

Question:

What is Aristotle's concept of citizenship? What are the implications of Aristotle's concept of citizenship for modern democracies?

1- INTRODUCTION:

Aristotle's conception of citizenship emerges from his broader political philosophy, where he views the polis as the highest form of human association enabling individuals to achieve moral excellence. For Aristotle, a citizen is not merely a legal resident; rather, citizenship is a functional and participatory role in public decision-making. His idea places emphasis on virtue, political participation, and contribution to the common good, reflecting a normative understanding instead of a purely legalistic one. In contemporary democracies, where citizenship is often reduced to voting rights or constitutional status, Aristotle's formulation offers a profound moral and civic dimension. His thought compels modern societies to rethink civic duty beyond passive entitlement. Moreover, as states face rising political apathy,

identity polarization, and weakened institutional trust, Aristotle's emphasis on active citizenship becomes increasingly relevant. Hence, revisiting his concept is essential for strengthening democratic responsibility and civic culture.

2- ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP:

2.1: CITIZENSHIP AS PARTICIPATION IN DELIBERATION AND JUDGEMENT:

Aristotle defines a citizen as one who "Shares in the administration of justice and in offices" (Politics, Book III).

This means active participation in deliberative assemblies, public decision-making, and holding office. Citizenship is therefore participatory, not merely residential. Aristotle excluded those unable to take part in political life (women, slaves, foreigners), showing that citizenship is intimately tied to political competence and civic virtue rather than universal identity. e.g. In the classical Athenian democracy, citizens served on juries, participated in the ekklesia (assembly), and took rotational offices - demonstrating

civic engaged

2.2: CITIZEN CAPACITY:

Aristotle later, arguing and ethical is not just education, goal is judgement. His idea - e.g. the framework ethical

2.3: CITIZENSHIP

For Aristotle depend oligarchy democracy

civic engagement as a daily practice -

2.2: CITIZENSHIP REQUIRES VIRTUE AND MORAL CAPACITY:

Aristotle links citizenship with the virtue of character, arguing that good citizens sustain the stability and ethical purpose of the state. Citizenship is not just a right; it is a responsibility requiring education, discipline, and ethical sensibility. The goal is to create citizens capable of rational judgement, courage, moderation, and public-spiritedness. His idea parallels modern civic education models - e.g., the UNESCO Global Citizenship Education (GCED) framework, which stresses values, participation, and ethical responsibility.

2.3: CITIZENSHIP IS RELATIVE TO THE CONSTITUTION (POLITEIA):

For Aristotle, the definition of a citizen changes depending on the type of constitution - democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, or polity. A citizen in a democracy participates broadly; A citizen in an

oligarchy participates narrowly through wealth and privilege - Thus, citizenship is a constitutional role, not an abstract or universal identity.

2.4: CITIZENSHIP EXISTS FOR THE COMMON GOOD:

Aristotle argues that the aim of the state is eudaimonia (collective flourishing). Citizens must orient political actions toward the common good, not personal gain. Political community is sustained by mutual responsibility and shared purpose.

Case Study:

Scandinavian democracies (e.g., Norway, Denmark) demonstrate high levels of civic trust, volunteerism, and community participation, aligning closely with Aristotelian ideals.

3- IMPLICATIONS OF ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT FOR

MODERN DEMOCRACIES:

3.1: REVIVING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP VS. PASSIVE CITIZENSHIP:

Modern democracies often reduce citizenship to;

- holding a passport
- paying taxes
- voting every few years

Aristotle challenges this minimalism and promotes active civic engagement. Countries like Switzerland, with frequent referendums and local participation, embody this Aristotelian spirit. The OECD (2023) Civic Engagement Report shows that nations with participatory cultures have stronger democratic resilience.

3.2: IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC VIRTUE IN AN AGE OF POLARIZATION:

Aristotle's emphasis on virtue counters rising issues such as:

- fake news
- political extremism
- declining respect for institutions

His view suggests that democracies must cultivate civic virtue through education, ethical media use, and responsible leadership. e.g., Finland national curriculum includes media literacy and civic reasoning,

helping it rank among the least misinformed societies (EU Digital Resilience Report 2022).

3.3: CONSTITUTIONAL CITIZENSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL LOYALTY:

Aristotle's argument that citizenship is tied to the Constitution encourages modern democracies to promote constitutional literacy. Citizens should understand democratic institutions, rule of law, and constitutional limits. This is crucial in states facing constitutional crises or populist challenges.

Case Study:

The constitutional turmoil in Sri Lanka (2018) and Pakistan's repeated constitutional confrontations show how weak constitutional citizenship undermines political stability.

3.4: CITIZENSHIP AS A VEHICLE FOR THE COMMON GOOD:

Aristotle's idea demands that citizens prioritize community welfare over individualistic gains.

Modern democracies facing climate change, inequality, and corruption need this orientation toward collective well-being - Participatory budgeting in Brazil's Porto Alegre shows how citizen involvement can effectively allocate resources toward the public good -

3.5: RELEVANCE FOR MULTICULTURAL AND DIVERSE DEMOCRACIES:

While Aristotle's original model was exclusionary, his theoretical core - participation, virtue, common good - can be adapted to modern pluralistic societies - It encourages inclusive citizenship grounded in shared democratic values instead of ethnic or religious identity - Canada's multicultural citizenship framework promotes inclusive civic participation while maintaining loyalty to constitutional principles -

4- CONCLUSION:

Aristotle's conception of citizenship, though ancient and originally restrictive, provides a powerful

normative framework for strengthening modern democracies. By defining citizenship as active engagement in public affairs, he pushes societies to go beyond the passive legal understanding that dominates contemporary political cultures. His emphasis on virtue, education, and the common good offers correctives to today's crises of trust, misinformation, and political polarization. Modern examples - from Switzerland's participatory model to Finland's civic education reforms - demonstrate the practical viability of Aristotelian insights. Moreover, his linkage between citizenship and constitutional order remains vital for states struggling with institutional instability. Ultimately, Aristotle reminds democracies that citizenship is not a legal status but a civic practice, and its true strength lies in morally committed, politically informed, and actively engaged citizens.