Name: Adeyemi Lateefat Adewumi

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Review on Chapter eight: Citizens Role in Democracy

This chapter discussed the relationship between citizens, citizenship and democracy. As described by former American president, Abraham Lincoln, Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Hence, citizens have a major role to play in the system of government but before diving into these roles, the chapter first emphasizes the need to understand the words ‘citizen’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘democracy’ as a concept.

A citizen of a state can be defined as on who possesses certain rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decision that affect public welfare.

Citizenship, on the other hand, is the status of being a citizen of a state and it may be acquired 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. Conditions for this vary from country to country.

Due to the fact that citizenship determined by place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries, Turner (1997) defines citizenship as a formal legal identity that an individual inherits through a collection of legal rights and obligations, controlling access to scarce political, economic and cultural resources of society.

However, citizenship does not have a single definition as it means different things to different people. Some scholarly definitions and arguments about the definition of citizenship includes Brannan et. al. (2006) who argues that citizenship is not only comprised of passive membership of a political entity but that active participation is an essential of being a citizen. Glover (2004) also argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship namely; ethical; integrative; and educative citizenship.

Citizenship can be perceived to be divided into: Civil citizenship –refers to rights necessary to protect individual liberty, Political citizenship –associated with participation in democratic exercise of political power, and Social citizenship –embodies the claim that citizens have a right to resources that allow them to live a civilized existence.

Civil rights are certain privileges expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state. They are rights belonging to citizens which when invaded by others allows the distressed to seek redress in the court of law.

Democracy, like many other concepts, has no single definition nevertheless, the essential aspects of democracy can be deduced from its various definitions. These aspects include: fundamentally rights of the citizens is guaranteed, independent judiciary, existence of rule of law, freedom of press, and periodic election is free and fair.

After discussing and clarifying all concepts involved, the chapter goes on to describe the duties and responsibilities of citizens in a Democracy. These include; duty to vote; willingness to pay taxes; duty to obey the law; offering constructive rather than destructive criticisms; refrain from interference with the rights of other citizens; and support for public education.

Democracy is a system of government whereby the citizens are directly responsible for the leaders elected. There would be no democracy without the commitment of citizens. Hence, citizens have a responsibility to check government and government agencies and challenge them when they err all while ensuring public interest is kept a priority.