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ASSIGNMENT: DO A TWO PAGE REVIEW OF CHAPTER 8, CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY, IN SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS

Answer

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions capture the foundation for the famous formulation that democratic government is ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’. They mean that ‘governments belong to the people, governmental processes belong to the people, and elections belong to the people’. There is no democracy without the engagement of the people. Engagement is thus both a right and a responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy, citizen engagement is not an abstraction ; it takes tangible forms and serves particular purposes to improve people’s lives.

For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. They must be free to come together to express their views and preferences and work to see the government responds to citizens views, thus holding those in government accountable. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information.

For full citizenship to be achieved, we must remove these barriers, whether they are based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. If not, universal and equal suffrage is essentially denied and governmental credibility is undermined. Citizens must, therefore, understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government.

Citizens have set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public warfare. In addition to the essential democratic value, participation is an instrumental driver of democratic and socio-economic change, and a fundamental way to empower citizens. In ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged status to be called citizens because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Slaves, serfs, and some alien residents were deprived of citizenship for racial, political and religious reasons. To be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights as opposed to the slaves who could not enjoy them.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or naturalisation. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state of his parents are citizens of that state or if he is born within the territory of that state. Citizenship is determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. Turner (1997:176) opines 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 society. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state another state is a known as Naturalisation.

Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of or can be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty; Political citizenship is associated with participation in a democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by the members of such a community and Social citizenship embodies the claim that citizen ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live a civilized existence in accordance with ethe standards prevailing in society.

Glover argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship, and educative citizenship.

Democracy is derived from the Greek word ‘demos meaning people and kratos meaning rule that is rule by the people’. The concept of democracy first originated from Ancient Greece where in the city states, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws. In these assemblies, citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political right. The Greek democracy was a limited institution in that it excluded labourers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights.

According to Abraham Lincoln, democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people of the people when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and that is a government by the people is when its ideological undercurrent is grounded in the people’s culture, also, it is a government which is for the people when the power employed by the custodians of state business emanates from, and resides in the collective mandate of the people.

There are features of democracy which includes; the fundamental rights of citizens is guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary, freedom of press, and periodic election that is free and fair. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive, because they know that the success or failure of the government is their therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

* A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
* A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy.
* A good citizen must be refrain from uttering destructive or criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternative to government policies.
* A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.

In conclusion, democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. It is considered as the best form of government in the modern era as it allows citizens to exercise and enjoy many rights and it gives them responsibilities at the same time.