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Political parties help to keep government accountable to public opinion, they help the government maintain its hold on power. They are an important between the people and government. Politicians developed the idea of political party at the same time as a device to help themselves and like-minded friends get elected, but the party proved to have many other uses as well and went on to become an unbiquitous feature of modern politics.

According to R.G Gettel, political party is a group of citizens more or less organised, 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. Abaje (1999), “a political party is a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention, for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices. Hughes (1972) see political parties as associations formally organised with the explicit and declare purpose of acquiring and maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition with other similar associations, over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or prospective state.

The major or central feature of political party is to capture governmental power through constitutional means. Every political party must be national-minded, i.e., in aims and functions, it must take into consideration the interest of the nation. Political parties should be an organised body, because it can only derive strength from an effective organisational structure. Political parties has party manifestoes which guide their conduct during and after winning elections.

There are types of political parties; Elitist/Cadre parties are political parties that draws its membership from the highest echelon of social hierarchy in a country. Mass parties are political parties that draws its membership from all sections of the society and have wide membership. Ideology party are political parties formed with political ideology or benefits which form the bases of the party. Broker party are political parties formed with its members the upper and lower classes of the society, the basic aim of it is to reconcile the conflicting interest of the rich and poor by carrying out policies of social justice for the interest of all. Charismatic or Personality party is a political party formed or led by individuals with charisma.

There are functions of political parties; political mobilisation and recruitment, political education, political representation, interest aggregation.

Political parties in Nigeria developed following the growth of the nationalist consciousness and sentiments, and nationalists movements. According to Ikelegbe, nationalists agitators formed groups and associations, to organise against colonial misrule.

The Nigeria 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. NNDP was led by Herbert Macaulay exclusively based in Lagos. It won all the three seats allocated to Lagos in the legislative council. The Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) was formed in 1934 by a group of young Nigerians led by Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akinsaya and Dr. J.C Vaughan. Promotion of Nigerian unity and national consciousness and achievement of complete autonomy within the British Empire were among the objectives of the NYM. The party contested and won elections to the National Legislative Council and Lagos Town Council in 1938. The National Council of Nigerian Council of Nigerian and Cameroon (NCNC) was formed in 1944. National Convention of Nigerian Citizen in 1960. It was the first political party to be organised to seek total independence for Nigeria. Its first president and general secretary were Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe.

The Action Group (AG) emerged from the Egbe Omo Oduduwa. Egbe Omo Oduduwa was formed in 1945. AG was started as the political wing of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1950. It was inaugurated in April, 1951. Its leader was Obafemi Awolowo, the general secretary of Egbe Omo Oduduwa. The aim of the AGwas to provide leadership to and capture political power in the western region. The Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) emerged from the Jam’iyya Mutanein Arewa. The cultural association was formed 1949 by Dr. Dikko, M. Yahaya Gusua, Aminu Kano and Abubakar Iman. The Jam’iyya constituted itself into a political party, the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) in October 1951. The main purpose was combating ignorance, idleness, injustice in the northern region and control of government in the North. The Nigerian multi-system of the first republic gave rise to the emergence of many political parties apart from the three major political parties.

The ban on politics was lifted in September 1978. About 53 political associations sought to contest the 1979 general elections. Five of these associations, were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission. These were NPN, NPP, GNPP, PRP, UPN, NAP, was registered to contest the 1983 elections. The NPN was officially launched in September, 1978 in Lagos. NPN was comprised and held by a host of social clubs, tribal unions, and associations, committee of friends, former NPC leaders and ex-public officials. The party’s main goal was national unity, with the slogan “one nation, one destiny.” Their major programmes were those of provision of food, shelter and qualitative education. The party won the presidential election and ruled the country for 4years and 3months. In 1979, the party won gubernatorial elections in 7 states. The Unity Party of Nigeria, on its part, was an offshoot of the Action Group (AG) and its main support base is the yoruba land. UPN embodied in its four cardinal point programmes, which were free education at all levels, free health services for all citizens, full and gainful employment for all the able-bodied and integrated rural development. The party won gubernatorial elections in five states in 1979 and lost one of them in 1983 election. The Nigerian Peoples’ Party (NPP) reincarnated from the NCNC. Its main support base was the igbo, and its members were largely old NCNC politicians and admirers and supporters of its leader Nnamdi Azikiwe. The aim of NPP is to work towards full employment for all Nigerians and to promote economic, social and political equality of all sections of the country. The party won gubernatorial elections and controlled three states: Imo, Anambra and Plateau. The GNPP was led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim. Its ethnic base was Kanuri, its major slogan was “politicians without bitterness”. It controlled two states, Borno and Gongola, between 1979 and 1983.

The political parties were without national outlook. They placed more emphasis on personalities rather than issues. Political party defection weakened or led to the collapse of political parties during this era.

Political parties in the second republic in Nigeria; NPN, GNPP, NPP, PRP, UPN, NAP. Political parties in the third republic; SDP, NRC. Political parties in the fourth republic; AD, APP, PDP, ANPP .e.t.c.

From the look of things Nigeria has gone a long way in gaining political parties but the question is can they be classified as political parties or money laundering machines.