

**ABSTRACT:**

Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 has opened the democratic space in the country which resulted into a new form of labour regime. With the widening of the political space, labour politics was engendered by new form of alliances that sort to engage the state.

The formation of labour civil society coalition in Nigeria is watershed in forging alliances of popular forces in addressing socio-economic and political inequalities in Nigeria. For instance the two trade union centers in Nigeria i.e. Nigeria Labour congress, (NLC) and Trade Union Congress, (TUC) aligned several occasions with the civil society to advocate for pro-poor macro-economic policies.

The neo-liberal posture of the Nigeria's civilian regime has been duly challenged by these forces. Three issues were at the fore of their campaign, namely; wage review (asking for an increased minimum wage), electoral reform, and fighting the deregulation of the oil sector.

This paper seeks to address the role of labour and civil society coalition in engaging the state, by addressing the following questions: How did the popular forces impacted on the government decisions? To what extent has the popular forces achieved their campaign issues? What alternative policy realms do the popular forces initiate? What were the major challenges confronted in the struggle? How the working classes in Nigeria viewed these alliances and its impact on their livelihood?

The research uses both primary and secondary data, at the primary level a survey was conducted using interviews and questionnaire instruments. At the secondary source a content analysis of policy document, news papers, periodicals and gazettes was made.

The paper argued that, while conceding the impact of neo-liberal globalization in the development process in Nigeria, the role of the political elites was also dismal. It concludes that the working class has a vital role to play in the transformation of the country.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The paper examines the struggle of the labour movement as a crucial element within the democratization process in Nigeria. It focuses on the Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO), an alliance formed by two trade union centers; the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the civil Society groups under the banner of Joint Action Forum (JAF). Such an alliance is presented in the tradition of “National Democratic Fronts” The organized labour has given Leadership to.

This alliance becomes inevitable because, labour and civil societies “jointly provides an ideological alternative to the hegemonic pretensions of the neo-liberal positions and hold an alternative vision of national development” (Beckman, 2010:161).

The incessant hike in the prices of petroleum product, corruption, subversion of democratic procedures, election rigging, poor living wage of the work force, the selling out of National patrimonies through privatization, and lack of ideological posture in political parties, have negatively affected good democratic governance in the country, and has subsequently dashed out the hope of the citizenry on Nation building.

As NLC was revived in 1999, having been banned by the Abacha government, it pushed a broad labour-civil society coalition, including a new labour party. Joint action with other civil society organizations was pursued successfully over the recurring attempts to raise the local price of petrol products, giving rise to LASCO, Labour Civil Society Coalition.

Strong unions are central to both social and economic progress, but without governments that share their values, unions cannot construct or sustain a more equal world where rights and opportunities are guaranteed (ITUC, 2011).

The paper contended that, the struggle waged by these popular forces as anchored by three (3) campaign issues; i.e. Electoral Reform, Fight against Deregulation and review of the National Minimum Wage are to a larger extent a struggle for social protection and decent work for the Nigerian people, and consequently critical elements of the peoples resistance to the subsisting neo-liberal regime in the country.

The arguments of the paper are as follows: first, since Nigeria has been integrated into the global capitalist system since colonial epoch and deepened by the current wave of globalization, the country has undergone series of neo-liberal economic reforms that have implication for labour and employment relations in Nigeria.

Secondly, the workforce is unable to meet basic needs, due to poor wages and decline in the purchasing power. Third, given that free and fair election has become a major challenge in Nigeria's Democracy. People have gradually lost faith in the democratization process. This has raises the concern of the labour movement.

Finally, labour is known historically for constructing alliances with civil society for collective action, to challenge exploitation and accumulation. This has been referred to as (Social Movement Trade Unionism) (Omar, 2009), which Labour Civil Society Coalition signifies.

Data is generated using specialized interview and structured questionnaires, the respondents were drawn from labour leaders, Civil Society groups and the citizens. Simple random sampling was used as a technique of determining the respondents, since all people have equal chance of being selected to speak.

Over forty respondents were drawn from both private and public sector; they were administered with a closed ended questionnaire, while 10 interviews were conducted with both labour and civil society groups. The data was presented using charts and analyzed using percentages.

The paper is structured in the following direction, after the introduction, it provides the socio-economic and political context of Nigeria, it reviewed literature on State, Civil Society and Democracy, the history of labour and the politics of alliance in Nigeria, Labour and Civil Society Coalition: formation, struggles and challenges. Finally the data was presented and analyzed, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

## **2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF NIGERIA:**

Nigeria is situated in the West African region of the world with an area of 923, 768 square kilometer. It is culturally diverse with virtually three hundred and sixty ethnic groups. It has a population of 150.1 million (2006, Census) the country secured its political independence in 1960. Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy in the eve of political independence, until 1970s occasioned by the discovery of oil.

From 1970s to date, oil becomes the mainstay of the economy. The mono cultural economy and rent seeking behavior of the state makes its political economy an apparatus of exploitation among its political elites. The official unemployment rate is about 20% with a total force of 52.1%

Nigeria has a long history of military rule, since the first military incursion in politics in 1966, which obliterates the first republic. The history of military rule in the country reflects itself in the socio-economic development of the country. For instance the Structural Adjustment Programme of 1980s has lunched the country into neo-liberal capitalist agenda of the World Bank and International Monetary fund (IMF).

The consequence of this was heightened social inequality, poverty, unemployment and de-industrialization of the economy. The labour market was adversely affected by this process, evidenced in the loss of Jobs and underemployment in both private and public sector.

In May 1999 the country returned to civilian administration with a lot of hopes for socio-economic transformation by the citizenry. Unfortunately brazen act of corruption, mal administration crippled the efforts of the state towards Nation-building. It is this unfortunate development that led the Transparency International to rate Nigeria amongst the most corrupt countries in the world.

The major policy preference of the government was underlined in the nations National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The major policy issues in the NEEDS documents borders on employment generation, private sector participation and value re-orientation. However, NEEDs has not translate into qualitative development in the country.

The major point of contention is the country's backwardness amidst its vast resources, which is plundered by its leadership. The poverty profile remained high which accounts to .....The unemployment rate is...

The country is presently pursuing a seven point agenda as well as visioning the country for socioeconomic transformation, tagged Vision 20:20. The aimed of the vision is to make Nigeria among the 20 industrialized countries by the year 2020. However, the major challenge facing the country rests squarely in its inability to fix power supply, overhaul its electoral reform and generates employment. These and other issues became the key issues engaging the minds of the citizens, labour movements and the civil society organizations.

### **3. STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES**

Labour regime buttresses the notion of formal and informal rules that govern the relationship between labour and capital (Gunilla & Beckman, 1999). The nature of the state to a greater extent determines its relationship with the labour and wider civil society. Labour regime also implies an area of state civil society relations (Williams, 2004)

In the era of neo-liberal globalization, which often tends to reduce the power of the state to mere enforcer of policies/decisions which emerge from the world market (Beason, 2001) series of contestation and agitation arose; trade unions and generally labour movement represent the aspiration of the popular demands for social justice and fairer globalization. This shows how labour goes beyond its traditional role of protecting wages and working conditions, but often embedded with issues of power relations and democracy (Lindstrom, 2004).

*State*, as an arena of contestation is seen as an organized political community with a definite territory a population and a government that is sovereign. Critical to the state is the contract it entered with its population, which is of providing welfare, and regulation in the entire socio-economic and political relations in the society.

The major point of contention is the role which the state plays in the society characterized with plurality and conflicting interest, the state behavior is premised in class relations in which political society is segmented. The state is far from being neutral but often represent and depend class interest, this has make the state far from being relatively autonomous.

The state is far from being a benign entity rather it is an instrument of hegemony in the hands of the ruling class. The history of state formation in Nigeria dating from the colonial period and post-colonial era portrays the state as an arena of power struggle among various interest groups. “The state is an agency in the hands of the ruling class who manipulate it in achieving desired objective” (Tar, 2009: 2).

Momoh (1996) summarizes the nature of the Nigerian State as follows:

*The state sector is used as an agency of economic development and hence capital accumulation. That the pattern of accumulation is along capitalist lines and consolidates neo-colonialism, is both a reflection of the centre as well as the weak and embryonic nature of the Nigerian national bourgeoisie*

It is this manipulation of the ruling class express in terms of denying the society public goods through alienation, that raise the consciousness of the *civil society* to contest and articulate the

national question. National question, represent the actual inequalities in the society, relations of ethnic domination and perceptions arising from these” (Seteolo, 2004).

National question here refers to the existing dominance of capital over labour and the consequent subjection of the working people into acute poverty due to neo-liberal policies and the way the civil society articulate to change it.

The attitude of the state further changes to respond to the yearning of neo-liberal globalization, as captured by (Yusif, 2010), the changes are outcome of marketisation of the economy which refines the way people relate with the state. He noted that “in the new society, the state in particular is “rolled back”, as state duties or responsibilities toward citizens and civil society becomes “dull and sluggish”. On the other hand, the state becomes hostile and undemocratic in order to attain its goal” (P; 67)

This process of globalization has affected the role of the state in terms of welfare provisioning, as captured by (Wess 1999:66), “the process of economic enmeshment is eroding the basis of the states authority and capacity to protect the social and economic wellbeing of its citizenry”

With the deepening of neo-liberal globalization, via the integration of National economies national borders became have diminished. National sovereignty became a highly contested term. Government macro-economic policies were geared towards deregulation, privatization and withdrawal of subsidies.

The process of economic integration in Nigeria is deepened with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), SAP marks a significant period in the state civil society engagement on policy issues, as informed by privatization, commercialization and the withdrawal of subsidy. Pro-democracy groups and trade union have protested its implementation.

SAP as an austerity measure had severely affected the Nigerian people, employment and workers welfare. The strategy which is a blueprint of IMF and World Bank has as its core strategy,

promoting free markets, including retrenchment of workers and across the board reduction in their salaries from November 1985 to September 1986. This policy was unpopular with the Nigeria Labour Congress as it saw the policy as nothing but “gloom for the workers” (Bulletin No. 1 of the Nigeria Labour Congress, 1985, cited in Nwoko, 2009: 146)

The politics of labour especially in the twenty first century is engendered by growing challenges of the market forces, the growth of information technology, flexibility in the working condition and the rolling back of the state from economic activities. However, this trend has engendered the weakening of labour unions as underpinned in the post-fordist mode of accumulation.

As aptly captured by Lindstrom “a new regime of accumulation, the post fordist regime, was established and institutionalized in market-oriented political and economic reform under the aegis of I.M.F and WORLD BANK. It includes stabilization of price, privatization of the means of production, liberalization of trade, and deregulation and elimination of the price control” (2004: 103)

The state was able to amend legislation so as to demobilize and contains the labour militancy as well as to ensure the primacy of capital over labour. The 2005 amendment of trade union act in Nigeria is a case in point; it prohibits strike and sought to weaken Nigeria Labour Congress by allowing for the establishment of more labour centers.

*Civil Society* is seen as associational life outside the state, which widen the public space in terms of interaction between formal agencies and informal set-up. Civil society represent the various interest groups in the society ranging from professional organizations, human right groups, trade unions and other associational groups.

Civil society is an outcome of social relations in capitalist society, where social relations of production are characterized with alienation. Gouldner, (1998), argued that “the civil society is thus, the outcome, not the condition, of capitalism and bourgeoisie development. The civil

society is the aggregate of the material conditions of life and its autonomy should be understood in the context of political economy” (cited in Seteolo, 2004: 4)

Therefore, civil society is seen as a self consciously organized institution with the primary aim to articulate demand on, and influence government policies. It is an identifiable aspect of the society that is autonomous of but still relate and prospect to influence the state (Seteolo, 2004; 50).

Civil society in this discussion is conceived from a *mass based* perspective (Olorode, 2010), because the neo-liberal civil Society agitates for good governance and fragmented rights but not for state power that guarantees both and more. A movement is considered as mass based if it command trust, response and obedience of a visibility by the large segment of society who sees the movement as its own. If its action compels significant attention from government civil authorities or its action is capable of extracting significant concessions from such authorities, it is coherent and capable of aggregating interests.

*Labour Movement* is the independent organization of the masses and their allies with social, economic and political programme for the transformation of the polity in favor of the masses of the people. In this discussion labour movement is seen as an integral part of civil society underpinned in a mass based orientation, at one instance the former Nigeria’s president, chief Olusegun Obasanjo has described the Nigeria Labour Congress NLC, being parading itself as an alternative government. (Olorode, 2011; 8)

This has portrays the mass based agitation of the NLC on various Socio-economic policies that changes government direction. In general terms, Labour Civil Society Coalition represents this typology, because it has greater geographical spread and it had engaged in public agitations across Nigeria on various issues including *minimum wage, electoral reform, corruprion, and fuel price*. (Olorode, 2010; 41)

Trade unions are integral part of the Labour movement. Within this frame of reference trade unions represent one of the more important interest groups in the African context, being primarily concerned with the protection and advancement of the interest of an identifiable group of individuals. (Osaghe, 1994: 126)

The organized labour in Nigeria is currently represented by two major trade union centers, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Since trade unions are integral part of other civil society groups, alliances became inevitable to engage the state for pro-poor policies and democratization of development process.

For instance (Yau, 2010) taking cognizance of alliances that human right groups forged historically in Nigeria to challenge the state repression. He noted that “at one point major alliances were with labour and student movement”. This indicates that alliances are essential in contesting and changing the outcome of state policies, as noted by (Yusif, 2010, 69) “the state become increasingly powerful on almost every aspects of the citizen public and private life’

The formation of LASCO in Nigeria reflects a regime of alliance formed by popular forces in the society to challenge the state, for instance series of rallies were carried out across Nigeria demanding for increased Minimum wage, Electoral Reform and fight against deregulation of the petroleum sector. This raises concern about the viability of Nigeria’s democracy, in terms of meeting the minimum and maximum democratic requirement.

*Democracy* is seen as a political and value system that allows wider political participation, majority rule and the protection of minority rights, characterized with a periodic election that is open and transparent, where a winner emerges based on the popular and high votes. Though, in Africa the form and content which democracy takes gives a different scenario to the extent to which democracy could work effectively as it operate in the west.

Our concern here is more with liberal democracy, as Nigeria did not practice socialist democracy, the liberal democracy been practiced is accompanied with an economic system

which is capitalism. Thus, capitalism produces social inequalities and dominance of capital over labour, market over the state. The state became eclipsed and replaced with the virtues of market forces.

Democracy in Nigeria has become a system which imposed itself through privatization of collective wealth and public properties-destroying the spirit of people to see anything good with democracy, reducing and deforming the state to play any role of commonwealth, in order to impose a market ideology that each is to him/her self. (Yusuf, 2010). In other words democracy is reduced to “democracy of politicians”

Our last ten years of democracy portrays the empowerment of few elites at the expense of the majority of the population. The poverty profile and unemployment rate remain high. While the earnings of the political office holders became an issue of concern. At one instance the Nigeria’s Central Bank Governor observed that, 25% of the National budgets goes to the National assembly members.

Our conception of democracy here is beyond the procedural nature of democracy, rather it pervades the extent to which it impacted on the wellbeing of the citizens, provides for social security , solve un-employment and ensures the participation of people in determining the outcome of government policies and decisions. Although, the procedural aspect of democracy are being subverted for self interest.

In the era of globalization democratization process is endangered as decision making does not require citizens legitimating. As analyzed by (Altvater, 1996:43) “politically globalization and concomitant deregulation also means that privatized decision making is also de-politicized it no longer needs citizen legitimation, not only political decision but economic decisions”

Democratization is seen as globalization (Kura, 2005). It enables openness of the economies through trade liberalization, which hitherto authoritarian regimes could not guarantee.

The process of globalization has also deepened the ascendancy of western-liberal democracy over the rest of the world. As such, economic interdependence is eroding the basis of the state authority to protect the social and economic wellbeing of its citizens.

Given this background, to what extent has democracy impacted on the living condition of the working people? How able is the civil society in engaging the state for pro-poor policies? How did LASCO as a popular democratic force engage the state in achieving its mandate?

### **LABOUR AND THE POLITICS OF ALLIANCE IN NIGERIA: HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS**

Labour and the politics of alliance which is the bedrock of this paper have a history in Nigeria. Historically, labour has forged alliances with fraternal organizations so as to serve as counter-hegemonic force to alter the state policy. Zikist movement formed in 1945 was able to forge alliances with the Nigerian left and trade unions on putting working class demand in the political agenda. (Momoh, 1996: 168)

The NLC has historically placed premium on alliance/coalition building in the effort to defend democracy. The recent history of the NLC has tended to disconnect unions from their traditional allies. In the past NLC had formal alliance with National Association of Nigerian students (NANS), and worked very closely with the academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU) even after the latter was forced to disaffiliate from the NLC. (NLC, 2003 Delegate Conference Report)

As buttressed by (Nwoko, 2009: 142) ‘the consciousness of the highly organized trade union shielded the Nigerian State, economy and the working class from exploitative vestiges of the colonial capitalist structure inherited by the elites class, trained to man the civil service and local petit bourgeoisie and comprador capitalist class’

Madunugu (2007) noted that Zikist movement in concert with militant labour leaders, like Michael Imodu initiated a class struggle to carry the labour movement for militant nationalism or in alternative, construct a rival militant faction in the movement.

From the 1970s down to 80s left wing and Marxist oriented activist took over the mantle of leadership at the Nigeria Labour congress, which brought in the leadership of Hassan Sommonu.

Whose tenure is seen as an arena of intense struggle between labour and capital?

At the dawn of the 1980s occasion by economic reforms under the aegis of Structural Adjustment Programmes SAP. Alliances were formed with mass-based organizations like student union movement under NANS, and the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASSU, Nigerian Medical association (NMA), the youth and women. In this context Olorode (2010:10) observed that:

Arising from patriotic struggles of Nigerian students and academics (1977-1979) to rescue higher education from total collapse, ASSU's strikes of 1982 forced a negotiated agreement with the federal government. Between 1984 and 1985, the military dictatorship simply tried to impose IMF/World Bank SAP by force. The NLC, ASSU and NMA in credible show of solidarity responded with sharp mobilization documents opposing privatization, wage freeze, fuel-price increase and withdrawal of welfare and social services etc. Among the most important mobilization document early in 1984 were; Nigerian Workers Socio-political View point in the situation of Military take-over of Government of the Federation, and Towards Economic Recovery.

It is the fall out of these alliances that resulted into conscious recruitment of some Nigerian lefts from the student union movement into the NLC secretariat. People like; John Odah, Chris Uyot, Issa Aremu, John Baggio, Salisu Muhammad and Yahaya Hashim.

It is worthy to note that the alliances have contributed significantly in fighting for apartheid regime in South Africa. Flat forms like Youth Solidarity for South Africa YASSA, and Nigerian African National Congress cultural Association NANCFA were formed.

These struggles continue unabated, especially with the Implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme, and Authoritarian Military Dictatorship. With the Proscription of the Nigeria Labour Congress and subsequent imposition of sole administrators by the state to manage trade unions, allied forces within the civil society continued with the struggle.

The anti-Sap fights brought the Civil Liberties Organization CLO, closer to the students. It decided to establish clubs or branches in institutions of higher learning. The radical students saw the CLO as an opportunity to continue the struggle. (Yau, 2010: 4) Adedeji and Momoh note;

*They join the organization as an avenue of struggle for fundamental transformation of Nigeria, more so as other avenue of struggle for fundamental transformation of Nigeria such as the labour movement had been hijacked by the military, especially with the imposition of a sole administrator on the central trade union federation, the Nigeria Labour congress (NLC). Their participation in the human rights organizations fundamentally transformed human rights work in Nigeria, from being neutral to being politically engaged (Edigheji and Momoh Cited in Yau, 2010: 5)*

The alliances outside the trade union movement continue with the struggle, two critical campaign issues were at the fore of their agitations, namely; fight against privatization and removal of subsidy. The movement was able to fight the removal of subsidy, but privatization goes unabated. In the 80s the working class was able to issue policy statements on the way out of Nigeria's political decay and economic doldrums. The kind of Nigeria the labour movement envisaged is stated as follows:

What kind of new Nigeria do we have in mind? The answer to this question can be found in several of the Labour movement documents and positions, the answer can be found in *Nigeria not to for sale*, a document issue in 1980s in the aftermath of the government decision to hand over public assets to private interest, other documents include *workers charter of demand*, which among other things insisted on a minimum wage and the basis of which government was forced through the 1981 general strike to increase the minimum wage from N60 per month to N125 per month, simultaneously National Association of Nigeria Student (NANS) in 1982, issued the NANS charter of demand. (Olorode, 2010, NLC, 2011)

### **THE LABOUR AND CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION (LASCO): FORMATION, STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES**

With the return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the country was confronted with the hike of petroleum price; secondly the NLC was revived after proscription from the military junta. The organization has had a chequered history, surviving two instances of dissolution of its national

organs and consequent appointment of state administrators. The first was in 1988 under the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. Congress' opposition to the anti-people Structural Adjustment Programme incensed the military administration to take over the NLC. (www.nlcng.org)

the second military intervention was in 1994 during the regime of General Sani Abacha, whose government also became fed up with the labour movement's agitation for the restoration of democracy. Like the initial case, the military government dissolved NLC's National Executive Council and appointed a Sole Administrator.

The same treatment was meted to the two unions in the oil and gas industry; National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers [NUPENG] and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria [PENGASSAN]. However, the administrators apparently added a further brief they plundered the finances of Congress and the two unions. (Ibid)

These issues informed intense struggle on socio-economic development and democratization in the country, after the unions reclaimed the NLC following the demise of General Sani Abacha in June, 1998. It culminates into a National Delegate Conference held on January, 1999, that brought Adams Oshimhole leadership. The congress came up, with a programme of *new beginning*, which entails among other things, revival of the labour movement, intense organizing and promoting the ethos of democracy.

The New Beginning is a decisive response to the imperative of rebuilding the movement in a direction that makes it more relevant to union members and other segments of civil society, which believe in its empowering and socially redemptive vision and capacity. It is also about enhancing inter-movement linkages that can help the movement project power in the labour market. In particular, it aims at firming up the capacity of each union and segment through solidarity actions involving the resources, experience and general organizational acumen of the

entire movement. This has been demonstrated in the struggle against casualization labour. ([www.nlcng.org](http://www.nlcng.org))

It is within this spirit, the Labour sought to re-engage the civil society components of the labour movement, so as to forge alliances in engaging and challenging the neo-liberal posture of the Nigerian state. The alliance became inevitable due to absence of vibrant opposition in the era of state retreat from the vital sectors of the economy through, deregulation and privatization in the country, the political parties have sunk into the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) through un-holy alliances.

As captured by Nwoko, (2009: 1): “ the NLC has since, return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999, been the platform for the Nigerian people to query government policies, actions and inaction, not only for the Nigerian working class, but the entire Nigerian people. Such polices include: privatization and commercialization of public institutions and services, incessant fuel hikes, retrenchments of workers and implementation of prescribed conditions and unfavorable policies of International monopoly finance capitalist institution”

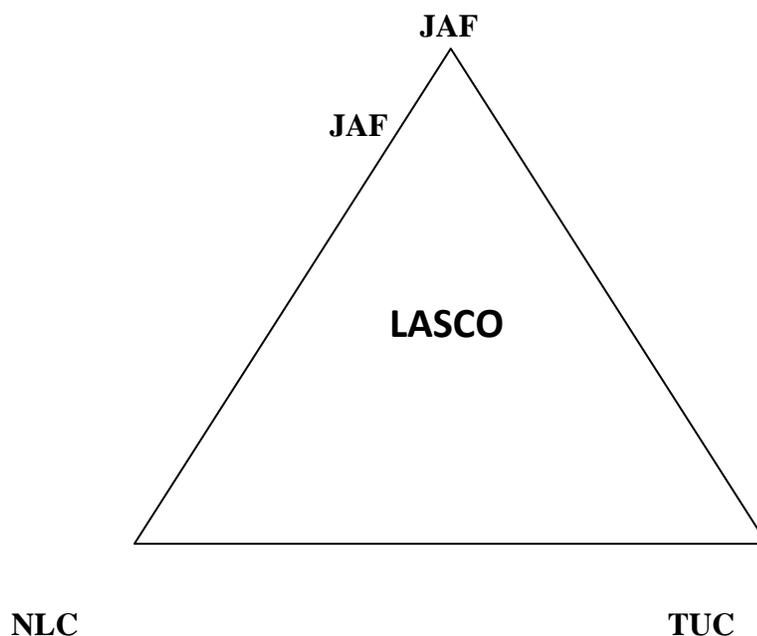
A deliberate policy of re-engaging civil society organizations led to the series of coalition building activities resulting in the organization of two summits in the country. The first Civil Society Summit in February 2001 led to the adoption of a *manifesto for civil society in Nigeria*. The manifesto represents a consensus of the need to create a working platform for civil society organizations. The first summit developed a programme of action of an organizational platform. (NLC, 2003 Delegate Conference)

The idea of LASCO arose in the context of rebuilding the labour movement, and the popular opposition to the incessant hikes in the price of petroleum product, arising from the policy of deregulation of the so-called downstream sector of the petroleum industry.

While the NLC had initially spearheaded the fight through the instrumentality of general strikes, it leaders appreciated the need to appreciated the need to reach out to other segments of organized civil society in order to broaden the social base of the struggle. This broadening of space, led to the formation of LASCO in 2003 (LASCO, background document

Given the plethora of social problems facing Nigerian state, ranging from political corruption, electoral fraud, poor working condition, bad governance and poor social security regime, LASCO, seem to broaden its scope, while taking cognizance of the impact of the hike in the petroleum price on the living condition of Nigerians. LASCO now has engaged the state on Corruption, electoral reform, and the minimum wage.

By 2004 the magnitude of the struggle deepened which prompted the pro-labour civil societies to form Joint Action Forum (JAF), JAF is the umbrella of civil society organization that form part of LASCO, while the organized labour under the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress of Nigeria, form the labour component of the coalition. The LASCO structure can be depicted as follows:



The inaugural chairman of JAF was Beko Ransome Kuti while the inaugural Secretary was late Chima Ubani. While at the level of LASCO, the presidents of the NLC, TUC and JAF chairman are the LASCO co-chairmen, while the JEF secretary, NLC and TUC's general secretaries are the co-secretaries. So there is no coherent administrative structure, which is part of the organizational challenge

### **Overall Goal of LASCO:**

The overall goal of LASCO should be to provide popular platform both to challenges current manifestations of bad governance and ultimately to actualize a responsive government that will be accountable to the people and alive to their needs, wishes and aspirations.

### **Objectives:**

The following specific objectives are proposed for consideration:

1. To create a broad based movement for popular emancipation founded on the sustainable alliance of organizations of the oppressed or marginalized throughout Nigeria
2. To struggle against all policies, programmes, measures, laws, agencies or governments that oppress or impoverish the people, hamper national development or hinder the full actualization of individuals and group potentials.
3. To facilitate the emergence of an alternative charter (or framework) for the democratic governance and human centered development of society on the basis of the expressed will of the people and the utilization of the common wealth for welfare of all.
4. To systematically and consistently educate, enlighten, organize and mobilize the Nigerian people at all levels towards the attainment of these objectives

**Structures:**

LASCO's structures is based on the concept of a bilateral alliance-of organized labour and the joint platform of civil society groups committed to the objective of LASCO and the alliance with Labour. The Labour component of the alliance is already well streamlined comprising NLC, TUC and CFTU (though CFTU is no longer in existence as its former affiliates have merged with the NLC), the Civil Society component has streamlined itself under the platform of the Joint Action Forum (JAF). All non-labour groups that want to be part of LASCO must thus be advised to join JAF in the same way that any labour organization that wants to join LASCO must come through the labour components.

**LASCO struggles and campaign issues:**

**we should be angry...we should be angry, gaari is expensive, rice is expensive, the masses are hungry...we should be angry” this was the chant that rent the air as workers; youths and poor masses marched under the banners of the labour and civil society Coalition (LASCO) in a protest rally in Ibadan Oyo state on Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2009 to reject government neo-liberal policies of deregulation of the oil sector, to demand N52, 200 minimum wage and credible elections. (Democratic Socialist Movement, 2009:1)**

Since formation, LASCO was able to struggle in the key sectors of the society, with critical campaign issues that affect the socio-economic condition of Nigerians. Among these issues are electoral reform, fight against deregulation, and review of the minimum wage. Other campaigns borders on good governance, corruption and international solidarities with the oppressed people globally.

LASCO was the main platform the NLC used for the last round of national campaign against fuel price increase, which took place in September 2005, towards this, rallies and street processions were held between September, 13-29 2005. Among the demand by LASCO was the call for a total fuel price reversal and an end to the anti people reforms of the administration. In most of the rallies, many people call for the resignation of the government of president Obasanjo. Increasingly, Nigerians began to call on the leaders of the labour movement and the progressive community to abandon “the protest industry” and give leadership to the country. (NLC, 9<sup>th</sup> Delegate Conference)

The planned NLC mass rallies and protests across Nigeria which were kicked off in the middle of last month (May 2009) articulate certain key economic and political issues that are central to the livelihood of the masses of the Nigerian people. Concretely the demands underpinning the protests concern a new minimum wage, opposition to deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry (another terminology for the increase in fuel prices) and adoption of aspects of the justice Muhammad Uwais recommendations for electoral reforms. (olorode, 2009:2)

### ***Electoral Reform:***

The 2003 and 2007 General elections in Nigeria have remained critical in eyes of citizens and the labour movement in the country, the elections where characterized with irregularities, massive rigging, and lack of authentic voters register. This trend prompted the transition monitoring group in 2003 to issue a report titled; *do the Voters Count*. This report unveils the challenges that surround the 2003 election in Nigeria.

The April 2007 general elections were expected to be an improvement on the previous elections which were all badly conducted. However, in spite of actions by NLC to ensure free and fair general election in which the will of the people will be supreme, the 2007 general elections were characterized by massive rigging, late voting, the non-appearance of electoral officials in many voting centers, severe shortages of ballot boxes, voter intimidation and the general subversion of the will of the people. The subsequent several court judgments upturning the victories of many candidates of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are further proof of the poor conduct and impunity that marked the general election. (NLC, 2011 Delegate Conference)

Against this background, the NLC in collaboration with other interest groups pressed the demand for the electoral reform accompanied by a two day stay at home protest, subsequently, the late president Musa Yaradua, the major beneficiary of the 2007 rigged election, promised to undertake the reform of the nations's electoral process to raise the standard and quality of our elections and in fulfillment of this pledge, on august 28, 2007, he inaugurated a 22 person committee to review our electoral system, of which the NLC was represented by its General Secretary John Odah. The committee was given twelve month to accomplish this task.

It is interesting to note that the core commendations of the Justice Uwais-led Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) were adaptations of the broad content of the memorandum of the Labour-Civil Society alliance. Among the key recommendations dear to LASCO were:

- a. Change in the mode of appointment of the chairperson of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The committee recommended that chairperson, who must be of unimpeachable character, be nominated by the National Judicial Commission to be confirmed by the senate.
- b. Change in the method of adjudication of election petitions. This provides that all election cases should be settled before the swearing in of the candidate deemed to have won the election.

- c. Criminalization of electoral offences in order to discourage those who violate electoral laws by jailing them.
- d. Change in the law guiding cross-carpeting of elected officials. We believe that a public official elected on the platform of one political party crossing over to another political party, with a different manifesto and programme and still maintaining that office, in the light of our experience in this country does violent damage to our desire to consolidate democratic norms in the country; and
- e. Change in the method of counting and declaring the number of votes cast at polling stations. These will curtail rampant incidences of ballot box snatching and stuffing of ballot during elections.

For the LASCO to ensure the implementation of these recommendations, the NLC National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of March, 10, 2009 decided that the implementation of justice Muhammad Uwais committee recommendations is included in the National rallies to be held across the country.

On crucial aspect of electoral reform canvassed by LASCO, was *IWU MUST GO rally*, tagged “mother of all rallies”, on March, 31<sup>st</sup> 2010. In this outing which proceeded from Labour House headquarters of NLC, to INEC headquarters in Maitama District of Abuja and finally to the National Assembly, Labour and Civil Society allies contested that Prof. Iwu lack the moral credibility, competence and independence of mind necessary to lead the INEC in the spirit of the Uwais committee’s recommendations. LASCO cited the 2007 elections described nationally and internationally as probably the worst ever in history as sufficient proof of his unsuitability and incompetence.

In the letter to the leadership of the National assembly, LASCO reiterated its commitment to ensure the removal of IWU by asserting that: “*on our part, we give our solemn commitment to work with other well-meaning Nigerians and organization to ensure that in the unlikely*

*event of Prof. Maurice Iwu's name ever surfacing again to conduct the next general elections, we will mobilize Nigerians to ensure that this does not happen!!!"*

The presidency as result of the pressure mounted by the LASCO especially following the poorly conducted re-run governorship election in Anambra state, decided against nominating Prof. Iwu for a second term as INEC chairman and appointed Prof. Attahiru Jega to replace him.

### **The Anti-Deregulation campaign:**

Following the pronouncement of Dr. Rilwanu Lukman, the then Minister of Petroleum resources that the Federal Government was prepared to fully deregulate the downstream operations of the oil industry, the NEC, of NLC took a decision to educate the public on the dangers of deregulation through a series of national mass protests, rallies and campaign, the campaign across the country, which has now come to be known as the anti-deregulation protest, was a pre-emptive warning strategy by the NLC to show that it will not fold its arms while government goes ahead to implement policies that will ultimately bring untold hardship to workers and the masses.([www.nlcng.org](http://www.nlcng.org))

The struggle against arbitrary increase in the prices of petroleum products spearheaded by the NLC is arguably the most protracted by organized Labour in Nigeria. It is a battle that dates back to the military era and which ironically gain greater and fierce momentum with the enthronement of democratic governance under former president Olusegun Obasanjo. Understandably therefore, deregulation and subsidy withdrawal have therefore come to symbolize the most contentious socio-economic points of popular agitation led by LASCO against the ruling elite. (ibid)

These protests became a major pre-occupation of organized labour when president Olusegun Obasanjo became president of Nigeria for the second time in 1999. Obasanjo has the

unenviable record of being responsible for the increase of product prices 11 out of total 18 times that various government have had one excuse or the other to introduce since January, 6, 1978. Incidentally, the first increase in petroleum products prices on January, 6 198 occurred when Obasanjo was a military head of state.

The national sensitization mass rallies of protest marches against deregulation began on May, 13 2009 in Lagos. It held in Asaba on May 15, 2009, in Kano June, 16 2009 and in Maiduguri on June, 23 2009. On July 17, 2009, the eastern coal city of Enugu played host to the rally while Makurki was host on July, 22, 2009 and Ibadan August, 13, 2009. The grand finale held on October, 29, 2009, where for the first time a mast protest by organized labour was allowed into the premises of the National Assembly (ibid)

### **Struggle for minimum Wage:**

In view of the depressing economic condition in the country which take their toll on the take home pay of workers in contrast to the salaries and allowances of political office holders, The NLC,TUC in collaboration with the civil society partners began moves for the demand of new national minimum wage. The NLC at its NEC meeting in Kano in December, 18, 2008 demanded that the federal government set up a committee to negotiate and agree on the National Minimum Wage of 52,200 based on the principle of equity and the need to bridge social inequality in the context of widening economic and social gaps among the citizens of the country. To draw public attention to the issue, LASSCO also decided to include the issue among its three core demands in the sensitization rallies it held across the country beginning in May 2009. (NLC, 2011 Delegate Conference)

In response to this set of actions, a tripartite committee was set up in July 2009 under the chairmanship of the Retired Chief Justice Alfa Balgore with representation from the NLC and TUC on the side of organized Labour, National Employers Consultative Assembly

(NECA) and government both federal and state. The composition was in line with ILO standard on wage negotiations.

Finally the NLC/TUC negotiated the sum of 18,000.00 as minimum wage which the government agreed to pay. However, implementation became a problem, although the president sign the new wage bill during the heat of 2011 election campaign , as well as the threat from the resolution of the 10 delegate conference of the NLC.

Despite the fact that the minimum wage has become a law, its implementation of to this point become contentious, as the ruling elites represented by the various state governors under the umbrella of *governors forum* vow not to pay the wage until, the revenue sharing formula is reviewed. Although even the federal government does not set the face in paying the new wage let alone the state government.

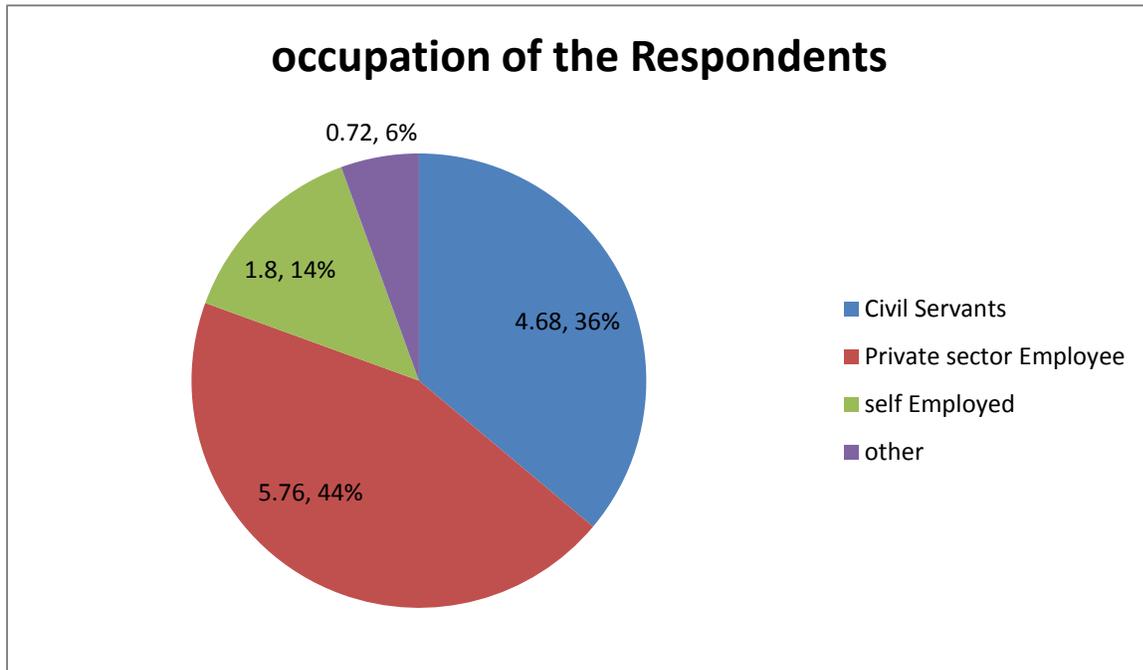
Other conditions set-forth by the state governors is that, the government should remove subsidy in the petroleum product, such proceed should be given to them to implement the new wage regime. This tactics is summarized by Olorode, in the following statement:

“we shall pay the new wages, but we shall reduce those wages by as much as, or even more than, we are adding to the current wages, for increase in fuel price will simply raise the price of everything-food, water supply, transportation, house rents, various services, Medicare, farm inputs, artisan tools, school fees etc. even those state governors who promise the new minimum wage think they are doing workers a favor by promising them 18,000 salve wage and harassing them about “productivity”. What does the ruling class produce?” (2011:13)

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS:**

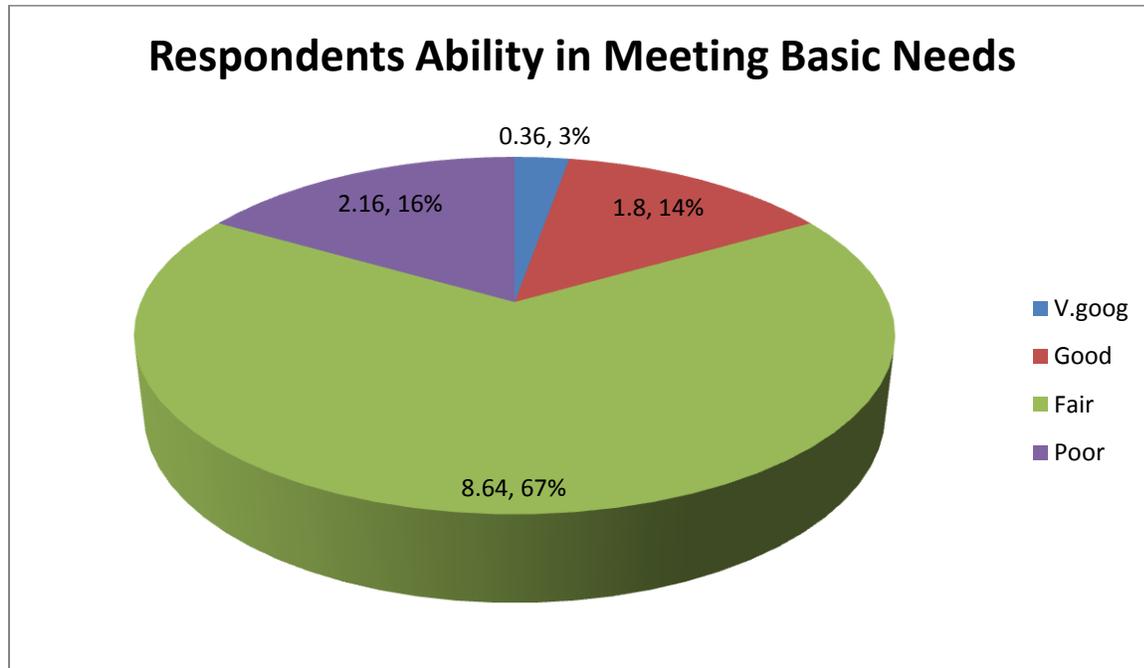
Following the literature review in the paper, which analysis the role of the state in the socio-economic development in Nigeria, and the way the civil society articulate to challenge bad policies in the country, bellow is the presentation and analysis of the generated data.

**Chart: 1**



**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011.

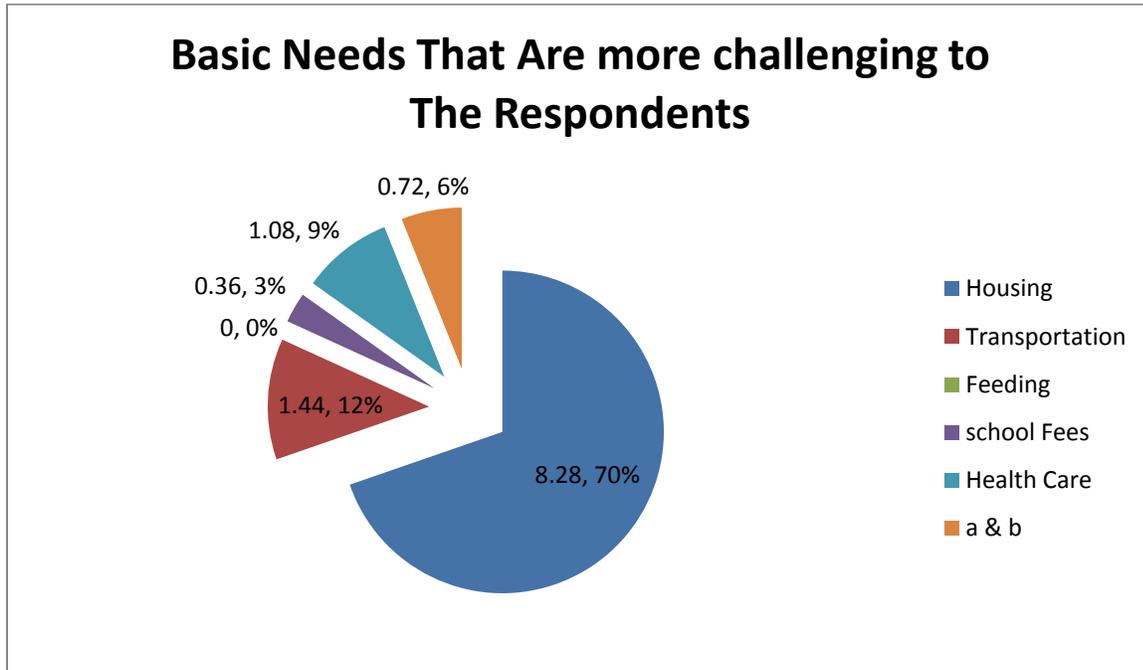
The above table illustrates the Respondents Occupation, Private sector employees constitute the highest percentage of the respondents, followed by Civil Servants and the self Employed, the other category where youth Corp Members serving in Abuja, the Federal capital Territory. Private sector employees constituted the highest number of the respondents, because the public sector employees did not return some questionnaires

**Chart: 2**

**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011

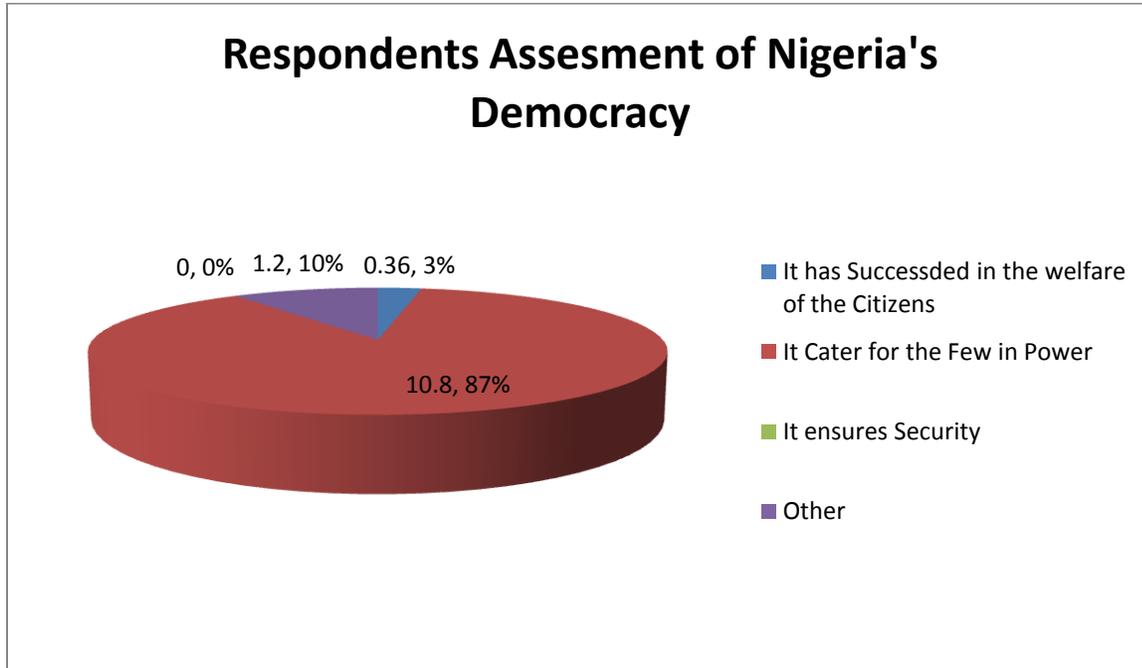
The data above revealed that majority of the respondents were not able to meet their basic needs, which include; food, housing, transportation, health care, and education. The data revealed that (67%) of the respondents rated their ability as fair, followed by those that rated their own as poor (16%), only 14% and 3% rated their own as Good and Very-Good respectively.

Chart: 3



**Source:** Survey research Conducted in 2011.

The chart above shows that housing is the major challenge facing the respondents, followed by transportation & health care; some respondents combined both housing and transportation, and finally school Fees. It is pertinent to note that, housing pose more challenge, due to high cost of rent in the capital city (Abuja), coupled by poor wages of the workers and poor land-access among the poor.

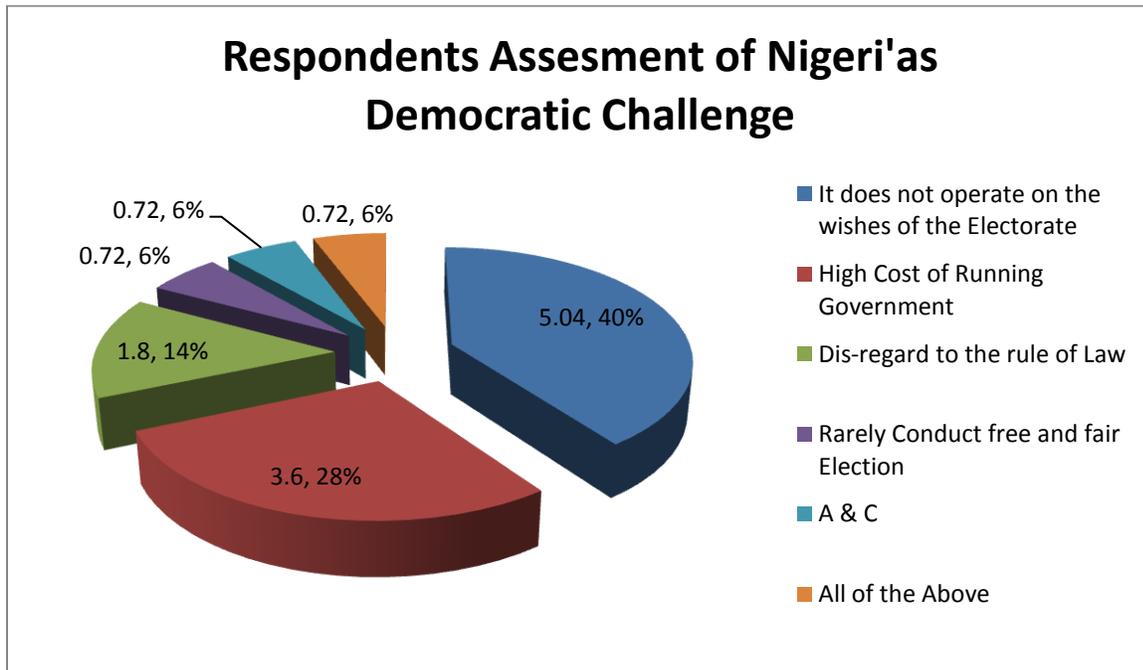
**Chart: 4**

**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011

The information above depicts that the respondent's assessment of Nigeria's Democracy is that it caters for the few people in power; this is evidenced in the way and manner in which the politician's emoluments consumes the national resources. At one instance, the CBN governor claims that 25% of the National budget goes to the National Assembly.

This data has concurred with Yusif (2010) that Democracy in Nigeria has become a system which imposed itself through privatization of collective wealth and public properties-destroying the spirit of people to see anything good with democracy, reducing and deforming the state to play any role of common wealth, in order to impose a market ideology that each is to him/her self. In other words democracy is reduced to "democracy of politicians.

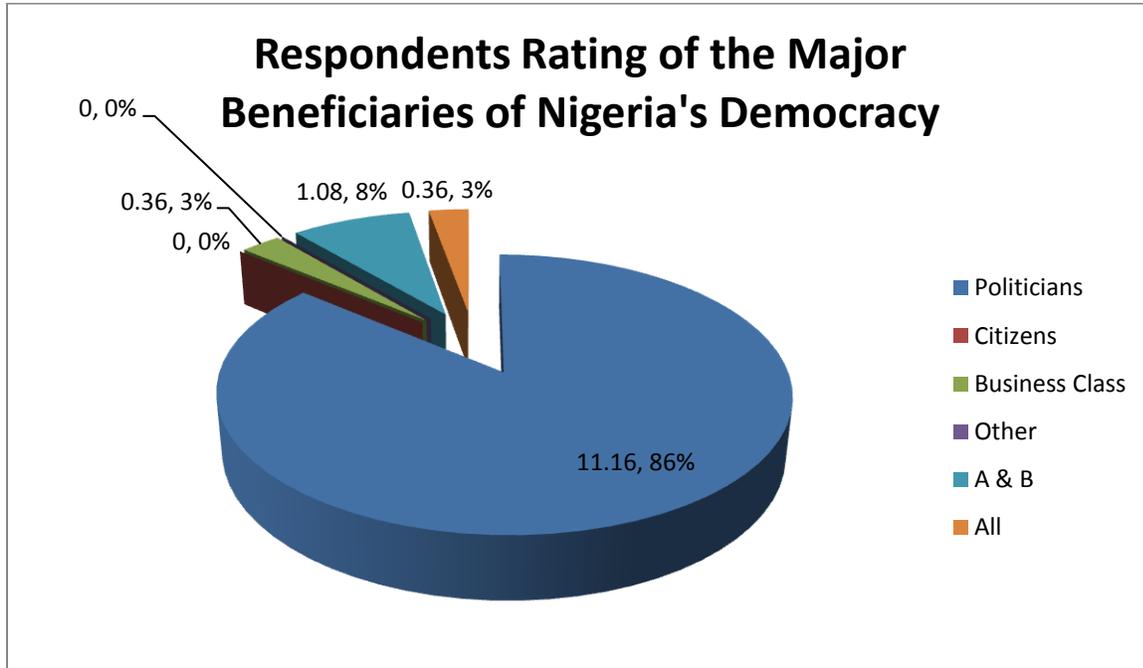
**Chart: 5**



**Source:** Survey Research conducted in 2011.

On the assessment of Nigeria’s Democracy, the respondents noted that the system does not operate on the wishes of the electorate. This assertion negates the essence of participatory nature of liberal democracy which accommodates the wishes of the people in policy articulation. In the same manner another challenge is attributed to the high cost of running government, this could be explained by the proliferation of several institutions, with statutory allocations. However, these institutions often times where politically created to reward party supporters or favor kinsmen.

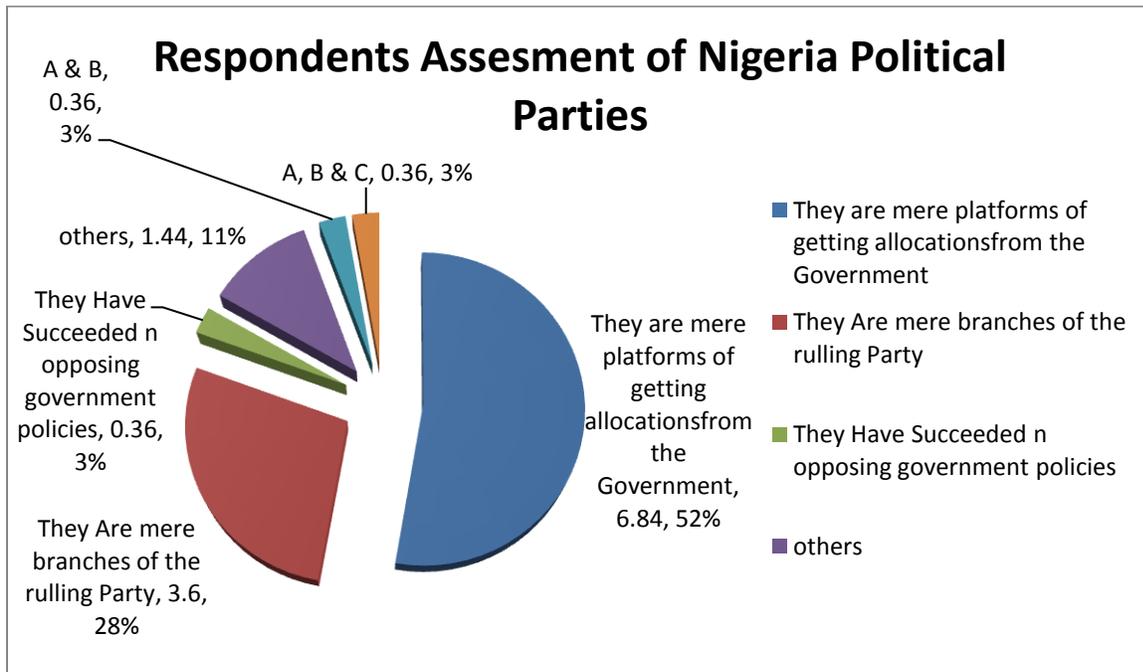
**Chart: 6**



**Source:** Survey Research conducted in 2011

Given the major challenges of Nigeria’s Democracy, which borders on high cost of running government, and neglecting the views of the people, the respondents contended that the major beneficiary of the system are the politicians. The living condition of a Nigerian politician is far better than a civil servant that spent 35 years in service. In fact, these inform why struggle for political power is intense and often a do or die *affair*.

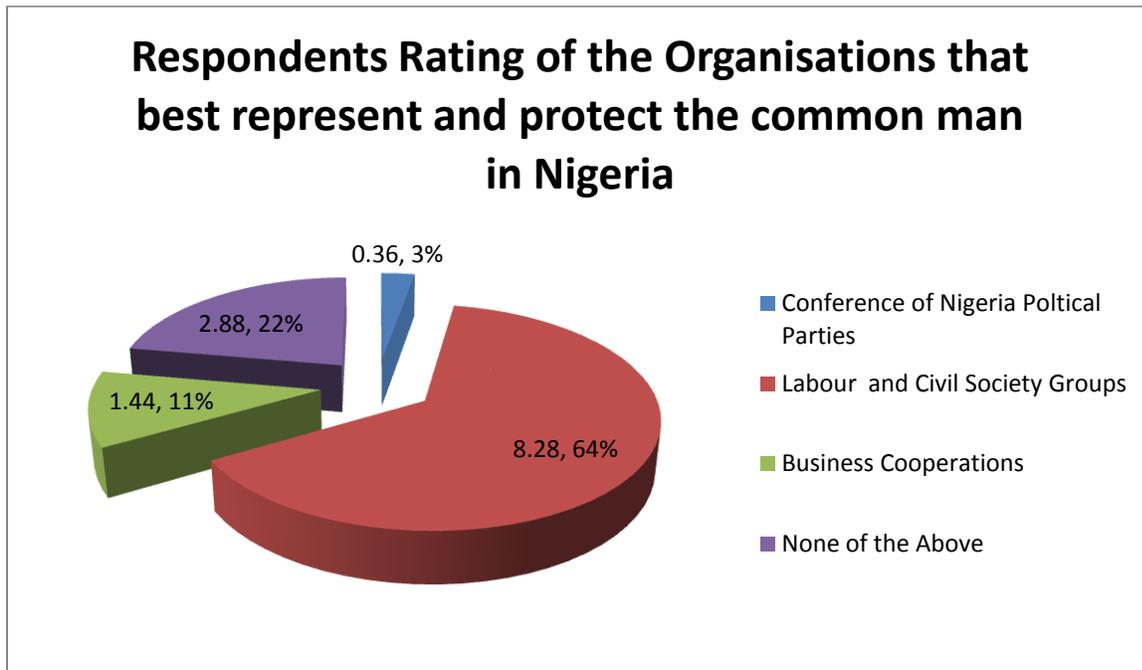
**Chart:7**



**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011

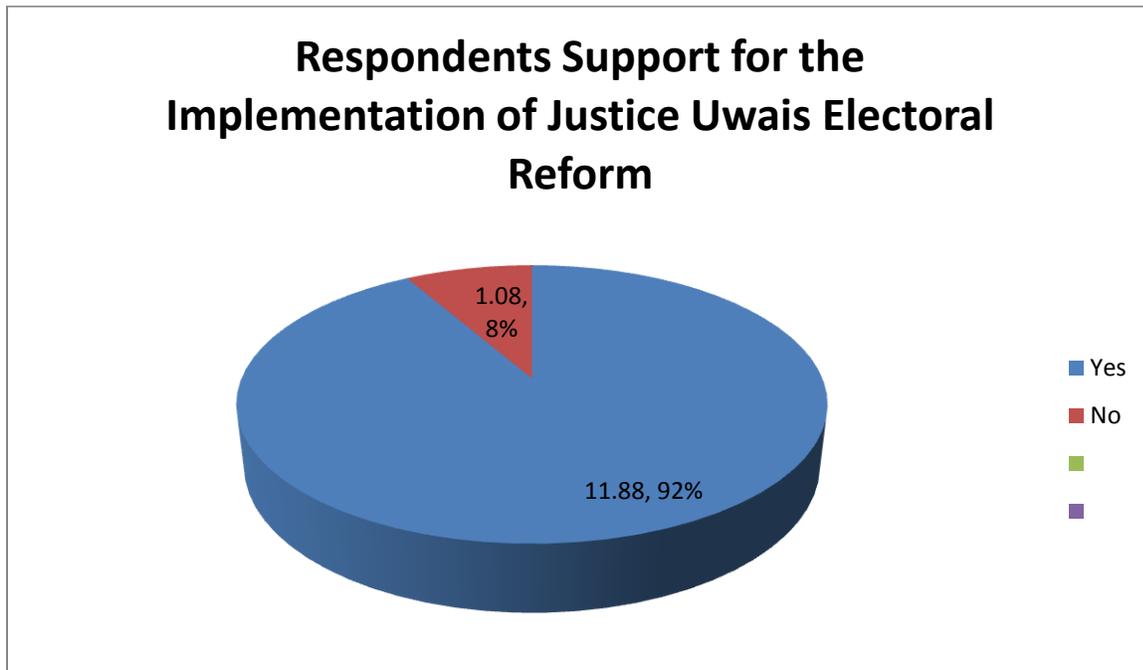
The above table has depicted the character of party politics in Nigeria. Political parties have gradually lost their ideological posture of interest aggregation and articulation, with the aim to capture political power. Political parties are becoming mere branches of getting subvention from the government, as shown in the chart above, high number of respondents which represent 53% of the respondents. While in other instances, they are seen as branches of the ruling party. Since Nigeria’s return to civil rule in 1999, opposition parties have sunk in to the ruling party due to thirst for power.

Chart:8



**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011.

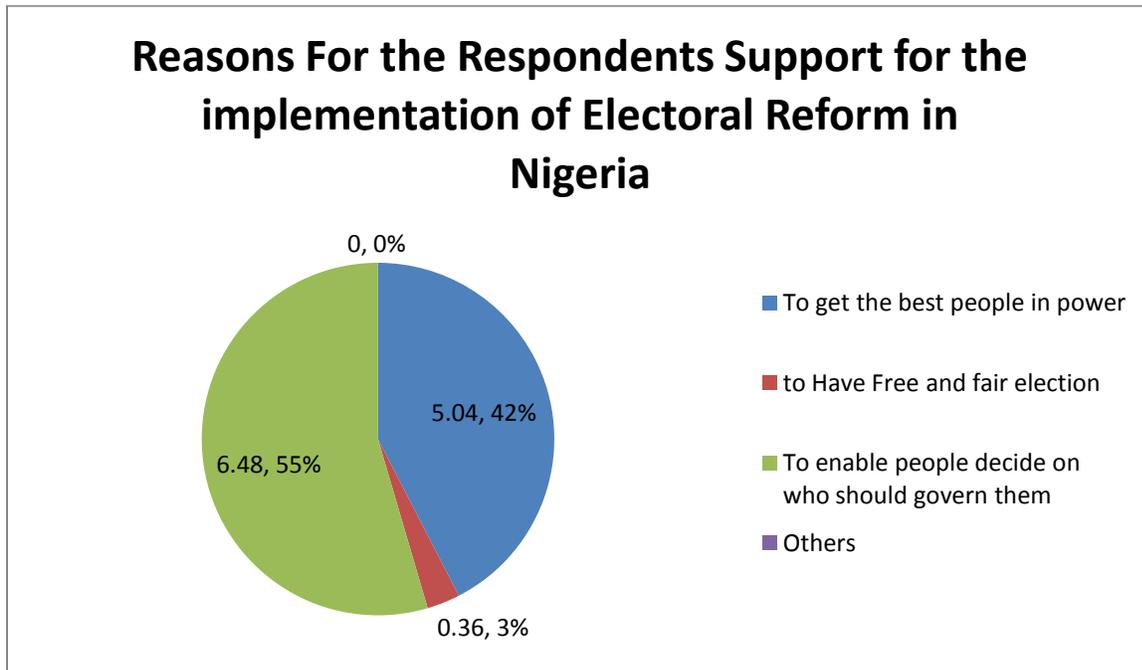
Given the decline of opposition politics in our democracy, the citizens tend to lack a platform with which to advocate for their rights and represent their demands. As such, the respondents have now seen Labour and Civil Society Groups as the alternative platform that best protect the common man from the state repression and anti-poor policies. 64% of the respondents see the potential of Labour and Civil Society Groups in Nigeria. Following Beckman (2010) that labour and civil society jointly provides an ideological alternative of the neo-liberal positions and holds an alternative vision of national development.

**Chart: 9**

**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011.

The 2003 and 2007 General Election in Nigeria has left a lot in the History of Nigeria's electoral Democracy. A lot of irregularities were recorded which ranges from lack of accurate voters' register, imposition of candidates, use of security forces to harass voters, and in some cases election rarely hold in some areas, this culminates into agitation for electoral reform. Justice Uwais committee was given the responsibility to fashion out ways to change the fortunes of election in Nigeria. The data above shows that the respondents have high conviction on the need to reform the electoral process in Nigeria.

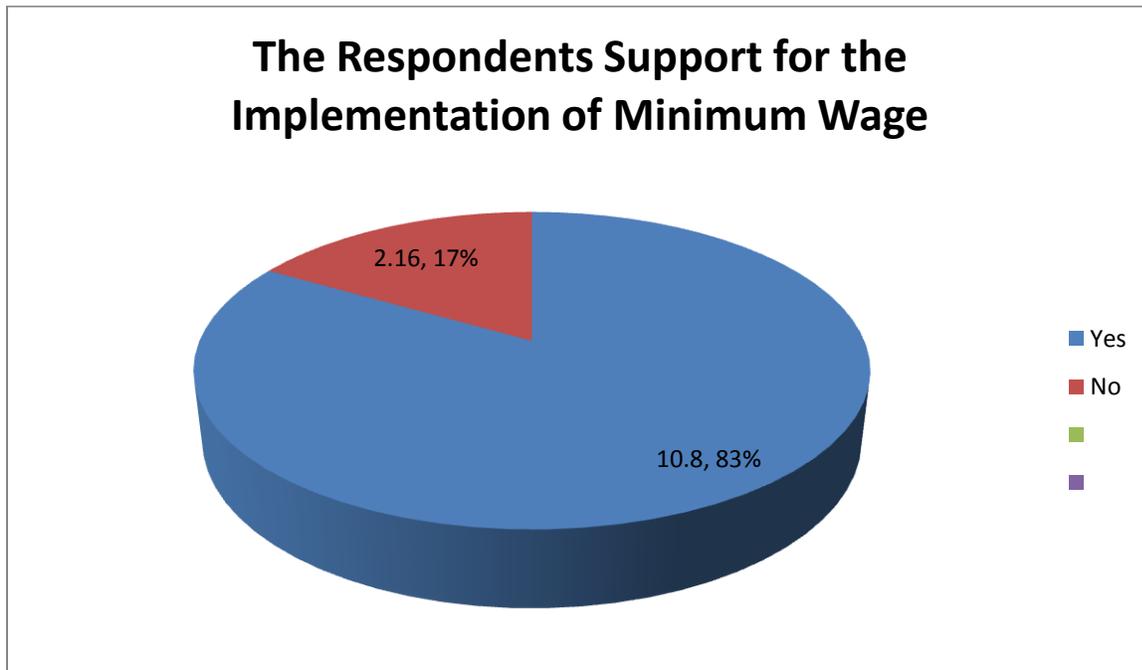
Chart: 10



**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011.

The chart above shades light on the basis upon which the respondents support for the implementation of electoral reform in Nigeria. The data showed that highest number of the respondents based their support to electoral reform due to the need to allow people to decide who should govern them. This entails liberalization of the political atmosphere; out-right rejection of imposition of candidates. It is interesting to note that, considerable number of the respondents supported the electoral reform so as to get the best people in power, this goes beyond allowing people to decide, but of course, entails determining who should be chosen among candidates vying for a political post based on competence.

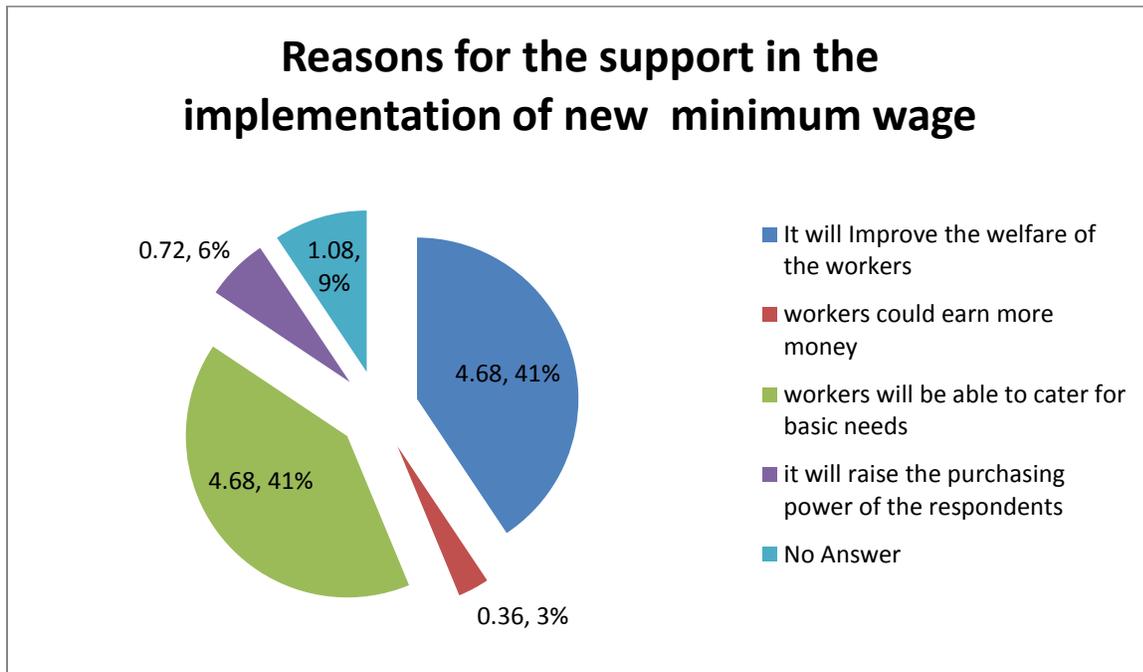
**Chart: 11**



**Source:** Survey Research conducted in 2011.

The data depicts that the respondents have overwhelmingly supported the implementation of the new minimum wage. This may be partly due to poor wages of workers, majority of workers their take home pay cannot take them home. Poor wage is also responsible for the respondent's inability to meet their basic needs effectively

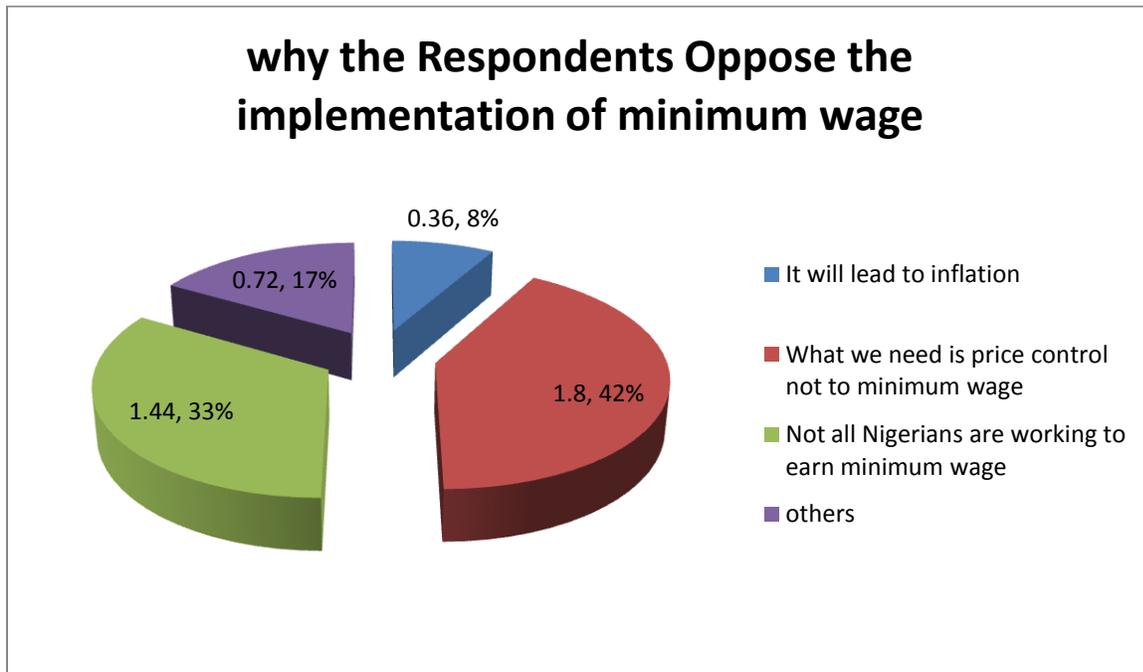
**Chart: 12**



**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011.

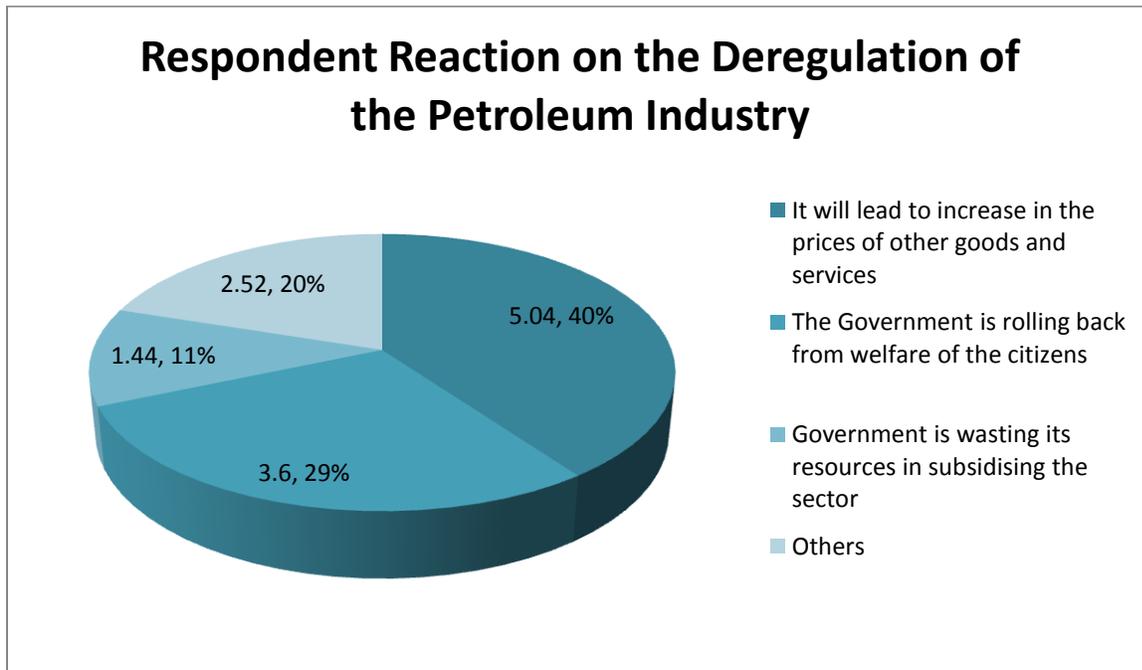
Given the fact that the respondents were not able to meet their basic needs, as shown in the data above, the respondent supported the new wage regime so as to be able to cater for their basic needs as shown above. In similar way the respondents believed that it will improve their welfare.

Chart: 13



**Source:** Survey Research conducted in 2011.

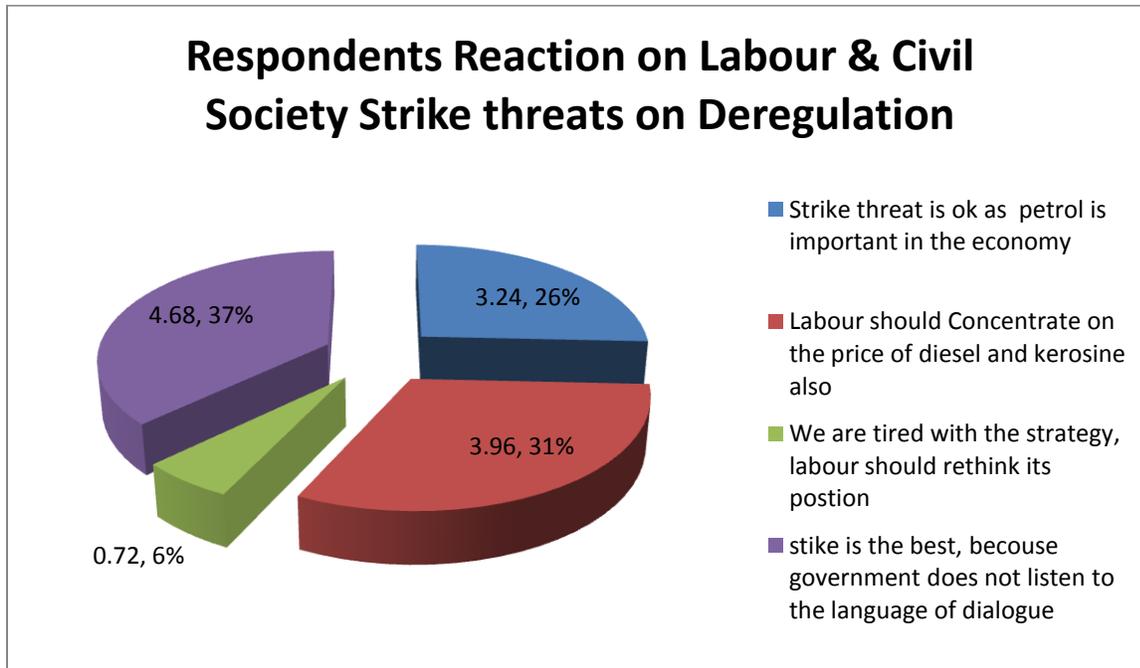
Despite the fact that the respondents maintained that increased minimum wage will increase their welfare, on the contrary, some respondents oppose it because, what they prefer is price control. While, other respondents foresaw the danger of inflation if minimum wage is increased and at the same time not all Nigerians are in the wage labour.

**Chart: 14**

**Source:** Survey Research Conducted in 2011.

Given the insistence of government to deregulate the petroleum industry in Nigeria, to allow market forces to determine the price of the petroleum products, highest number of the respondents opposed deregulation because of its multiplier implication in other sectors of the economy. On the contrary, the second category of the respondents opposes it because the state seemed to roll back from the basis of its creation that is welfare of its citizens. However, third category of the respondents admitted that government is wasting its resources in subsidizing the sector which often lead to waste hence; the best option is to deregulate.

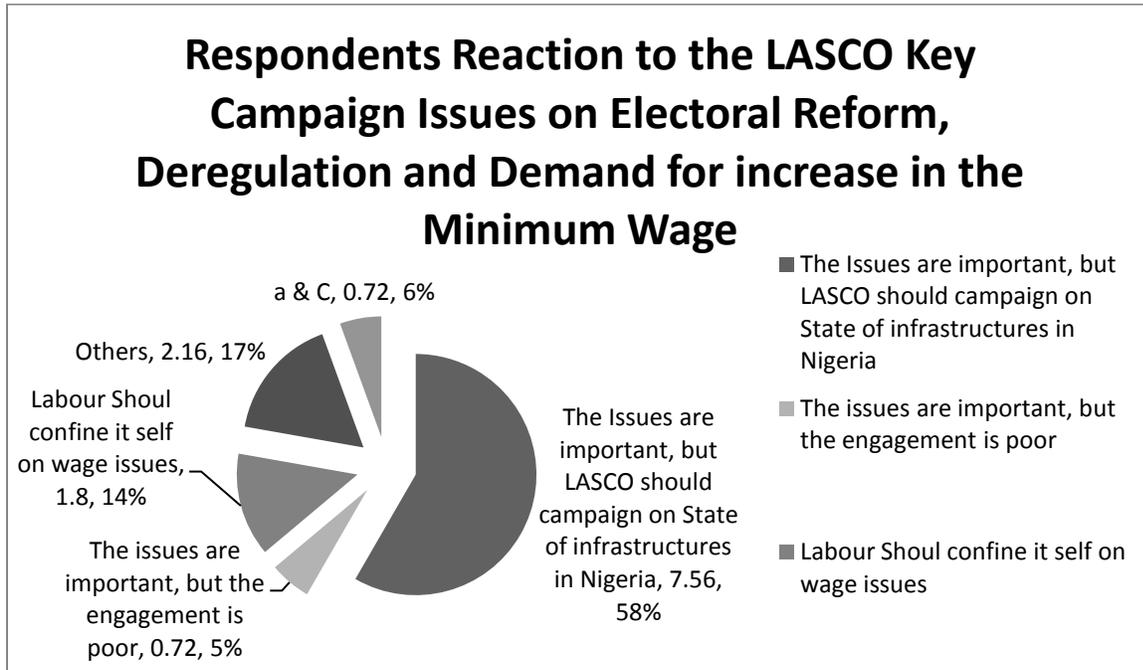
Chart: 15



**Source:** survey research conducted in 2011.

It is worthy to note that for several times Nigeria labour movements used to serve the government with strike notice on its social demands, whether the strike strategy is the best or not, the above chart shows that, the highest number of the respondents 37% argued that, Nigerian government does not listen to the language of dialogue as such strike is the best option in pressing workers demand. Followed by those who advocate on the need for the labour to concentrate and engage the state on the prices of diesel and kerosene. Little number of the respondents 6% debunked the strike options.

Chart: 16



**Source:** Survey Research conducted in 2011.

The chart above shows that the respondents have supported the 3 key campaign issues of LASCO, however, they demanded for other campaign issues like state of infrastructures in Nigeria. While the second largest category of the respondents observed that labour should concentrate on the issues of industrial relations.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The paper has examined labor and politics of alliance in Nigeria historically, specifically it analysis the Role of Labour and the Civil Society Coalition LASCO, in Nigeria. The paper argued that, while conceding to the neo-liberal impact of globalization on the state ability to provide for the welfare of it is citizens, the role of the political elites on democracy and development was dismal.

Labour and civil society groups as counter-hegemonic forces have a potential role to play in democratizing the development process in Nigeria, whilst entrenching the ethics of developmental state in the society. The paper envisaged that, LASCO will provide an effective plat form for social change, due to the absence of effective opposition in Nigeria. But this can be achieved through formalization of its structure and deepening its integration into the overall society.

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