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ASSIGNMENT: WRITE A REVIEW ON CHAPTER 8, ”CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY” IN SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS.

In a democratic system, the sovereignty resides in the people and also the authority of government is derived from the people’s choices. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the constitution has stated that democratic government is “of the people, by the people and for the people”, meaning that the government and governmental processes belong to the people. Citizen engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development, including the provision of opportunity, resources and security (Albright 2012).

For a democratic government to be successful, the citizens ought to be aware of issues that can improve their lives and they must be able to come together to express their views and see that government respond to the citizens’ needs. Also, citizens access to information is required, since transparency is a necessity in democracy. There are some barriers that hinder the participation of citizens in every country. It could be subtle and obvious, small and formidable and based on numerous factors. And for full participation of citizens in government to be ensured, these barriers ought to be eliminated whether it’s based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, religion or status. If these barriers are not eliminated, universal and equal suffrage is essentially denied and government credibility will be undermined.

The term citizen has a political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and the government. Citizens have rights and responsibilities, include the right to make decisions that affect them. In ancient Rome, it was a privilege to be called a citizen because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the roman empire and the main citizens enjoyed certain privileges.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or naturalisation. A man becomes a citizen of a state if his parents are citizens of that state or if he was born in that state. Citizenship determined by place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. The conditions under which naturalisation are placed vary from one country to the other. Chapter 3, section 25 of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria defines citizenship as every person born in Nigeria before or after the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen or belonged to a community indigenous to 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 rights necessary to protect individual liberty, political citizenship is associated with participation in democratic exercise of power and social citizenship involves 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 the society.

Brannan et. al. (2006:55) argue that the concept of citizenship holds that citizenship is not solely compromised of passive membership of a political entity, but that being active is an essential of being a citizen. Glover ( 2004:18), 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 pubic goods as an important feature of citizenship. Integrative citizenship involves the belief that every individual plays an assortment of roles and that this form of citizenship enables the individual to integrate their roles making them to have great participation.

Democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is ‘rule by the people’. Abraham Lincoln, former American president, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. In democracy, the following features must exist ; the fundamental rights of the citizens , independence and impartial judiciary, existence of rule of law, freedom of press and periodic election that is free and fair.

A citizen has several duties and responsibilities in democracy, some of which are; a citizen should have the duty to vote leaders out of office and also vote leaders into office, a citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund government, there would be no democracy, a citizen must have a duty to obey law and provide law enforcement agencies useful information such as breaches, a citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community, citizens must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must offer constructive alternatives to governmental policies.