth century when there were large numbers of voters. However, modern electoral democracy started in The United States of America and so did the development of political parties. The Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the world. In Europe, the political parties only appeared when democracy arrived and there were varied electorates as well. This occurred in the year 1867. In Nigeria, they developed following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalists’ movements in the 1920s.

The definitions of political parties are as varied as political thinkers. However, a political party can be seen as a group of more or less organised citizens, having some arrangement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means. There are certain characteristics that a group must possess before it can be called a political party. Some of these characteristics are: ability to capture power via **constitutional** means the possession of party ideologies, party constitution and party manifestoes, national mindedness and high level of organisation. As there is more than one definition of political parties so is there also more than one type of political party. The chapter briefly discussed five types of political parties which are; Elitist/Cadre parties (i.e. parties whose members are of the highest rank in the society), Mass parties (i.e. parties with members from all sections of the society), Ideological parties (i.e. the bases of the party are its ideologies), Broker parties (i.e. parties with members from upper and lower classes of the society) and Charismatic/Personality Party (i.e. parties whose members have a lot of charisma). A few of the functions of political parties according to the chapter include: political education, political representation, political stability, goal formation and organisation of government among others.

The emergence of political parties in Nigeria was aided and supported by constitutional development, with Clifford constitution (1922) providing four elective sets in its legislative council and giving rise to the formation of Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) in the year 1923. NNDP was the first political party in Nigeria and it was headed by the father of Nigerian nationalism, Herbert Macaulay. Then Richard’s constitution (1946) retained the seats and went further to establish regional assemblies. Macpherson’s constitution took the development further by establishing regional executive councils and providing a system of indirect elections to the Nigerian legislative houses. In 1934, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed by a group of young Nigerians. It contested elections and won in 1938. In 1944, National Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) later renamed National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960, was formed. The party fought for the independence of the country and was led by Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Two major political parties came into existence between 1950 and 1951, Action Group (AG) and Northern People’s Congress (NPC). AG emerged as a political wing of Egbe Omo Oduduwa (of the Yoruba cultural group, formed in 1945) and was formally inaugurated in April 1951. NPC emerged from Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa (of the Northern region, formed in 1949) and was declared a political party in October 1951.

The second republic saw the birth of a number of political parties after the Ban on politics was lifted in September 1978. The multi-party system of the first republic of Nigeria laid the bases for the emergence of many political parties; some being splinters of the major political parties. In the third republic, two political parties were registered in accordance to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The two parties were; the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention (NRC). The national chairman for SDP was Chief Tony Anenih and that of NRC was Chief Tom Ikimi. In preparation for the fourth Republic, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) registered three parties; Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) which later changed to All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) in 2002 and People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Since that time, many more political parties have been registered by INEC, bringing the number of political parties in the country to about 92 according to the chapter. However, it is important to state that since the time the book was published, INEC has since un-registered some parties, bringing the number of political parties in the country to about 18.