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POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

There are different definitions of political parties, but simply put, a political party is a group of organized citizens, having some agreement in broad principles of national policy with an effort to capture political power by constitutional means. According to Herman Finer, a political party is an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political power.

Political parties help to make both democratic and autocratic governments accountable to public opinion. They are an important link between the government and the people. The oldest political party in the world is the Democratic party in the United states of America. Political parties in Nigeria were developed as a result of growth in nationalist consciousness and sentiments in the 1920's. The chief objective of political parties is to attain and maintain political power.

The basic features of political parties are as follows: To capture governmental powers through constitutional means; Having a party ideology; Being national minded; Being an organized body; Having party manifestos; Having a party constitution.

There are different types of political parties. Firstly, the Elitist or Cadre party, which is a party that consists of members from the highest level of social hierarchy in the country. Secondly, the mass party which is a party that has members from all levels and sections of the society and has wide membership. Furthermore, the ideology party which is formed on the basis of a particular political ideology. Also, the broker party whose members are drawn from the upper and lower classes of the society; their main aim is to ensure social justice. Lastly, the charismatic party which is a party formed or led by an individual with charisma.

The functions of political parties are political education, political representation, political mobilization, organization of government, electoral competition and governance.

The National Congress of British West Africa Territories (1920), the west African student's union (1925), the Lagos youth movement (1934), were all formed to protest against colonial misrule. Some of the nationalists were Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, H.O Davies, Ernest

Ikoli, etc. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties' formation in Nigeria was constitutional development.

The first political party in Nigeria was the Nigerian National Development party (NNDP), which was formed in 1923. It was led by Herbert Macaulay (the father of Nigerian Nationalism). The party was based in Lagos and had no national coloration. Its activities were aided by a newspaper called The Lagos daily news launched in 1925. The National Convention of Nigerian Citizens was the first political party to be organized to seek total independence for Nigeria. There were two major political parties that emerged between 1950 and 1966. They were the Action Group and the Northern Peoples Congress. These parties emerged from cultural associations because of the prospects of the 1951 election. The leader of the Action Group was Obafemi Awolowo. The multi-party system gave rise to the emergence of many political parties. Some of which were splinter political parties as a result of the disagreement that arose in the major parties. Some of these parties are Northern Elements Progress Union, United Middle belt Congress, the United National Independent Party. Some of the problems of the pre-independence political parties were that the political parties did not have a national outlook, they placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues, political party defection weakened the political parties, etc. In the second republic, after the first and second military coups, many political parties sought to contest for the election but only five were registered. These were the National Party of Nigeria, the Nigerian People's Party, the Great Nigeria People's party, the Peoples Redemption Party and the Unity party of Nigeria. In the third republic, Nigeria had a constitutional two-party system for the first time. This was all set up by the military government at that time. The two parties were the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican convention. In the fourth republic, three main political parties were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission, namely: The Alliance for Democracy, the All-Nigeria's People Party, and the People's Democratic Party. Some other parties were later registered by INEC, namely: Accord, Action Alliance, Action Democratic Party, Advanced Allied party, African Action Congress, African Democratic Congress, All Blending Party, Better Nigeria Progressive party, Change Nigeria Party, Coalition for Change, Congress of Patriots, Democratic Alternative, Fresh Democratic party, Green Party of Nigeria, Hope Democratic Party, independent Democrats, Kowa Party, Zenith Labor party, etc.

In conclusion, the present political parties face a lot of challenges. There is an extreme level of corruption which has made politics a competitive business people join politics in order to accumulate wealth and not to serve the people.