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QUESTION

Do a two page review of Chapter 7, ‘Political parties in Nigeria’, In Salient issues in Government and Nigerian Politics.

ANSWER

Political parties are very important links between the people and government. They help government to be accountable to public opinion and help government maintain its hold in power. It is an invention that first developed in the nineteenth century in response to the appearance of elections due to large numbers of voters. Politicians developed the idea of political party as a device to help themselves and like-minded people elected. It was first developed in the United States. Political party has so many functions so it is difficult to establish one definition but 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 at controlling the government and carrying out its general policies” while 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.

The main feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Every political party must be nation minded, that is, its function should be in the interest of the nation. They must have party manifestoes which guide their conducts. They must be guided by party constitution.

There are five types of political parties: **Elitist**, political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy. **Mass**, it draws membership from all sections of the society. **Ideological**, party formed with political ideology or benefits. **Broker**, party formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society. **Charismatic**, party formed or led by individuals with charisma.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements. They formed groups and organizations to organize against the colonial misrule. **Herbert Macaulay, H.O. Davies, Ernest Okoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo** and others were the precusors of political parties in Nigeria.

The Nigerian National Development Party (NNDP) was regarded the first political party formed in Nigeria headed by Herbert Macaulay. It was formed in 1923 due to the elective principle introduced by Clifford constitution of 1922. The Nigerian Youth Movement was later formed in 1934 by Ernest Okoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan. The Nigerian Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) later renamed to Nigerian Convention of Nigerian Citizen was formed in 1944. It was the major Nigerian party up onto 1950. Between 1950 and 1951 two groups were formed: Action Group (AG) and Northern People Congress (NPC).

Political parties faced a lot of challenges in the pre independence era like: placing emphasis on personalities more than issues, they were without national outlook, and they led to the collapse of themselves during this era. The ban was lifted in 1978, 53 parties sought to contest in 1979 general elections and 5 of them were registered by the federal government: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People Party (NPP), The Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), The Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN).

In the third republic, Nigeria had a constitutional two party system. Everything concerning the two political parties was set up by the military. The two parties were The Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention (NRC) set up by the government.

In the fourth republic, only three parties were registered towards the election by the INEC) Independent National Election Commission. They were Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and the People Democratic Party (PDP). So since the fourth republic, a lot of parties have been registered by the INEC.

Presently, most of the politicians see the political party as a business and the level of corruption has increased and politics is seen as a competitive business. Political parties need to start to foster cohesion among Nigerians.