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In the modern age of mass participation, an essential feature of politics is political party. Political parties serve as a link between the government and the people and it is an essential political agency in the political process of a given political system. The idea of political party was fist initiated in the 19th century, when there was mass participation in elections. The first set of parties to be developed was in America and in Britain by 1867, there was an extension of votes. In Nigeria, the political parties developed following the growth of nationalism in 1920s.

According to Herman Finer a political party is an organized body of with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in pursuit of political party. There are various characteristics of politics and they include capturing of political power constitutionally, adoption of party ideology, every political party must be nation minded, a political party must be an organized body, a political party has a party manifesto to guide their conduct during and after elections, and political are guided by a party constitution. There are various types of political parties and they are elitist party; it derives its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in the country, mass parties; it draws its members from all sections of the society, ideological party; this is formed with political ideologies which is the bases of the party, Broker party; it draws its members from the upper and lower class of the society, and charismatic party; this is formed with individuals with charisma. Political parties have a lot of functions which are political education, political stability, conflict management and so on.

The development of political parties in Nigeria were triggered by the growth of nationalistic consciousness and sentiments, and nationalistic movements. Then, groups and associations formed by national agitators was to organize against colonial misrule. The formation of political parties in Nigeria was a constitutional development. The first political party in Nigeria is Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) of 1923, introduced by the Clifford constitution and was led by Herbert Macauley. NNDP was based in Lagos and had no national coloration. The second political party is Nigerian Youth movement (NYM) formed by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J.C. Vaughan in order to promote national unity and consciousness, and to achieve complete autonomy within the British empire. The third political party is the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroun was formed in 1944. Later on, the name was changed to National Convention of Nigeria Citizens because the Cameroons broke away in 1960. NCNC was organized to attain independence for Nigeria. These political parties above are the early political parties (1920-1950).

The development of next set of political parties falls in between 1950-1966. Two major political parties emerged between 1950-1951 and these were Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress. These political parties emerged from cultural associations. The AG was from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (a pan Yoruba Cultural society) and it was formally inaugurated in 1950 headed by Obafemi Awolowo. While the NPC was formed from the Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa and became formal in 1951. NPC’s objective was to combating ignorance, idleness, injustice in the Northern Region and control of the government in the North. As time went on, smaller political parties were formed as a result of disagreements between the major political parties. Smaller political parties include; the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), United National Independent Party (UNIP), and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). However political parties before independence were not without out some challenges and these problems includes; political parties were without a national outlook, they placed more emphasis on personalities rather than issues, intra-party and inter-party conflicts causing a spilt within them, and political party defection led to the collapse of parties during this era.

In 1978, the ban on politics was lifted and after that about 53 political associations sought to contest in the 1979 general elections and five of them were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. The five parties include; the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), The Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), The Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), the People’s Redemption Party (PRP) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) is a sixth party that registered to contest the 1983. In the 2nd republic, most political parties formed on the bases of ethnicity and they were offspring of earlier political parties. They also had similar objectives.

A transition to civil rule by General Ibrahim Babangida gave birth to the third republic. In this republic, for the first time Nigeria’s had a constitutionally two-party system. Two parties that were established by the government and were approved by the Armed Forces Ruling Council are the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), under the chairmanship of Chief Tony Anenih and Chief Tom Ikimi, respectively. Both parties had registered offices in the Federal Capital Territory.

In the fourth republic, three political parties were registered in preparations for the 1998 elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission among a myriad of political parties that struggled to be registered. The registered parties include: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). These parties had offices registered at all levels and the contested in the 1998 and 1999 elections. However, since the inception if the fourth republic, large numbers political parties have been registered by INEC.

It is quite evident now that political parties are not without it challenges and problems. Firstly, the high level of corruption has made politics a competitive business. Secondly, regulatory framework for parties should be changed in other to prevent new parties from forging coalitions of the wealthy as the basis for their registration. Notwithstanding, the aim of most political parties has been the development of national system for sharing out the ‘national cake’ as a system of patronage. Besides, most leaders see their political parties activity as a means to future their business interest.