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MATRIC NO.:19/LAW01/122

COLLEGE: LAW

LEVEL: 200

COURSE TITLE: GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

COURSE CODE: GST 203

DATE: JANUARY 20, 2021

ASSIGNMENT

1. Do a two page review of Chapter 8, ‘Citizens Role in a Democracy,’ in Salient Issues in Government and Nigeria’s Politics.

 CHAPTER 8: CITIZENS ROLES IN DEMOCRACY

Introduction

Sovereignty resides and flows from the people in a democracy. They have the collective right to choose their government, political and electoral systems as well as take part in their government through elections. These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They give meaning to the saying, “Government of the people, by the people and for the people.” There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Citizen engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development. For democracy to deliver, citizens must be aware about issues that can improve their lives. They must be free to express their opinions and see that government responds and are accountable. For full citizenship to be achieved, barriers like race, gender, ethnicity, etc must be removed.

Citizen/Citizenship

The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. The essence of a state is to provide opportunities to enable citizens lead the good life. Citizenship of a state can be acquired by birth or naturalization. The conditions for becoming a citizen by naturalization are stipulated in Section 26(1) to Section 32 of the constitution. While Chapter 111 Section 25 of the constitution defines citizenship. There are also various definitions of citizenship as it means different things to different people.

Citizens’ Rights

Individual’s rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. A right may be defined as a privilege conferred by the law upon a person or group. Rights are not absolute as they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right and if those rights are invaded by another citizen or the government, he is entitled to redress in a court of law. Some important rights accorded to Nigerian citizens in the constitution are; right to life, right to freedom of religion, right to education, right to freedom of speech, etc.

Democracy

It has been etymologically established that the word ‘democracy’ 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. In these assemblies, citizens werefree to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. Abraham Lincoln perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Since there is no one definition of the concept of democracy, the following can be deduced as the various features of democracy from various definitions:

* The fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed
* Independent and impartial judiciary
* Existence of the rule of law
* Freedom of the press
* Periodic election that is free and fair

Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. There is a saying in free societies: you get the government you deserve. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive, because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility, and no one else’s. In turn, government officials understand that all citizens should be treated equally. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

* The duty to vote
* Payment of taxes
* Obedience to the law
* Refraining from destructive criticisms and giving constructive ones instead
* Refraining from interfering with the rights of other members of the community.
* Support for public education

Conclusion

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. It is considered as the best form of government in the modern era as it allows citizens to exercise and enjoy many rights and it gives them responsibilities at the same time. Citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no democracy without the cooperation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must be aware of their rights and responsibilities as without the awareness among citizens, a government may turn into a tyranny.

At the same time, while being critical, citizens must also not lose sight of the pursuit of public interest,. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.