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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

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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

The popular definition of democracy, given by Abraham Lincoln, states that democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. From this definition, one can deduce that the people own the government. The repetition of the word ‘people’ shows how important they are in a democratic society.

Citizen’s involvement in a democratic society is very crucial that it is considered as a right and duty to them, and essential for the preservation of democracy. Their involvement in political affairs spurs development in all sub-systems of society. To support their participation in political affairs, it is important that the citizens are well informed. This is one of the requirement for a democracy to function well. Citizens should have access to accurate information about the political affairs and events happening around them from reliable sources, preferably the government. Citizens should also be given the freedom to express their views on political matters. As important as citizens engagement in politics is in a democracy, some countries limit this engagement because of the social and cultural differences that exists amongst the citizens e.g gender, race, religion etc.

Before going into the main matter of this discourse, we will begin by defining the key terms that will be used. They include citizen, citizenship and citizen’s right.

‘Citizen’ refers to the relationship between the people and the government of the state. This is the word used to refer to an individual who has acquired a status called ‘Citizenship’. The latter can be acquired basically by birth or naturalization. The term ‘Citizenship’ like other concepts of this discipline has been given various definitions by scholars. These definitions point to the concept being the rights and privileges accorded to one who is a citizen and that the citizens are expected to assume roles in the society for the collective good of it. Basically, the term refers to the status accorded to an individual who is a citizen of a state. ‘Citizen’s rights are the privileges conferred on a citizen by the law of a state. These privileges entail the duties and responsibilities of the citizens. A citizen’s rights are not to be violated or infringed upon by a fellow citizen or the government. The rights include; right to life, right to education etc.

Etymologically, the term democracy originates from two Greek words; *‘demo’* which means people and *‘kratos’* which means rule. Therefore it means ‘rule by the people’. This correlates with other definitions of the concept emphasizing that the people are the basic foundation of government. The term originated from Ancient Greece where the citizens were actively involved in state affairs. The idea grew and has developed further. One event that contributed greatly to this development is the American Revolution where democratic ideas where developed and spread to other countries of the world. Presently, any state where their practices, constitution or laws, and government processes are shaped in such a way that the citizen’s right and liberty are guaranteed is considered to be practicing a democracy. Democracy may not have a general definition but from the various definitions of scholars one can deduce the following ordinances; fundamental human rights is guaranteed, an independent judiciary is in existence, the rule of law prevails, freedom of press and periodic free and fair election.

Since the citizens are the basic foundation of democracy, they perform certain duties to preserve their democracy. Such duties should be carried out actively. The inability to do so will lead to the failure of the democracy. Some of it include; duty to vote during elections, pay taxes which fund the government’s expenditure, keep to the law/constitution, provide the government with proper solutions rather than giving destructive criticisms about their ruling style, respecting the rights of fellow citizens as well as their properties, financially support public education etc.

As earlier mentioned, the people are the foundation of democracy. Their cooperation and commitment is important to safeguard their democracy. They can preserve their democracy mainly by being aware of their rights and responsibilities and actively participating in decision-making processes of the state (e.g election). Democracy is the best form of government as it allows the people to control its affairs and assures them of certain rights. It also serves as a check to government activities and helps to pursue the public interests of the state.