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CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY

In a democratic nation, citizens have every right to take part in the democratic process in their country. A citizen, in a lay man’s language is someone who belongs to a country either by birth or by naturalization. It is also believed that there cannot be any participation in government without the people and also there is no government without the people. Democracy according to Abraham Lincoln is defined as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. But there are many barriers or limitations to peoples participation in democratic processes as a breach to them exercising their rights in terms of voting which may include their age, status, religion and so on. other concept would be explained dutifully later on.

The definition of a citizen, is seeing as a sort of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have various rights and regulations in a country that they are entitled to either by birth or naturalism which include; right to life, right to vote and be voted for, right to freedom of speech, right to freedom of association etc. According to Turner, when he opined that citizenship is a formal legal identity that the individual person inherits through a collection of legal rights and obligations, controlling access to the scarce political, economic and cultural resources of the society.

The conditions under which naturalization are conferred vary from country to country, following the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, chapter 111 section 25 defines citizenship as;

1. Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria: provided that a person shall not become a citizen of Nigeria by virtue of this section if neither of his parents nor any of his grandparents was born in Nigeria.
2. Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria.
3. Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Section 26(1) to section 32 also stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalize must fulfil before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria. Citizenship is said to be divided into civil citizenship which refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty, political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic process of a country, and social citizenship embodies the claim that citizens have over scarce resources. However, according to certain scholars Brannan et al and Glover, citizenship is seen as participating actively in the democratic process of a country other than being passive, and also there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship.

CITIZENS RIGHTS

Individual rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. Rights, are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. A right therefore can be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. Important civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: the right to life, right to education, right to association and freedom of speech, writing and publication among others.

DEMOCRACY

It has been etymologically stated that the word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos meaning people and kratos meaning rule, that is the rule of law” it gives individuals the right and freedom to discuss political matters and express their concerns with the use of appropriate agencies and bodies to convey issues to the government. Individuals are able to choose their own government and participate in democratic processes. This is classified as a direct democracy.

Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduce from the various definitions of democracy are the following features:

1. The fundamental rights of citizens are guaranteed
2. Independent and impartial judiciary
3. Existence of the rule of law
4. Freedom of press
5. Periodic election that is free and fair

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties and responsibilities to the state. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility, and no one else’s. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes.
3. A good citizen must have the duty to obey the law.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms
5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
6. (s)he must support public education in every way possible.

Citizens are therefore said to have the upper hand in democracy, because without the citizens there would not be democracy and government. The participation of citizens in the democratic process of a country, helps to check the activities of the government in a society, and also elect good governors to promote good governance and prevent corruption.