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**GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

 **CHAPTER 7**

 **POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

 Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. They are an important link between government and the people. It is an invention that first developed in the nineteenth century in response to the appearance of elections involving large numbers of voters. The first modern electoral democracy was the United States of America, and it was here that the first parties developed. The Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the world. Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalists’ movements in the 1920s.

 There are so many definitions of political parties as the political thinkers. Herman Finer defined political party as an organized 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. According to Agbaje, 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. A political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizeable group of citizens into an organization; a chief object of this organization is to ensure that its officials attain power or maintain power. From the above opinions, we infer that a political party is a group of citizens, more or less organized, having some agreements in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by some constitutional means.

 The major feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Political parties always have a broad principles of public policy adopted by its organization i.e party ideology. Every political party must take into consideration the interest of the nation. Political parties have party manifestoes which guide their conducts during and after winning elections. They are guided by party constitution which directs the conducts of party officials and members within and outside government.

 There are different types of political parties. They include; (i) Elitist party: This is a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in the country. (ii) Mass parties: This is a political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. (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 a political party formed with its members drawn from upper and lower part of the society.

 The functions of political parties include; (i) Political mobilization and recruitment (ii) Political education (iii) Political stability (iv) Goal formation (v) Conflict management

 Nationalists agitators formed groups and associations, to organize against colonial misrule. Thus for this purpose, the National Congress for British West African territories was formed in 1920, the West African Students Union in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties’ formation in Nigeria was constitutional development. The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded as the first political party that was formed in Nigeria. The elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution in 1922 gave rise to the formation of NNDP in 1923. NNDP was led by Herbert Macauly who is regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. Nigerian Youth Movement was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians led by Ernest Ikoli. The National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon was formed in 1944 and renamed in 1960. NCNC was the first political party to be organized to seek total independence for Nigeria.

 Two major political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951. They were Action (AG) and Northern People’s Congress (NPC). AG emerged from Egbe Omo Oduduwa that was formed in 1945 and the main aim of AG was to provide leadership and to capture political power in the western region. NPC emerged from Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa which was formed in 1949 and the main purpose of NPC was to combat ignorance, injustice in Northern region and control of government in North. The Nigerian multi-party system of the first republic gave rise to the emergence of many political parties apart from the three major political parties.

 Challenges that confronted political parties before independence include; (i) They were without national outlook, they had regional support and ethnic royalty (ii) They placed more emphasis on personalities rather that issues.

 The ban on politics was lifted in September 1978 and five political parties (NPN, NPP, GNPP, PRP, UPN) were registered. In the third republic, Nigeria had a constitutional two party system. The two parties were SDP and NRC. Three political parties were registered in preparation towards the fourth republic in 1998. They were AD, APP and PDP. Over time, INEC registered more political parties.

 Nigeria’s political parties face challenges ranging from corruption to excess political parties. There is need to arrest this trend and make political parties to be directed to fostering cohesion among Nigerians and engendering the development of Nigeria.