YUSUF DEBORAH DAMILOLA

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**POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Political parties are an essential feature of politics in the modern age of mass participation. Political parties are an important link between government and the people it is also an essential political agency. The political party was first developed in the 19th century in response to the appearance of elections involving large number of voters. The first modern electoral democracy was the United State of America, and it was where the first parties developed. By the 1820s there were well-organized parties, and the Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the world.

There are many definitions of political parties as the political thinkers. “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” According to R.G Gettel. Herman Finer on his part defined political party as “an organized body with voluntary membership, its concerted energy being employed in the pursuit of political power”. A political party performs so many tasks in the political process that it is difficult to establish a single definition. There are several diverse definitions of political parties and one definition does not do justice to it because it performs various tasks.

There are various characteristics of political parties. Below are some of those characteristics:-

* The major feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means.
* Political parties always have a broad principle of public policy adopted by its organization which is referred to as party ideology.
* Every political party must be national-minded etc.

There are five types of political parties these are:-

Elitist/cadre parties: This is a political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country.

Mass parties: this is a political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and has wide membership.

Ideological party: it is a political party formed with political ideology or benefits which form bases of the party.

Broker party: it is a political party formed with its members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society.

Charismatic or personality party: this is a political party formed or led by individuals with charisma.

Political parties perform various functions some are- political education, political mobilization and recruitment, political representation, interest aggregation, political stability etc.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalist movements. 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. The likes of Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Earnest Okoli and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria, were in the forefront of political activities and party formation in the 1920s and even thereafter. The center of party formation in Nigeria was constitutional development.

The early political party was during 1920-1950. 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 it was led by Herbert Macaulay regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. Other political parties in this era are The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) formed in 1934, the Nigerian Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) formed in 1944.

Political parties in Nigeria 1950-1966. Two major political parties emerged between 1950 and 1951 these were the Action Group (AG) which emerged from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) which emerged from the Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa. Political parties before independence in Nigeria were not without some challenges. Some of them are- the political parties were without national outlook, the political parties placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues etc. Some of the problems that confronted pre-independence political parties are

* The political parties were without national outlook. They had regional support and ethnic loyalty
* The political parties placed much emphasis on personalities rather than issues etc.

There were political parties in the second republic such as The Nigerian People’s party (NPP), The People’s redemption party (PRP) etc. In the third republic: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and The National Republican Convention (NRC). In the fourth republic: the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People’s Party (APP), Advanced Allied Party (APP), Action Alliance (AA) etc.

As things are in the country, Nigeria’s political parties face some challenges such as extreme high level of corruption and the regulatory framework.