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MATRIC NO: 19/MHS01/404

DEPARTMENT: MBBS

COLLEGE: MHS

COURSE CODE: GST203

RREVIEW OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA. 'IN SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA'S POLITICS

Political parties are essential features of politics in the modern age of mass participation. In liberal democratic systems, they help to keep governments accountable to public opinion; even in autocratic system of government, its aids the government in maintaining its hold on power.

The first modern electoral democracy was the united states of America, and it was here that the first parties developed. By the 1820s, there were well-organised parties, and the democratic party, which can trace its roots back to time, is the oldest political party in the world. However, political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of nationalist consciousness and sentiments and nationalists' movements in 1920s.

There are many definitions of political parties as the political thinkers. 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.

Also, a political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizable group of citizens into an organization; a chief object of this organization is to ensure that its officials attain power or maintain power. (shively,2008).

Characteristics of political parties; They possess manifestoes which guide their conduct during and after winning an election, guided by party constitution which direct the conduct of party officials and members within and outside government, must be national-minded, i.e., in aims and functions, etc.

Types of political parties;(i)elitist parties: This is a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a 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 benefits which form the bases of the party. (iv)Charismatic party: This is a political party led by individuals with charisma, i.e. personal qualities of a leader.

Political parties perform certain functions such as political representation , conflict management and political integration, organization of government, interest aggregation, goal formation and so on.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements. According to Ikelegbe, nationalist agitators formed groups and associations, to organize against colonial misrule. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties' formation in Nigeria was constitutional development.

As things stand now, Nigeria's political parties face some challenges. First there is an extremely high level of corruption which has made politics a competitive business. Second, the regulatory framework for the establishment of parties should be changed so that new parties do not have to forge coalitions of the wealthy as a basis for their registration. Moreover, the aim or political project of most Nigerian parties has been the development of a national system for sharing out the 'national cake' as a system of patronage. This is why the parties are established as coalitions of various factions of regional and economic rent-seekers. Most party leaders see their political party activity as a means to further their business interests. There is a need to arrest this trend and make political parties to be directed to fostering cohesion among Nigerians and engendering the development of Nigeria.