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Assignment

Do a two page review of Chapter 8, "Political Parties in Nigeria," In Salient issues in Government and Nigeria's Politics.

CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

In a democratic government sovereignty resides and flows from the people. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. For true democracy to exist citizens must be informed about issues that can improve their lives. Be free to come together to express their views and preferences and work to see that government responds to such views. Barriers to citizen's participation have to be removed so as to achieve full citizenship, failure to do this results in denial of universal and equal suffrage. Citizens must therefore understand what citizenship, politics and government entails. A symbiotic relationship exists between democracy, the citizens and states' development hence democracy is seen as the citizen's government, made by the citizens for the citizenry. Development is brought about by the active participation of people in governance.

Citizen / citizenship

The term citizen politically implies a certain type of relationship between the government and the people. Citizens have a set of rights, liberties and responsibilities which enables them develop their potentials. Citizenship may be acquired either by birth, which is fundamental in the law of most countries or by naturalisation. Naturalization is the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/ her citizenship of state to another state. The conditions under which naturalization is conferred vary from country to country. Citizenship means different things to different people. Chapter III section 25 1 (a) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines what citizenship is. Section 26 (1)-36 stipulates the conditions for naturalization.

Citizenship can be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Civil citizenship are the rights necessary to protect individual liberty. Political citizenship associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power. Social citizenship claims 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. By fostering a sense of being part of the community, citizen participation works to overcome individualism and self-interest. It develops important capacities by exposing citizens to the connection between their private interests and the public interest. The general view with regards to all the definitions is that citizenship is a privilege status conferred by states on its people either by birth or by naturalization.

Citizens' Rights

Individual's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state. They are essential for individual participation in government. These rights are limited by the exercise of rights of other citizens hence they are not absolute. A right can be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. A privilege when expressed within the framework of the constitution becomes a civil right. A citizen upon invasion of his/her civil right is free to seek redress in court. Civil rights in Nigeria include: the right to life, right to education, right to freedom of religion, right to work, right of association and right to freedom of speech, writing and publication and so on.

Democracy

Etymologically democracy is derived from the Greek word ‘demos-people and kratos-rule i.e ‘rule by the people’. This concept originated from Ancient Greece, here direct democracy was practice with the exclusion of labourers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. The idea that all citizens within a state are entitled to take part in running the affairs of their state was first advocated in England after the great Civil War of the 17th century. American colonies upon their successful revolt against England developed democratic ideas which were spread from county to country in the western world in the 19th and 20th century.

Democracy in practice now is indirect government as defined by Abraham Lincoln as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. Maxey opines that in a democracy, the rights, freedoms and values of individuals count more than those of the state.

Features of democracy include:

- i. The fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed
- ii. Independent and impartial judiciary
- iii. Existence of rule of law
- iv. Freedom of press
- v. Periodic election that is free and fair

Duties and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy

- a. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
- b. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes.
- c. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law. They must be ready to assist the law enforcement officers by reporting breaches of the law and by giving them any useful information they may have.
- d. Good citizen refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepare to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
- e. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community. He must appear before the court as a witness when called upon to do so and serve in the army when military service is compulsory and defend the country when it is at war.
- f. (S)he must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according this system the respect to which it should be entitled.

Citizens should participate in every event in democracy with full enthusiasm to ensure the survival of democracy. Citizens have the duty of ensuring that their rights are preserved by challenging government when it errs. Citizens should check how institutions put in place for the well-being of democracy are working.