POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

Political parties are an essential feature of the politics in the modern age of mass participation. They help to keep government accountable to public opinion in liberal-democratic system while in the autocratic system, they help the government maintain its hold on power. According to Dickerson and Flanagan(2002), political parties are an important link between government and the people. The party is an essential agency in the political process of a given political system. Political party crops up all aspects of politics. It was first developed in the 19th century in response to the appearance of elections involving large numbers of voters. Political parties were developed by politicians as a device to help themselves and their friends get elected, but the party had other motives and went on to become a ubiquitous feature of modern politics(Shively,2008). The United State of America was the first modern electoral democracy and the first parties were developed from there. In the 1820s, they were well organised parties, and the oldest party in the world Is the democratic party. In Britain, the year 1867 was the first year in which there was a reasonably widespread extension of the votes. In Nigeria, political parties developed following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalist’s movements in the 1920s

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF THE IDEA OF POLITICAL PARTY

There are a lot of given definitions of political party, a few of them will be dictated in the paragraph. According to R.G. Gettel, “a 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 defines political party as an organised body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political power. A political party performs so many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to establish a single definition. Joseph LaPalombra defined political party as a formal organisation 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.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POLITICAL PARTY

There are several functions of political government and a few of them are;

* Political parties make use of manifestoes that guard them throughout the election and also after
* They capture governmental power in a peaceful and lawful manner making use of the constitution.
* They have broad principles of public policy adopted by its organisation.
* They must be open-minded.
* They should be an organised body.
* They are guided by a party constitution that directs the conducts of the party members.

There are different types of political parties, and they are; Elitist/cadre, Mass, ideological, broker, charismatic/personality. The political party has different functions such as; political mobilisation and recruitment, political education, political representation, interest aggregation, political stability, conflict management, goal formation and so on.

* Elitist party draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country for example; doctors, lawyers, business owners, etc.
* Mass party draws its own membership from all parts of the society therefore has a wide range of membership.
* Ideological party is formed with political ideology and benefits.
* Broker party is formed with its members drawn from the upper and lower classes of the society.
* Charismatic party is formed by individuals with charisma. Basically deals with one’s personal qualities.

Political parties in Nigeria

Political parties in Nigeria were formed due to the growth of nationalist consciousness, sentiments and also nationalist movements(Ikelegbe,2010). Ikelegbe also stated that groups and associations were formed by nationalists’ agitators. Groups like the West African Students Union (1925) and the Lagos Youth movement (1934) were created in an attempt to organize against colonial misrule. People like Herbert Macauly, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe and a few others became the precursors of political parties in Nigeria and were in the forefront of party formation in the 1920’s. The drive for the creation of the early political parties between 1920 and 1950 was due to the establishment of the constitution. The elective theory adopted in the 1922 Clifford Constitution gave rise to the first ever political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP), in 1923. Herbert Macauly, who was thus recognized as the father of Nigerian nationalism, headed the party. Later, in 1934, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was founded. Ernest Okoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J.C. Vaunghan were in charge of this party. The Nigerian Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (later renamed the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens) in 1944 was the next group to be founded. It was the first political party ever to see Nigeria's complete independence and was led by Herbert Macauly and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Two major political parties emerged during the period between 1950 and 1951. The Action Group (AG) and the Congress of the Northern Peoples are (NPC). With AG from the Yoruba and NPC from the Northerners, both parties are racial focused. Because of the multi-party structure present in the first republic and for others, discord within major parties, some other minor parties formed. The first parties of the republic lacked a national outlook. Such parties often place a great deal of focus on personalities rather than problems.

The ban on politics in 1978 was lifted by the army. Some parties were launched after these and they include: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the National People's Party (NPP), the Great People's Party of Nigeria (GNPP), the Nigerian Unity Party (UPN), etc. These parties, 53 in all, tried to participate in the elections of 1979. Nigeria had a constitutional structure of two parties for the first time in 1989. This was attributable to the transition to the decree promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida on civil law. The Social Democrat Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention were the two parties (NRC). They were founded by the government and the Military have also set up their constitution, priorities, policies and programs. Three political parties were registered by the Independent National Electoral Committee in 1998 in preparation for the Fourth Republic (INEC) and they include: The Democracy Alliance (AD), All People's Party (APP), later changed to All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and the Democratic People's Party (ANPP) (PDP). But other political parties have been registered by INEC since the creation of the Fourth Republic, bringing the total number of political parties in Nigeria to more than 50.

Nigeria's political parties are facing several problems at the moment. The high degree of corruption that has now made politics a very successful industry is one of them. Another is that many political parties have a structure in which the identification of a candidate depends on his income. Most political parties also seek to create a national structure for the distribution of public resources, also known by party members as the "national cake". Most political leaders today see their party activities as a way of advancing their private companies. These are not only problems for the country, but also serious factors leading to the growth and development of Nigeria.