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Question: Do a two-page review of Chapter 7, “Political Parties in Nigeria,” in Salient issues in Government and Nigeria’s Politics.

Response:

This chapter focuses on Political Parties in Nigeria, it’s definition, characteristics, types, functions, development, examples, and the challenges they face. There are as many definitions of political parties as people who aspire to define them. A political party is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizable group of citizens into an organization. One of the main objectives of this organization is to ensure that its officials attain power or maintain the already-attained power. Political parties are a very important feature of politics in this modern age where a lot of individuals participate. It is an important link between the government and the people. It was first developed in the nineteenth century in response to the appearance to elections involving large numbers of voters.

In addition, characteristics of political parties include their capture of governmental powers through constitutional means; their broad principle of public policy adopted by its organization which is known as party ideology; their national-mindedness, which means that it must take the interest of nation into consideration; their organized body due to its strength which comes from an effective organizational structure. They have party manifestoes which guide their conduct during and after election and are guided by a party constitution which directs the conduct of party officials and members within and outside government.

Furthermore, political parties come in different types including the Elitist or Cadre parties, Mass parties, Ideological parties, Broker parties, and Charismatic or Personality parties. The Elitist is the political party that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country. A Mass party, on the other hand, is a political party that draws its membership from all sections of the society and has wide membership. Ideological parties are the type of political parties which are formed with political ideology or benefits from the basis of the party. Meanwhile, a Broker party is the political party formed with the members drawn from upper and lower classes of the society and is basically aimed to reconcile the conflicting interest of the rich and the poor by carrying out policies of social justice for the interest of all. A Charismatic or Personality party, however, is a political party formed or led by individuals with charisma.

The functions of Political parties are as follows: political mobilization and recruitment; political education; political representation; interest aggregation; political stability; conflict management and political integration; organization of government; provision of alternative government and policies; electoral competition and governance; and goal formation.

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. Thus for this purpose, The National Congress of British West African Territories were formed in 1920, the West African Students Union in 1925 and the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934. Herbert Macaulay, H.O. Davies, Ernest Okoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and others were precursors of political parties in Nigeria and were in the forefront of political activities and party formation in the 1920s and thereafter. The fulcrum for the emergence of parties, formation in Nigeria was constitutional development. The Clifford constitution of 1922 provided for four (4) elective seats in its legislative council, while the Richards constitution of 1946 retained the four (4) elective seats and established regional assemblies. The Macpherson’s constitution established regional executed councils, and provided for a system of indirect elections to the much largely Nigerian Legislative houses.

The first political party formed in Nigeria was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) were formed as political parties after the introduction of the Clifford Constitution. They could not be said to be national parties. Their activities were mainly restricted to Lagos. However, at the end of Second World War, new political parties emerged and replaced the NNDP and NYM. Some of these new parties were in two groups which are the major and minor parties. Some of the major parties were the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), Northern People’s Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG). Some of the minor parties were the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Dynamic Party (DP), Bornu Youth Movement (BYM), etc. Most of these parties, if not all, were regional in outlook and based on ethnic sentiments and it can be said that none of them commanded nation-wide support. Some scholars, have argued that NCNC was more of a national party than others. However, they were formed mainly to awaken people’s consciousness towards the struggle for political independence.

In conclusion, Nigeria’s political parties face some challenges. First, there is an extremely high level of corruption which has made politics a competitive business. In addition, 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. Most political leaders see their political party activity as a means to further their business interests. There is need to arrest the trend and make political parties to be fostering cohesion among Nigerians and engendering the development of the Nigeria.