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COURSE: GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

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ASSIGNMENT

Do a two page review of Chapter 8, Citizens Role in a Democracy, In Salient issues in Governance and Nigeria's politics.

ANSWER

The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. A citizen is a legal member who possesses a set of rights and duties, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was seen as a privilege to be called citizen because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Slaves, serfs and some alien residents were deprived citizenship for racial, political or religious reasons. 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 naturalisation. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens of that state or if he is born within the territory of that state. On the other hand, the process by which an individual voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalisation. Chapter 111, section 25:1(a) (b) and (c) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defined citizenship. Section 26(1) to section 32 stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalise must fulfil 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, political and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to 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 (voter) or as an individual elected by the members of a political community (politician); 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. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debates, to be willing to get involved (Brannan et. al). According to Glover, he argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship namely;

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

Citizen's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to have the citizens to have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of the other citizens in the state. Rights entail some duties on the part of the citizens. A right is a privilege conferred by law upon a person or group. Rights includes right to life, right to work, etc.

The chapter looked at Democracy. Democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos" meaning people and "kratos" meaning rule, which is rule of the people. There is no single definition of democracy, what can be deduced from the other definitions are that the fundamental rights of citizens is guaranteed, there is an existence of an independent and impartial judiciary, there is existence of rule of law, freedom of press and the periodic elections that is free and fair.

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democratic system. First of all, a citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote. Secondly, a citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy. Also, a good citizen must have a duty to open the law. Fourthly, a good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies. Another point is that a good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community. Lastly, a good citizen must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according to this system the respect to which it should be entitled.