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## **From “Authoritarian Rule” to “Democracy” in Nigeria: Citizens’ Welfare a Myth or Reality**

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**Abstract:** *What does democracy do or fail to do about the welfare of Nigerians? Does it matter for the performance of democracy? This paper seeks to determine the mutual impact of democracy and welfare of citizens in Nigeria. Given the state of democracy and available data, it seems that politicians at the state and local government levels are more concerned about their personal interests than those of citizens. We then problematise theoretical western democracy, sold to Nigeria, as with many other third world formerly colonized territories, after independence, but refused during colonialism, at the least for lacking in development and failing to take local conditions into consideration. Implied here are both the institutional and behavioural deficiencies that run democracy dry. The question is, is democracy affecting welfare of citizens positively? To respond in the negative as we do, means more than just a simple answer. Why is it so? With a focus on 1999 to date, a major assumption in this paper is that both the performance and stability of democracy consist in its responsiveness to the welfare citizens. Without any allusion or references to any saintly model of democracy somewhere to be copied, it is argued that the lack of involvement of citizens in election of leaders has created in political elites the loss of all sense of accountability to citizens. Besides, having found oil revenue as the sustaining power for the state, the individual tax paying citizen has been relegated, as against traditions of respect for the tax payer in more established democracies, where the running of the state is dependent on the tax payer’s money. The gap between the volume of resource allocation and development projects at the state and local government levels, as well as the ostentatiousness of politicians seem to have led us to conclude that politicians are only feeding fat on citizens’ welfare.*

**Key Words:** Democracy. Welfare. Citizens. Nigerians.

### **1 Introduction**

What does democracy do or fail to do about the welfare of Nigerians? Does it matter for the performance of democracy?

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This paper seeks to demonstrate how democracy has neglected the welfare of Nigerians in the period extending from 1999 at the state and local government levels. With available data on continuous poor living conditions of majority of citizens, negative effects of over-emphasis on the markets, lack of convergence between volume of resource allocation and projects that impact on the welfare of citizens directly, it seems that politicians at the state and local government levels are more concerned about their personal interests than those of citizens. It seems that institutional and behavioural dimensions of democracy are implicated in the case of Nigerian, warranting a basis for probing western democracy models for failing to fulfil the assumption that both the performance and stability of democracy consist in its responsiveness to the welfare of citizens. Implied here are both the institutional and behavioural deficiencies that run democracy dry. The question is, is democracy affecting welfare of citizens positively? Without any allusion or references to any saintly model of democracy somewhere to be copied, it is argued that the lack of involvement of citizens in election of leaders has created in political elites the loss of all sense of accountability to citizens. Besides, having found oil revenue as the sustaining power for the state, the individual tax paying citizen has been relegated, as against traditions of respect for the tax payer in more established democracies, where the running of the state is dependent on the tax payer's money. The gap between the volume of resource allocation and development projects at the state and local government levels, as well as the ostentatiousness of politicians seem to have led us to conclude that politicians are only feeding fat on citizens' welfare.

## **2 Methodology**

This paper draws on three sets of data obtained from primary and secondary sources for its analyses and conclusions. The first derives from responses to questions in 200 copies of questionnaires distributed to students, lecturers and households at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. This decision was based on the fact that the university, being a federal institution is host to people from

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all three major ethnicities in Nigeria (Igbos, Yorubas and Hausa Fulani), as well as some of the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta though their numerical equality in the institution is completely out of the question. The second set of data derives from review of relevant empirical and theoretical literature. The effort yielded important data that fed into the analysis and arguments of this paper.

The questionnaires contained structured questions, though with some open-ended ones, to give room for information on key issues of citizens' welfare. The choice of respondents was by random sampling, to give equal chance of being selected. Measurement of welfare issues were mainly in the area of citizens' access to health care, good roads, participation in free and fair elections, perceptions of security, economic performance, governance, accountability, public needs such as poverty and behaviour of politicians.

### **3. Democracy**

There continue to exist a troubling state of confusion on the precise meaning of the concept, democracy. It seems that varying experiences and claims of democracies by countries have complicated the situation, making it a difficult task to adequately articulate what it is. Ironically, and as a result scholars are quicker to point out what democracy is not than what actually it is in a clear and well thought out process. This confusion actually motivated Dahl's conviction that perfect democracy is does not exist anywhere, instead, he described the experience as that of *polyarchy*, which the characteristic should be the continuous response of the government to the demands of citizens (Dinneya, 2006:24).

Theoretical literature on the subject of democracy focuses on two models, classical and procedural (Tiruneh 2004: 469-472). The former assumes that self-rule and political equality are achievable for citizens. Idealistically, the system serves the common good and interest. The later, procedural democracy (also called liberal or representative democracy), associated with modern states, assumes that political and civil liberties are fundamental rights that must be present in modern democracies (Gastil,

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1991; Diamond et al, 1995; Southhall, 2003:1). Procedural democracy emerged from two historical traditions of republicanism and liberalism. Whereas republicanism emphasizes active role for the citizen in governance, a variant of the liberal democratic thought focuses on minimal role, such as voting in elections for the citizen. Then, elites are given the prerogative of governance (Carter and Stokes, 2002:2).

Both models are deficient and have major set backs. For instance, assumptions of classical democracy is itself a weakness when juxtaposed with empirical literature on democracy. Procedural democracy, on the other hand does not address the incidence of power differentials among citizens, where in the real sense, citizens lack equal economic, political and social opportunities with political elites. It seems quite clear that the idea of equality associated with classical democracy is not anywhere close to the reality of modern representative democracies.

A body of literature continues to see procedural democracy in Africa as a 'second wave of independence' (Ada, 2000; Southhall 2003). It seems that democracy has failed to respond adequately to welfare needs of citizens of countries in Africa. The 1990s have however seen a re-emergence of democracy with electoral politics as the dominant theme. Incidentally, it is what has been referred to as the 'second wave of independence', to emphasize a strong connection between democracy and development. This normative ideal, should be clearly distanced from some of core institutional/ structural problems and values of procedural democracy. At some point, some scholars from Africanist perspective would want to think that procedural democracy is prone to manipulation by western countries in their use of democracy to pursue their economic interests, thereby resulting in failure few years after independence for most of Africa. Of course, theoretical democracy was "not known" to African scholars before independence, but thereafter, it came as a modernization theory.

Therefore, the challenge facing procedural democracy remains predominantly how it can transform and provide

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reasonable economic and social security for citizens. It appears that both the values and practice of this variant of democracy continues to fail in providing channels for citizens to have a say in governance (see Carter and Stokes, 2002).

In the circumstance, Tiruneh, in what appears to be a reformulation, proposes an alternative way of defining democracy, described as *normal democracy*, one that once established should continue to evolve in terms of improvement in income or wealth distribution among the middle class. This type of democracy depends on the rise of the middle class in terms of their income and general economic status. Following from this view, democracy is a hybrid of the classical, procedural and normal democracy, a political system that integrates political rights, civil liberties, mechanisms for citizen participation in election and governance, as well as guaranteeing to bridge the gap in wealth distribution among citizens. This conceptualization, at least recognizes the limitations of both classical and procedural democracy. It also extols the connection between democracy and economic development of citizens, something Tiruneh has translated to mean political power. The problem, however, is how to locate the middle class for a country like Nigeria, something easier to do in the more advanced democracies such as the U.S and Canada. To close that lacuna, response of democracy in Nigeria to citizens' welfare will be measured in terms of citizens' access to education, electricity, portable water, good roads, health care and security.

Normal democracy, is supported by the developmental democratic theorists (Carter and Stokes, 2002; Diamond 2002) whose normative emphasis points to social justice and general welfare for citizens. They accept basic principles of both classical and procedural democracy but go further to express concern for the common good, where overall condition of society is enhanced. Extensive participation of citizens in politics and governance is promoted as means for individual progress.

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**Figure 1. Types of democracy**

A	B	C
CLASSICAL DEMOCRACY -political equality -self-rule -common good -common interest	PROCEDURAL DEMOCRACY -fundamental rights -minimal role for citizens in governance -regular elections -elite dominant	NORMAL DEMOCRACY - a process - -economic development - Reduction of income disparity - extensive citizen participation

**Source:** Adapted from Tiruneh's formulation (2004)

From the foregoing, and irrespective any common conceptualization of the word democracy, three elements seem to be key to various definitions given to the subject. They are: competition, participation and the existence of civil and political liberties (Dinneyta, 2006:25)

#### 4. Accountability and Governance

Accountability and governance are part of the explanation of each other. Indeed, since 1995, both concepts have become part of the debate and research language on democracy. This is perhaps because of the intrinsic value of democracy as a political system and a subject of attraction for scholars for years, and more for the reason of explaining the experience and variance among countries so described as democracies today. For instance, Diamond (2004) insists that there is a close connection between democracy and good governance. In short, he argues that democracy possesses the capacity and functions as good governance.

Conceptually, accountability emanated from the democratic political ideology in which the citizen is the ultimate sovereign for which all authority must be held to

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account (Davis, 2007:3-5). Within the context of democracy it implies the existence of some sort of mechanism to ensure accountability to taxpayers and beneficiaries of state service. As noted by Davis:

Thus the rise of the concept of accountability in Western public life is closely linked to the development of the modern nation state, modern nation state, modern state bureaucracy and the increased role of the state in the provision of public goods.

The concept evokes notions of responsibility for one's action and outcomes, in which both answerability or responsibility and enforcement are latent components. To answer for actions is to give account to those with power that are necessary for judgment of the motives of such actions. Enforcement is the utilization of account given for reward or punishment. Within the context of democracy, citizens' judgment of actions and motives based on information or account given by leaders enables them to reward by way of support for the regime or returning of a party and its leaders during an election year. These processes clearly portray some welfare implications for citizens. For instance, if leaders have this sense of accountability and fear losing elections because of negative judgment of citizens of their activities while in political office, it may well contribute positively towards meeting the welfare needs of citizens.

Within the context of democracy, ultimate power lies with citizens in the sense that those entrusted with responsibility of governance should be answerable to citizens. Being answerable then provides opportunity for citizens to access their stewardship for the purpose of reward and punishment. Both reward and punishment can be manifested in regime change through free and fair elections. In this sense, problem seem to have been created for democratic theory when it is considered that in many democracies today citizens lack this power to exercise their power in order to benefit from accountability. For although Nigeria is seen as democracy from a purely liberal sense, it appears that citizens lack power to ensure accountability of public officials, and this may well be a serious factor in the poor provisioning of welfare services to the people.

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## **5. Democratic Governance**

Governance portray the connection between the civil society and the state over issues or problems of national interest and of common concern( Barten e tal 2002: 131). Issues of governance have emerged so strongly in recent times with focus on a participatory approach to development by scholars( Diamond 2005:4; Barten e tal 2002: 134).

The United Nations Development Programme says that governance has three core dimensions: economic, participatory and administrative governance. It makes a lot of sense to think of economic governance in terms of public decision-making processes on the economy and how such processes affect economic activities of citizens and a country's external relations. In essence economic governance has large scale implications for welfare of citizens.

Political governance refers to the processes of formulating public policies, such as whether it is participatory or not. In contrast, administrative governance points to processes or mode of implementing public policies.

Good governance then means all three dimensions to governance in terms of structure and processes that define the socio-economic and political relationships (UNDP, 1997; Diamond ,2005: 4; Barten et al, 2002: 132). Indeed the UNDP insist that good governance should be understood in terms of participation, transparency and accountability and emphasis on process. For Diamond, good governance entails several dimensions, such as for example, the capacity of the state to provide the public good; commitment to the public good; transparency; accountability; rule of law and mechanisms for conflict resolution( Diamond 2005: 5). To be sure, Habitat ( 2000: 197-202) has added credence to the argument that principles of good governance include: decentralizing responsibilities and resources to local authorities and encouraging the participation of the civil society (Habitat 2000: 198).



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Following from the above, democracy and good governance facilitate economic development. This assumption is problematic when drawn into the experience of African countries where often scholars decry and explain poor living conditions of citizens with the lack of quality democracy and good governance. Apparently a working democracy where the ruled actually wield the power to control the ruler through voting and other accountability mechanisms and freedoms inspire a logic of an embedded good governance where participation and consultation with citizens over pertinent issues and policies are the defining characteristics. The ruler will not only be powerless to stop citizens over the exercise of their rights but will respect the outcome of such processes.

From the foregoing, it is clear that democracy is said to possess the ability, through good governance, to improve citizens' quality of life. A growing theoretical literature is replete with optimism on the relationship between democracy and improvement of the quality of life of citizens (Diamond 2005; Gyimah-Boadi 2004). Ironically, a corresponding volume of empirical literature is skeptical of the reality of this relationship in most of Africa. (Ake 1996; Sindzing 2006; Carter and Stokes 2002; Ufo and Fidelis, 2005; Drung, Kriechaus and Lutzig 2006). This thinking has been explained in terms failure of eurocentric development paradigm to address problems of human advancement within the context of parallel liberal democracy for most of Africa and the third world (Ake, 1996). As Ake has argued, politics within the context of liberal democracy has prevented social progress in Nigeria, as much as in other countries of Africa. Ideally, the whole idea of addressing the welfare of citizens is linked directly to the overall development of a country in all sectors. In that sense, a rising economic profile of a country ought to, by logical extension translate into improvement in the living conditions of citizens.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Literature on democracy in the third world mainly yields an identification of gap between the ideal and unsatisfactory functioning of democracy, frustrating the

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realization of expected economic, social and political benefits. Both institutional designs and behavioral elements account for this. The later, here, will help to answer questions on how politicians are constitutive of failed democracies as regards improvement of the welfare of citizens. Current politicians appear to be predators who have hindered responsibilities of democracies towards citizens (Sindzingre, 2006). This is making many doubt the ability of liberal democracy to improve the living conditions of citizens (Carter and Stokes 2002:2; Drury, Kriechhaus and Lusztig 2006: 121). From the experiences of countries with *oil deposits*, it seems that the source of revenue and funding of the state in democracies affect the quality of governance, and in turn, performance of democracy. Where the state depends on the tax payers' money, accountability is more easily demanded by citizens. This of course can translate into good governance capable of improving the living conditions of citizens. Rent seeking states that depend for revenue and funding of the state, unearned money, on natural resources such as oil, have more tendencies to be reckless with public funds. Citizens also lack the courage and will to demand accountability from the government in such states (Moore 2004:299). Two hypotheses arising from the above theoretical positions are: that, the welfare effects of *undemocratic democracies* is negative on citizens; second, democracies that depend on rent other than taxes from citizens are more prone to unresponsiveness to welfare needs of citizens.

### **Democracy and Welfare of Nigerians**

Empirically, relationship between democracy, development and welfare for citizens is uncertain (Diamond, 2004; Przeworski and Limongi, 1993; Huntington and Nelson, 1976;) There exist contrasting positions on this relationship. A body of literature repudiate any relationship between democracy and development whereas some scholars have attempted to demonstrate that such relationship does exist. For example, Inkeles and Sirowy suggest that the relationship exist in the sense that political democracy facilitates economic development that in turn impact welfare of citizens positively, Roll and Talboth (2003) do actually

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argue based on their research findings that good governance associated with democracy do explain the variance in per capita income of countries. To be sure, Zweifel and Navia (2000) and Navia Zweifel (2003) have all added credence to the positive relationship between democracy; development and welfare.

However the history of democracy, economic development and welfare for citizens in Nigeria has been that of disappointment ( Kalu, 2004: 528-544; Ake, 1995, 1-46). This position is common with most scholars on democracy when it comes to the case of Africa but worse still that it has been more of a critical response to the experience with democracy based on normative ideals of democracy and western standards. For instance Kalu has argued that democracy in Africa is unstable and this is mainly because of absence or weakness of institutions rather than than the state per se. The logic here is that institutions are meant to provide the basis for collective action while the state's responsibility is that of integrating these actions in ways that will enjoy legitimacy. To a large extent the absence of these institutions is also the very factor that explains the state's unwillingness or inability to do its responsibility of integration.

Institutions such as the civil society organizations, independent judiciary, and political parties, regular free and fair elections, to mention but a few, provide avenues through which citizens can demand accountability from leaders. Accountable leaders can generally directly or indirectly contribute to improvement of welfare of citizens.

In the case of Nigeria, viewing it from a time-series between 1999 and date, the institutions emerged but remained essentially weak in terms of response to the political, economic and social needs of citizens. For instance, electoral institutions created to manage elections have been unable to permit substantial involvement of citizens in the electoral process. Effecting a regime change through the ballot box has then been difficult for citizens.

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The purpose of this article is not so much only about explaining why democracy seem to have failed in Nigeria, but to do so in relation to how its unique variation neglects the welfare of citizens within the framework of the “intrinsic importance of political participation and freedom in human life;” the instrumental value of keeping politicians responsible and accountable; and the relevance of the constructive and strategic role democracy may play in the formation of values and in understanding of citizens’ needs, rights and duties (Kalu, 2004).

One of the expectations of many Nigerians when elected political leaders emerged in 1999 in sixteen years after military dictatorship was the improvement of their already worsening economic and social conditions. Personal economic circumstances of unemployment, shortage of food, public safety, lack of clean water, inadequate health care, poor income level, and more, were on the sky high, negative on citizens (Lewis, Bratton, and Alemika, 2001:36). Several years today, it seems that many are wondering how the governments have addressed basic national and personal economic problems in the country with poverty still very much prevalent. Incidentally, performance of politicians within the period is being questioned over their role in improving the welfare of citizens, and a consequent low rating of performance of democracy. The question is, is democracy neglectful of citizens’ welfare in Nigeria? If yes, why is it so?

One of the problems of this paper is the seeming difficulty in connecting democracy and welfarism in Nigeria. For one, the Nigerian case does not quite fall into any discourse on the linkages, especially as a political concept associated with how liberal democracy and economics are articulated to bring about social progress. As a form of governance, welfarism, existing or desired, is about democracy that is sensitive to the human condition, economically valuable, environmentally friendly, historically and culturally relevant, by which social equality is also elevated (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2005). Secondly, how relevant is the concept of welfarism to the Nigerian case as an explanatory variable? The concept is characteristic of the

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democracies of North American states of the United States and Canada; Western Europe and the Nordic European countries. In those countries, the welfare state is articulated with democracy, although outcomes are unique in some ways for each of them in terms of type of societies, democratic processes, citizens' behaviour, expectations, political behaviour of elites and political participation (ibid.) We are also worried about using the concept of *welfarism* to articulate democracy as a mechanism for social progress in the case of Nigeria, for a further reason of the lack of empirical basis for the establishment of this linkage.. Apparently, any debate or discourse on these linkages within the context of Nigeria, especially among politicians amount to mere some sort of rhetoric. This thinking spurred the choice of the topic of this paper and the argument that democracy neglects welfare of citizens in Nigeria. Both liberal and social democracy and economics are part of the welfare state paradigm, but can the Nigerian variant contribute to the value of this paradigm? The objective here will be to be able to theoretically and empirically justify the argument that democracy in Nigeria neglects welfare of citizens.

The welfare state, as practiced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century western Europe and North America, emphasized the collective good. Labour activism, socialism and leftist parties were all contributively to defining the welfare state (ibid.) In short, welfarism meant the strong intervention of the state in defining social security and protection of citizens from the excesses of the market.

Incidentally, notions of strong intervention of the state, today suffer retreat. Rising arguments of minimal role for the state, manifested in the various privatisation and structural adjustment policies of countries, as in the case of Nigeria now appears to have become the dominant practice. Meanwhile, the rationalities of the forces of demand and supply appear to be questionable given existing outcomes of state policies meant to directly impact welfare of citizens, such as petroleum pricing policies and sale of public refineries.

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Can a welfare state function without democracy? Some have argued that democracy functions independently of other realms such as economic rights. This contradicts the argument that democracy should wear a social character in the sense of being a ble to extend democratic values into the “ social and economic domain to ensure that the economy and society actually serve democratic purposes such as greater social and economic equality, social justice and individual security (Plant, 2002250-267). This process requires potential political forces such as the civil society as well as the institutions to create and to maintain democracy.

Democracy apparently is fundamental to the functioning of a welfare state. Does it mean Nigeria is not a democracy? It is irrelevant to think that way if we contextualize Nigerian variant of democracy within the parameters of social forces that ought to shape or even create and maintain the welfare state. The point is that the state or political elites in Nigeria appear incapable of creating the welfare state without the democratic environment of large space for the input of the civil society and general mass participation of citizens both in politics and governance. For instance, Labour, a historically relevant instrument for the creation and maintenance of the welfare state, in the case of Nigeria seems to have suffered serious politicization. In the early years of the current civil regime, it took up serious policy issues concerning petroleum pricing. Its resistance to frequent rise in the price of petroleum products was commendable, in respect to the over all implications for the welfare of citizens. On other equally serious issues such as the elections in 1999 and 2003, Labour appeared comatose.

## **6. Empirical Analyses**

The task in this section is, first to demonstrate with data how *undemocratic democracies* is negative on citizens, and second, to demonstrate how democracies that depend on rent other than taxes from citizens are more prone to unresponsiveness to welfare needs of citizens.

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SN	Variables measured	Excellent	Good	Above Average	Poor	Examples
1.	Access to water and electricity	3%	5%	12%	80%	Public utilities
2.	Access to health care	0%	5%	15%	80%	Availability of drugs; number of citizens per doctor of medical programme in some states
3.	Provision of public amenities	0%	10%	20%	70%	Construction of roads; funding of education;
4.	Workers attitude/activism towards democracy	0%	15%	5%	80%	Ability to check excesses of politicians; demand for accountability from politicians;
5.	Participation in	0%	10%	20%	70%	1999, 2003

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	voting					and 2007 elections;
6.	Participation in governance	0%	10%	20%	70%	Involvement of citizens in decision making;
7.	Free and fair elections	0%	5%	5%	90%	Rigging,- manipulation of the electoral process;
8.	Behaviour of politicians	3%	5%	12%	80%	Good governance in terms of provision of basic amenities; accountability to the public;
9.	Utilization of federal allocation to states and local government	3%	5%	12%	80%	
10.	Access to education	3%	5%	12%	80%	
11.	Economic performance	0%	45	45	10	Inflationary trend; growth



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						rate
12.	Response to public need	3%	7%	10%	80%	Natural disaster; internal refugee situations; poverty alleviation; food shortage; scarcity
13.	security	0%	0%	5%	95%	Public safety; assassinations and armed attacks; commitment of the police and its activities towards prevention of crime

**Source:** survey conducted by one of the authors on 200 persons drawn from the students, lecturers and households at the University of Port Harcourt, choba, between 5 and 23 of August,2006.

Several years ago, it was unusual for an existing regime to peacefully handover to another within the context of military autocracy. Over the years, since 1999, Nigeria

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seems to have now passed from a country of people with fears of military coups to the one with civilians in control. To that extent, Nigerians agree that the country is a democracy. The quality of democracy in terms of citizen participation in the succession processes, such as in the procedures leading up to regime change has been assessed to be far below what is normal of democracy, at least in the sense of citizen involvement in the determination of successors. The 1999, 2003 and 2007 set of elections those ushered politicians into offices were flawed, with massive rigging by politicians.

The welfare implications of such flawed procedures have been well captured by critics of procedural democracy who have already traveled the same road from both neo-Marxist and pluralist perspectives (Brettschneider, 2006: 259-267; Therborn, 1986, 132-156). *Proceduralist* insist that fair procedure that guarantee participation by the majority of citizens in a democracy will produce legitimacy and the public good. This thinking creates a normative problem in the case of Nigeria, seeing that outcomes of elections, which is an important test of democracy constantly throws up the problems of illegitimacy, accountability and bad governance. Besides, neo-Marxist thinking that liberal democracy is class oriented clearly throws up issues of elitist character of the Nigerian case, where it has come to appear that democracy is for a class other than the majority of the over 140 million people of the country. Over 70% of respondent to questionnaires used for data collection in this study said they never considered it important to vote in aforesaid elections because the outcomes were forgone conclusions.

The social and economic situation in the Niger Delta, where the Federal Government earns from oil extraction \$20 billion annually is despicable. There is one doctor per 82,000 people in the region. Only 30 and 27 percent of the population have access to electricity and safe drinking water respectively. Only 7 percent of the population has access to telephone, while about 70 have never used telephones. Incomes and consequent welfare have not risen for the poorest 20 to 40 percent of the country in spite of relative economic growth. The welfare effects of malnutrition, disease, inadequate water, low educational levels, high infant

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and child mortality rates, and depressed longevity statistics are worthy of note( Little 1990:2). According to the International Monetary Fund, IMF, the inflationary rate for Nigeria among countries in the West African sub-region in 2004 stood at 15.8 per cent. It was second to that of Guinea which was 16.6. What this implies is that, though growth of the economy has improved in terms of national income, the poor is yet to feel the impact of that growth. The question is, why is there still so much poverty in the midst of plenty?

The multi-layered governance structure, constitutionally engineered to allocate resources on per cent share to the different levels of Federal, State and local governments, for sure has meant huge financial outlays since 1999. But to whom has this benefited at the state and local government levels? In short, what does the present democracy do or fail to do about the welfare of Nigerians? It seems that the amount of federal resources, got mainly from extraction of oil, distributed and managed by politicians at the state and local government levels have been used more for personal interests of politicians than for the public welfare.

Indeed, for the purpose of writing this paper, 80% of total of 200 citizens of Nigeria ( resident in the Niger Delta) , who responded to questions negatively on identified indicators of welfare provisioning by the governments in Nigeria (see table 2). Performance of democracy in terms of delivery of basic public goods such as security, human rights, utilisation of allocations from the federation account to the states and local government, poverty alleviation, and so on were poorly rated. Democracy is said within the period 199-2006 not to have adequately addressed basic welfare issues of the poor though reforms in the economy were acknowledged to be productive.

As noted by Southhall (2003:2), democracy is sought for its promises of economic progress as a form of the second wave of liberation. The first wave of democratization was for liberation from colonialism. The second is for liberation from poverty. While it is easy to endorse this economic dimensions to the enthronement, stability and general performance of democracies, the experience in Nigeria as

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much as in Africa shows little relevance of identified indices (Diamond, 2004) of a liberal democracy, to which by inference many African leaders have desired, even if in degrees, to bear the identity of real democracies.

The Nigerian case clearly falls short of the behavioural ideals but if by a simple classification of democracy in terms of military and non-military regimes the country falls quite conveniently to be designated as democracy. It is not a pure democracy (Diamond, 2004) given what democracy has been defined to be in this paper.

Welfare of Nigerians remains the unwritten contractual desire of citizens in the business of politics between politicians and them. Unfortunately, the perception of many is negative and unsatisfactory in the seeming neglect of this holy and desired fulfilment of this aspiration. Poverty is much a product of natural disasters as much a product of wrong undemocratic and repressive policies of government (Tarshys 2004: 12, emphasis mine) The use and abuse of governance in much of these years of democracy is vividly reflected in the level of poverty that still prevails among many of urban and rural dwellers. Government initiatives for the reduction of poverty were rated as failure by respondents (see table 2).

A central problem of democracy in Nigeria is a seeming conspiracy of the elites (politicians) against citizens. The seeming common perception of the state as an instrument for accumulation of wealth among political elites has negative effects on welfare of citizens. All citizens have formal political rights but all citizens do not have equal opportunities and the basic conditions to exercise those rights. In other words, citizens lack the substance to exercise those rights. For instance, the constitution guarantees equal rights to all qualified citizens to vote and be voted for in elections. Appropriation of this right by individuals or political parties in opposition to incumbents has meant violent resistance from some of the incumbents. While their material conditions have worsened, social and economic advancement which democracy promises have been elusive. Politicians then utilized their privileged positions to exercise their political rights though in twisted ways. Inequality is

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usually the right concept to describe the gap between the material conditions of the politicians and the citizens.

The issue of welfare of citizens, of course points to the idea of good governance. Good governance in Africa has been rare, but, conceptually it is directly connected to social, political and economic progress and outcome. Indeed literature that emerged in much of the 1980s and 1990s were skeptical of the possibility of existing developmental state, or at least suggested the impossibility of the developmental state in Africa (Mkandawire, 2001), essentially because of bad governance of politicians. It is apparent that democracy has not provided institutional and behavioural conditions for good governance in Nigeria, at least it appears that both have not assisted each other. This fulfils the fears of many who have been concerned with, within the context of liberal democratic ideals, the conditions under which democratic institutions can contribute to developmental governance (Alence, 2004). Indeed, good governance means the effectiveness of governments in responding to citizens needs.

Taking the Niger Delta states and local governments as examples of how the governance deficit has impacted the welfare of citizens over the years but with a focus on 1999 to date, lack of good governance seems to be the greatest cause of poverty and generally declining economic conditions in the region. As noted by the United Nations Report on the Niger Delta (2006:5):

Governance is very central to achieving meaningful development outcomes. The effectiveness of governance, especially at the local government level, is an issue of serious concern. At the core of promoting effective governance is the urgent need to institutionalize the practices of accountability, transparency and integrity to guide the flow of development resources at all levels.

There has been predominantly, absence of infrastructure in more than half of the states and local governments of the region since 1999. One respondent in addition to his views on the questionnaire argued that the poor in Nigeria is marginalized at the level of planning,

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formulation of policies and implementation. There exist a deep sense of marginalizations for the poor, especially from the areas so designated as Niger Delta, where Nigeria's oil revenue are derived from. Rural poverty seems to have remained a major feature of the average local community in the Niger Delta, as much as in several other communities in the Nigeria in terms of access to basic necessities of life such as portable drinking water, electricity, good roads, health facilities and public safety. To address rural poverty, basic ingredients of a human development approach must include access to land and water resources, robust agricultural inputs and services by way of extension and research services, participatory development methods, equity and civic engagements with the processes (ibid.) At least, a comprehensive socio-economic progress of citizens in the rural areas require all of these and more. That, bad governance, where corruption, maladministration and seeming total neglect of the welfare needs of citizens in the Niger Delta by federal, state and local elites (politicians) is widely acknowledged (United Nations,2006; Ikelegbe,2005;) In short, the statement in the United Nations' Report on the Niger Delta that the region suffers serious administrative neglect speaks volume on the extent of neglect of citizens' welfare in Nigeria. For an oil economy like Nigeria, with over 90% dependent on oil as a source of revenue, a threat to the oil sector should be of serious implications to the well-being of the entire citizenry if every citizen had equal access to the resources of the state.

Closely associated with bad governance in Nigeria is the issue of corruption. Literature yields the assumption that democracy has minimal impact on economic performance but has direct influence on corruption in democracies while citizens suffer worse situations in non-democracies (Kriekhaaus and Lusztig, 2006). The reason borders on the inability and rights of citizens to evict non-performing and corrupt politicians. My observation and general data on the 1999 and 2003 set of elections in Nigeria clearly showed extensive exclusion of the Nigerian voters. The election monitoring team of the European Union and several non-partisan nongovernmental organisations that monitored those elections commented negatively on the voter turn-out.

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Nigerian voters appear to have been incapacitated from exercising their rights to vote as formally required of liberal democracy. They lack the substance to exercise that right in the face of determined effort by politicians to secure power outside the liberal democratic procedural. The level of violence, associated with those elections scared many away. For some, winning parties and politicians were foregone conclusions, that voting was not necessary. Unemployed young men and women were recruited and armed with sophisticated guns to work as 'thugs' for politicians. They maimed and killed opposition groups, some of whose seeming only available option was to withdraw or organize counter thugs. These thugs were young men and women with an informal mandate from politicians to destroy all opposition. Then, politicians won elections in 1999 and 2003 without votes from voters. They achieved this through manipulation of the electoral process at the levels of formulation of rules, establishment of election management bodies, conduct of elections and adjudication. They fear losing elections through liberal competition. They want all uncertainties associated with liberal democratic elections removed. Thugs, then, were useful to them at each of those levels. For instance, assassinations of opposition political elites and bureaucrats have been common. Assassination of other politicians during and after elections has also been common. All of these, have created fear in ordinary citizens and prevented them from appearing physically at the polling boots to cast their votes or even stay on effectively on the opposition. Winning elections without the input of voters has created a strong sense of pride and uselessness of voters to securing power in local political elites. It has destroyed all sense of accountability that liberal democracies promise, by which the welfare of citizens can indirectly be delivered. At least, the fear of losing election by being voted out if existing crop of politicians do not perform well is said to be capable of generating accountability necessary for good governance. One can imagine politicians of dominant political party or group(s) in present democracy bit their chests before aforementioned elections of victory before the votes were counted. Liberal democratic electioneering process removes all feelings of such certainty about victory in elections, mainly because of the power of the voter in a free and fair

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election. Since politicians know that voters in Nigeria are not directly relevant or determinants of their victory at the polls, it has also been logical to argue that voters lack the power to change politicians that do not perform. They are unable to evict bad leaders who hurt the economy. Apparently, it is the mass of citizens that bear the greatest brunt. Their well-being is less considered in governance. This condition in Nigeria supports Kriekhaus and Lusztiq's argument that democracies have indirect and insignificant contribution towards economic progress that bring improved living conditions to citizens. How then can citizens overcome poverty and live valued dignified lives?

The link between democracy and welfare of citizens in Nigeria is directly connected to the character of development practice of politicians. The income-centered development paradigm characteristic of the country does leave out the poorest of the poor. That approach has been damned (United Nations, 2006) for its inability to improve the welfare of Nigerians, especially the seriously neglected local communities, as in the Niger Delta. Both the state and local governments should be the appropriate levels of government in which the peoples' input in the development process should be most sought because they are closest to the governments. The income-centered approach has only intensified poverty. The approach neglects the specific needs of the people, taking it from the top to the bottom. The human-centred development approach, now advocated by the United Nations for the Niger Delta, takes as a matter of priority, the needs of citizens to be the building bloc of social and human transformation. Such needs also cannot be determined unilaterally from the angle of the operators of the state only. That tradition, as in the imposition of development on citizens, have turned out to be the bane of development, since most of such imposed development strategies have only being ploys for corruption and draining of the resources of the state.

Democracy, since 1999 in Nigeria appears to have failed to address the problem of development from the dimension of human centered approach. Worse still, is the source of revenue for the development pattern that have characterised governance in Nigeria. Dependence on the oil



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resources by government over these past years and now for the funding of the state has had real implications for the quality of governance. The Welfare of Nigerians would improve if the government were more dependent on domestic taxpayers for their financial resources. This argument has been generalized for all rent-seeking states in the developing world ( Moore 2004:297) To be sure, emerging from the rentier state theory is the proposition that oil rentier states have certain features common to all of them that make democracy difficult to take root (Ibid.). Three framework of the theory that fits into the Nigerian situation are : that the Nigerian state does not rely on the taxpayer for income and accordingly is relieved of its democratic obligation to the taxpayer; rentier states are autocratic and lack the social structure that encourage democratic opposition. Nigeria, Algeria, Libya and Angola have these characteristics. The logic is that, accountability, so required in democracies, is rare in democracies that depend most on rent for their financial resources. Nearly all the countries endowed with oil have this problem. It can actually be argued that the taxpayer will be more courageous to demand accountability from the government when the government derails, or fail to do something about citizens' welfare. This thinking provides insight into answering many questions about governance in Nigeria and other countries of the third world (Ibid.) A critique, to that thinking, might be, that because all literature on democracy in Nigeria yields the assumption that liberal democracy is not entrenched, as such, the institutions and behaviours of the various populations-voters and political elites are still far short of expectation.

**Table2: Development of macroeconomic fundamentals (2000-2004)**

2000	2001	2002	2003		2004
Growth of GDP in %	5.3	4.6	3.7	5.0	5.5
Export fob in US\$ bn	21,4	17,9	16,9	22,2	27,7
Import fob in US\$ bn	10,1	12,3	13,1	14,4	14,8
Inflation in % (CPI)	6.9	18.9	16	12	15

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Gross domestic investment in % of GDP (excluding grants) <sup>c</sup>	17.7	20.1	23.3	N/a	N/a
Government revenue in % of GDP (excluding grants)	45.4	48.7	40.7	N/a	N/a
Unemployment in %	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Budget deficit in % of GDP	-2.5	-4.9	-5.0	-1.3	-2.2
Current account balance in billion \$		3.3	0.9		-0.7

*Source: EIU Country Report August 2004; EIU Country Profile 2004*

## 7. Neglect of Citizens' Welfare

If a regime, democratic or authoritarian, neglects the peoples' welfare, the consequences are usually diverse, political and socio-economic. Apparently, the performance of democracy in terms of its stability is also dependent and conditioned by it. The neglect of citizens' welfare in Nigeria represents threat to freedom. There is a semblance of what can be described as the autocracy of the elites, where, in most cases in the political processes, the political elites in power or seeking it do not respect basic rights of citizens.. This section argues that the neglect of citizens welfare has two basic implications for democracy: it degrades the human condition, and democratic institutions; and, secondly, it defines the conflict structure in some segments of the Nigerian system. Yet the neglect of welfare by democracy does matter, in respect of its integrity and performance.

Initial failure of democracy in Africa to bring social and economic progress was explained severally, but to be remembered is Ake's, whose explanation for democracy's neglect of welfare of citizens is based on his critique of the Eurocentric development paradigm, as in the failure of development strategies to address the human condition within the context of liberal democracy. He argues that politics within the context of liberal democracy has prevented social progress in Nigeria, as much as in other

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countries of Africa (1996:4). The whole idea of addressing the welfare of citizens ought to be linked directly to the overall development of a country in all sectors. In that sense, a rising economic profile of a country ought to, by logical extension translate into improvement in the living conditions of citizens. Unfortunately, it is not so. The problem borders on governance, on how present character of the state and its operators might have actually constituted an obstacle to development. It is for this reason, perhaps that Ake has argued that the state in Africa has a narrow social base. Nigeria has recorded a steady rise in national income over the years( thanks to oil money) without a corresponding improvement in the living conditions of Nigerians. Liberal politics and economics in Nigeria, though transitional, lacks any human centredness. By that, I mean the giving of priority to the needs of the poor in the formulation and implementation of policies. Development strategies adopted by leaders, are more externally determined than internally, in the sense of how and what ultimate purpose they serve in terms of affecting the well-being of people. This is not strange, considering the history of Nigeria, a former colony of Britain, whose legacies include neo-colonial economic and political links to the country. The colonial history that produced these leaders and development strategies in Nigeria, as much with other counties in Africa, are not without interests. The conflict of this interest, for example as in the functioning of the economy and democracy and their outcome on the poor lies partly, the reasons for the neglect of the welfare of the poor.

The welfare of citizens also suffer neglect because of a seeming crisis of identity and lack of purpose for civil societies. Having fought very hard to enthrone a civil regime after many years of military dictatorship, a role vacuum seems to have appeared for the civil societies in the years after the lowering of the flag of military rule in 1999. Confirmable that there are so many existing civil society organisations doing one work or the other, the absence of a peoples' organisation outside the realm of the state, with defined mission to check the excesses of political elites has large-scale implications for the functioning of democracy and welfare of citizens. Of course, this also depends on the

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political environment and nature of political leaders, most of whom use violence as means to achieving their ends. For one, Labour as earlier mentioned, deserve some self appointed role in governance, but many believe it can compromise with politicians on some national issues. Some workers whom I have interacted with concerning the influence of labour towards improving the living conditions of workers are also sceptical about the extant leadership of labour to cause changes in the polity that affects the poor positively.

Many Nigerians believe that the government under the present civil democracy neglects welfare of citizens inspite of colossal amount of national revenue accruing from oil extraction. In short, from 1999 to June, 2006, a total of about N11 Trillion was allocated to the three levels of government in the country. The federal government alone has had N5.6 Trillion of that amount. Elected officials, who have managed this amount seems to have very little to show for this amount( Sunday Vanguard, August 13 2006: 13). Among the Niger Delta states, Rivers State alone had had 12 percent, highest, compared to what the other states of the region , put together have collected. For the month of June, 2006, Rivers State alone collected N23.246 billion. That was also the highest in all 36 states of the federation. Paradoxically, per capita income in Nigeria in 2006 stood at \$1,030, something far removed from the case of Botswana and Mauritius which stood at \$8,000 and \$12,000 respectively. The Gross Domestic Product in the 1990s stood at 2.9%. It has since 2000 risen to 4.6% but remains essentially short of expectation when compared with countries like Botswana whose GDP is 5%.

Security in terms of public safety is one area that the state seems to have failed (Fresh Facts, 2007; see table 2). An astonishing 95% of sample of respondents to questionnaires indicated that the government has done poorly in the area of providing security. Provision of security and safety of lives and property are basic indices of good governance.<sup>i</sup> Consequently, ordinary citizens and patriotic citizens, who quite naturally would have been interested in politics, are now being scared away by “hoodlum politicians.”

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Hoodlum Politicians are those without requisite democratic cultural traits needed for a stable and developmental democracy. Developmental democracy is change oriented in

terms of distribution of welfare and guarantees of individual and collective rights.

The political class conceives security in terms of threats to source of revenue for the state. Liberal politics appears to be a threat to them, essentially because of their deficient democratic cultural credentials.

Many also believe that provision of basic social amenities is below expectation, with implications for the living conditions of Nigerians. Since emphasis on Agriculture dropped due to the expansion of the oil economy and shift away in government policy, citizens seem to have become more expectant from the government for survival. Politicians have concentrated limited development projects in their villages of origin, leaving out others, especially where their oppositions come from. For the Niger, oil has destroyed much of historical farmlands, leaving the rural people helpless, with resultant grievances partly being manifested in the current level of violence.

Politicians seem to lack needed democratic culture of dialogue and non-violent approaches to resolving differences. Often, they resort to the use of violence. <sup>ii</sup>

The behaviour of the political class leaves much to be desired, looking at the negative identity of *thuggery* and determination to secure political power by all means. The madness can reduce if the state were not dependent on oil for revenue. If corruption of politicians were fought by citizens in their demand of accountability for revenue generated from taxes on individuals. How many Nigerians really pay true tax, except those in the employment of the state. Even when they pay, how much is truly remitted to the accounts of the government? Although without statistics to show, impressions got from the activities of bureaucrats at the finance units responsible for collection of taxes and those of politicians who manage allocated funds, suggest the devastating effect of a corrupt state.

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Ekewe (1998:176-178) has rightly articulated an aspect of the explanation to the neglect of citizens' welfare by the political class under the supposed liberal democracy in Nigeria, in his argument that the state exist to serve its interest. For a state that must protect its interest, which of course is different from those of the citizens' which liberal democracy extols, the question of an objective and selfless mobilization of the resources of the state towards the welfare of citizens should not be strange. One responded to questions in the questionnaire stated that the government in Nigeria has become more withdrawn in spending towards the public except for the cost of administration, benefiting the political class. According to him the effect is negative on the weak in society. Another responded faulted the privatization programme of the government stating that the process lacks integrity. For instance labour accused the government of selling the Eleme Petrochemical Company to an indigenous firm, rumoured to belong to powerful politicians. Labour claimed that Nigeria will be losing about N100,000,000 daily for selling the company for a paltry sum. The overall welfare implications for labour is part of the problems of democracy and liberalism. Governments all over the world have waged war against labour, and that of Nigerian does not constitute an exception, at least for now.

Nigerian variant of capitalism enjoys protection from the state. What is of issue is the effect of this protection to the living conditions of citizens. Whereas, the more advanced democracies such as Canada and the United States have constructed interventionist mechanisms in checking and controlling the excesses of economic actors under the market economy, those of Africa, and Nigeria lack even the political will to do it because of vested interest. Evidently, the state puts capital first and the people last. This is why cut in government spending and social services are without unemployment benefits, public job creation schemes etc. or some form of social security.

Elections have been badly conducted and managed in Nigeria (Adejumobi,2000:59-73; Nwokedi, 1994; Momoh, 1997). Rigging, brigandage and violence are easily identified features of the election process. Elections continue to provide the logic for liberal democracy. It is the nucleus of

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a democracy founded on consent of the people. Indeed, the opportunity and existence of a culture of free and fair regular elections is the most cherished properties of democracy for which failure to accomplish has painted any claim of democracy uncertain. Yet, the Nigerian experience tilts towards explanations of elite theorists who argue that elections in a African democracy is the affair of a few political class. Election is therefore not done by voters but by this class of few that do not represent the interest of all. The Nigerian situation is not far from this scenario. The implication is that the functions of elections in Nigeria with particular reference for the 1999, 2003 and 2007 years have played negative roles to the welfare of Nigerians. This is reflected in the perception of respondents (see table 2) on the issue of elections in Nigeria. Both empirical and theoretical literature supports this perception concerning elections and democracy in Nigeria (see for example, Olaitan, 2005:43-50; Omele, 2005:69-91; Odofin, 2005:93-111; Nnadozie, 2005:112-131).

### **Implications for Democratic Theory**

The Nigerian experience, in the thinking of many in the democracy discourse, would necessitate designing alternative indices for assessing democracy in relation to citizens' living conditions, depending on the strand of conceptualization of democracy one upholds. The problem of conceptualization is age-long in this discourse. Three scholars who might claim to be studying democracy in the U.S, Britain and Nigeria, will of course be studying three different systems or variables if the key variables are not commonly understood. Yet this is not so easy, as this difficulty has led many to accept the transitional democracy classification for countries such as Nigeria. This is why many will quite comfortably, assert that Nigeria is a democracy even if basic universally accept criteria are not met. So, what implication can that have on democratic theory today? Is there any basis to problematise known assumptions of democracy based on its popular indices?

First, it should be noted that whatever system that can be described as democracy consists in the procedure and outcome of the political processes. Procedurally, both social

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and liberal democracies are strands, though the later appear to have become more universally desired. Liberal democracy incidentally is what comes to one's mind in studying transitional democracies and the developed democracies of North America, Western Europe and the Nordics. Some have also associated the welfare state with liberal democracy, perhaps because of its idealist character of having the ability to limit state power. The limiting of state power conceptualization of liberal democracy derives from the normative strength in the participation of citizens in politics. Perhaps this idea is the reason for the usual but classical and obsolete description of democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. Contemporary sense of it is in regards to representative democracy. Even so, participation as an underlying component of liberal democracy underscores the lack of justification for the exclusion of citizens in governance. Citizens' participation at the level of voting and regular consultation at the level of policy formulation and implementation are normative features of liberal democracy. Therein is the idea of citizens' power to limit the power of the state against democratic rights of citizens. It is worth noting at this point that though liberalism and democracy are now usually joined to describe contemporary normative democracy, the two words represent different histories and ideals ( Kane 2002:104) In short, liberal democracy is a hybrid of values that emerged from the republican and liberal traditions ( Carter and Stokes 2002:I) Whereas republicanism emphasizes active role for the individual in governance, liberalism prescribes only minimal role for the individual, at the level of voting, while the elites assume prerogative of governance. Respect for democratic rights of citizens as a component of the liberal democracy therefore can be manifested in the constant culture of tolerance of opposition from the public by the government. Empirically speaking, the Nigerian situation is far from achieving this ideal. The level of political violence since 1999 clearly point to the intolerance of opposition on the part of incumbent political elites and political parties. To explain the character of the Nigerian political elite, in respect to its intolerance of any opposition, there is need to be reminded that the Nigerian political elite is a product of education and institutions that detested opposition (Obi, 2004)



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Effective participation in liberal democracy also means the guarantee of free and fair elections. Literature is pessimistic and negative on measuring liberal democracy in Africa and Nigeria in particular from this criterion because of observed level of fraud and violence in the process. Political elites also think that citizens' role or participation should be limited to voting during elections. Consequently there has been serious decline in the participation of the bulk of qualified voters in elections, especially for Nigeria where electoral violence has so much characterised the process. Procedurally, elections are meant to guarantee power to voters to effect change of bad regimes and confer legitimacy on regimes. Therein is also the role of limiting the power of the state by democracy.

Liberal democracy, as an outcome of the political process, emerging from the republican tradition, gives importance to the public interest and common good. It also gives key role to citizen participation in political decisions. Republicanism has its origins in the Arthenian polis and ancient Rome. This encompasses economic, social and political rights, as against liberal thinking of lack of interest in social distinctions or inequality among citizens, and emphasis on obedience to the law as a primary citizen right and responsibility. Citizens are only, in the liberal thinking, to vote to elect representatives without further role in governance, while their individual political rights will be protected.

The experience of Nigeria points less to both perspectives of liberal democracy, as a hybrid of the republican and liberal traditions. Although this is not strange, and peculiar to Nigeria, since even established democracies of the west continue to experience changes that also point them away from normative liberal democracy. For instance, the intervening variables of terrorist activities can explain many of government actions and policies that appear contrary to basic freedoms of movement and speech.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian experience contributes less to the pool of empirical cases of the convergence of liberal democracy and provision of citizens' welfare. It is rather a

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case of divergence, seen from the behaviour of political elites at all levels of government. At best, while Nigeria carries the label of a transitional democracy, for which most of the criteria of liberal democracy are overlooked though not justified, a summary of basic critique of liberal democracy as found in literature is also necessary here. Liberal democracy gives the impression that the state acts in the interest of all, but practice actually portrays the state as an independent agency with ends, interests and goals different from that of the public. In spite of the political benefits that liberal democracies promise across the board, its present institutions are functioning unsatisfactorily in terms of delivering what citizens need in terms of social stability and economic security (Carter and Stokes, op.cit). Transnational flows, referred to as globalization is connected to this decline in the usefulness to liberal democracy, at least for its emphasis on putting more and more limits on government intervention on society and economy. This is contradicting normative liberal democratic values and practices as vehicles for achieving the collective good.

It seems that civic engagement and apathy that now characterise many liberal democracies is undoing the functioning of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy requires maximum mass commitment and identification with a political community but that is fast eroding in democracies. The problem of citizenship has emerged to compound the problems of mass participation in politics for many these democracies.

The inequality associated with liberal <sup>1</sup>democracy; tend to also disfigure normative architecture of democracy for all democracies. It is elitist, giving formal political rights but lacking substantive rights to participate in politics for the ordinary citizens. Indeed, a point of criticism for advocates of social democracy is the economic inequality and injustice. Only a few with the economic wherewithal are able to

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on original version presented at an annual Nigerian Political Science Association congress held at the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt in 2006.

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exercise such formal political rights provided by liberal democracy.

Contemporary democracy discourse yields less potency for answering basic questions of how economic transformation of citizens can be achieved through the means of democracy in all countries that claim to be, or even described as democracies. If the liberal democratic ideal is different from the functioning of the institutions of democracy, what account for the case of countries of like Nigeria? And how correct can one be to classify Nigeria as a democracy while it neglects the welfare of its citizens?

The need arises for a construction of a variant of democracy with wide social base. Such a system will not hold sacrosanct all idealist liberal criteria but will consider the unique circumstances of the country in terms of cultural differences as well as ethnic differentiation in the delimitation of representative units. Most importantly, of a system that will have the people as the centre of politics and administration, accountable to them and responsible to them. A system, where economic advancement and social justice will supersede individual greed.

## **8. Conclusions**

If, as we argue, that democracy in Nigeria neglects the welfare of citizens, problematising liberal democracy becomes inevitable, first based on the assumptions of liberal democracy concerning welfare of citizens that has failed to come through for many transitional democracies. Suspicious of citizen participation in governance and general civic engagement with government, the Nigerian political elite appears to have been without apparent vision of economic transformation that will translate into welfare of Nigerians. Governance at the local level seems to have been the most guilty, as local political elites acquire properties and struggle to remain in power. Without regards and any sense of accountability to citizens, the struggle for power among politicians at the state and local government appears to be the struggle for control of the oil resource and revenue. Dependence on oil and not tax from citizens for revenue

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makes Nigeria typically a rentier state with the following implications for the welfare of citizens: Insulation of political leaders from accountability to citizens; lack of transparency in public expenditure, lack of incentives for civic engagement in politics and ineffective bureaucracy.

The task for leaders in newly emergent civil democracy in Nigeria since April 2007 is to address these basic issues of governance that make democracy responsive to welfare needs of citizens to change the character of democracy in Nigeria.

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<sup>i</sup> The World Bank criteria for good governance includes security and safety, accountability, transparency, predictability, openness and prevalence of the rule of law. A



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recently released index of African governance ranked Nigeria 37 out of 48 countries. See Fresh Facts Monday to Sunday 9, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup>The list include: Mr. Sunday Ugwu, killed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 1999; Lambert Saturday Dagogo, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2001; Odunayo Olagbaju, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, 2001; Chief Bola Ige, Minister of Justice, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2001; Janet Ola, PDP leader, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, 2002; Dele Arojo, PDP gubernatorial aspirant for Lagos state, killed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 2002; Philip Olorunnipa, chairman of Kogi State Electoral Commission, killed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, 2004 and Luke Shigaba, Chairman of Bassa Local Government, killed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 2004. The others are: Dikibo, Vice chairman of PDP south-south, killed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 2004; Marshal Harry, former PDP stalwart who decamped to ANPP, co-ordinator south-south presidential campaign of ANPP, was killed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 2003 in Abuja and very recently was the assassination of Funsho Williams, a gubernatorial aspirant of PDP in Lagos, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 2006 (Ogundiya and Baba 2005:369; Newswatch, 2006).