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An essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation are political parties. They help to keep governments accountable to public opinion in liberal democratic systems and in autocratic systems, they help the government maintain its power. Politicians developed political parties during the nineteenth century to help themselves and like minded friends get elected but the party proved to be useful and went on to become ever-present feature of modern politics. The oldest political party is the democratic party established in the 1820's. A political party performs many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to establish a single definition. It joins people together in a formally organized structure. A characteristic of a political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. They also have principles of policy known as party ideology which serves as a basis for classifying parties. Political parties have party manifestoes which guide conduct during and after winning elections. The different types of political parties include Elitist parties for intellectuals like doctors lawyers, Mass parties that draw membership from sections of the society, Ideological parties formed with political ideology, Broker parties formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society, Charismatic parties formed or led by individuals with charisma etc. Some functions of political parties include, political mobilization, political education, political stability, electoral competition and governance, organization of government etc.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and nationalist movements, nationalist agitators formed groups associations, to organize against colonial misrule. For this purpose, The National Congress of British West Africa Territories was formed in 1920, the West African Students Union in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934. Herbert Macaulay, H.O. Davies, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria. The pivot for the emergence of parties' formation in Nigeria was constitutional development. The Clifford constitution of 1922 provided for 4 elective seats in its legislative council, while the Richards constitution of 1946 retained the four elective seats and established regional assemblies.

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 of 1922 gave rise to the formation of NNDP in 1923. NNDP was led by Herbert Macaulay regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. The party was exclusively based in Lagos and had no national colouration. It won all the three seats

allocated to Lagos in the legislative council in the elections of 1923, 1928 and 1933. They were aided by a newspaper called Lagos Daily News. The Nigerian Youth Movement was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr J.C.Vaughan. The major objectives of the NYM was to promote Nigerian unity and national consciousness and achieve complete autonomy within the British Empire. The Nigerian Council of Nigerian and CAMeroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944 but was later renamed National Convention of Nigerian citizen in 1960 when some parts of Cameroon broke away from Nigeria. The NCNC was the first political party to be organised to seek total independence for Nigeria and its first president and general secretary were Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe. The party campaigned against the Richard constitution of 1946 and was the major Nigerian party until 1950. Nnamdi azikiwe became its president in 1946 after the death of Herbert Macaulay.

Action group and Northern people's Congress were the two major political parties that emerged between 1950 and 1951. The AD emerged from a pan Yoruba cultural society known as Egbe Omo Oduduwa formed in 1950 with Obafemi Awolowo as the general secretary and the main aim was to provide leadership to and capture political power in the Western region while the NPC emerged from Jam'iyya Mutanein Arewa and was formed in 1949 by Dr Dikko, M Yahaya Gusau among others with its main aim to combat ignorance, idleness, injustice in the Northern Nigeria. Some problems pre-independence political parties faced include, they were without national outlook and they placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues.

In the second republic, the ban on politics was lifted in September 1978. 53 political associations sought to contest and only 5 were registered; The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People's Party(NPP), The Great Nigeria People's Party(GNPP), The People's Redemption Party(PRP) and The Unity Party of Nigeria(UPN). A sixth party the Nigerian Advance Party(NAP) was registered to contest the 1983 elections. NPN was officially launched in Lagos after lifting the ban on party politics by the military and its main goal was national unity with the slogan "one nation, one destiny". The Unity Party was an offshoot of the Action Group and its main support-base is the Yorubaland. The Nigerian People's Party (NPP) reincarnated from the NCNC with the igbo as its main support base. The Great People Nigeria People's Party was led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim with Kanuri as its ethnic base.

General Ibrahim Babaginda promulgated the transition to civil rule decree through which two political parties were registered in accordance with the constitution of Nigeria 1989. They were set up by the military government; Social Democratic Party(SDP), National Republican Convention(NRC).In the fourth republic, three political parties were registered in 1998 by the INEC. they are Alliance for Democracy, All Nigeria's People's Party formerly known as All People's Party and the People's Democratic Party. They contested in the 1998 and 1999 election. The People's Democratic party has its maintaining and preserving the integrity and sovereignty of Nigeria won the presidential election in 1999 and has maintained presidency for 16 years. Political parties in the present include All Progressive Party(APC), Fresh Democracy Party(FRESH), Hope Democratic Party(HDP), Labour Party(LP) etc.