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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.

CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. 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. Citizen engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development, including the provision of opportunity, resources, services and security (Albright, 2012). To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information. Citizens, including political competitors, must also be free to impart their views about governmental processes and public affairs; otherwise citizens cannot be truly informed, nor can they freely make choices. They also need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority, along with the skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and hold public officials accountable.

The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. 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 by naturalization. Citizenship determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization. The conditions under which naturalization are conferred vary from country to country.

Section 25: 1(a) of the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria defines citizenship as:

1. Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belong 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; and
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 fulfill before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of, or 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 the 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 citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live a civilized existence in accordance with the standards prevailing in society.

However, as with so many other concepts, citizenship does not have just one definition, it means different things to different people. For example, Brannan et. al. (2006:55) argue that the concept of citizenship holds that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity , but that being active is an essential of being a citizen. However, there are broader definitions and perceptions of citizenship as well, as shown by Glover (2004:18), who argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship

Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship. Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices and institutions. Educative citizenship, on its part, according to Dagger (1997) refers to the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship.

Democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning “rule by the people” (Emiri, 2003, cited in Ojo, 2015). The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts 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. Abraham Lincoln, former American president, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

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

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

Citizens are 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, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy.

3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.

4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.

5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.

In conclusion, democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. It is also defined as the system of government by the people, of the people and for the people.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. They must be aware of their rights and responsibilities as without the awareness among the citizens, a government may turn into a tyranny.