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A TWO PAGE REVIEW OF CHAPTER 8 “CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY”, IN SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS

There is no democracy without the engagement of the people. Engagement is both a right and a responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing, and sustaining democracy. Citizen engagement is not an abstraction because it takes tangible forms and serves particular purposes to improve peoples’ lives. In order to fully understand this topic, it is important to clarify a few concepts

Citizen/citizenship: In ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged status to be called citizen because state accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Slaves, serfs and some alien residents were deprived of citizenship for racial, political and religious reasons. Modern states confer citizens on practically their whole residents or populations. They provide rights and liberties to enable them develop their personalities. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalization. Naturalization is the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state. The conditions of naturalization vary from country to country. Chapter 111, section 25:1(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines citizenship. Section 26(1) 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 divided into civil, political, and social citizenship. Citizenship does not have one definition, it means different things to different people. According to Glover, he argues that there are three dimensions of active, ethical, integrative, and educative citizenship. \

Citizens’ Rights: right entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizens. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. Some civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: the right to life, the right to work, right to freedom of religion etc.

Democracy: It is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule that is rule by the people. 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. The Greek democracy was a limited institution in that it excluded laborers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. The idea that all citizens, high or low, within the state are entitled to take part in the running of the affairs of their state was first advocated in England after the great Civil War of the 17th century. Abraham Lincoln, former American president perceived democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. According to him, democracy is a government of the people when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and that it is a government by the people when its ideological undercurrents 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.

Features of Democracy

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

Duties and responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes to fund a democratic government
3. A good citizen must 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
6. He or she 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.