

Lagos: City report

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Abstract

This paper applies the African Cities Research Consortium's (ACRC's) holistic analytical framework, comprising of politics, systems and development domains, to explore the complex dynamics of contested political systems and the impact of the rapid urbanisation of Lagos, Nigeria. The study applies this framework by, firstly, examining Lagos's place within the national "broad dispersed" political settlement. Lagos is found to have a "narrow concentrated" political settlement at the city level that significantly influences development and the prospects of developmental reform. Federal–city relations and frictions are found to be a key dynamic shaping urban development. A broad and nuanced approach to the political economy of Lagos's urban systems demonstrates profound inadequacy in the coverage, access and quality of various systems, including transportation, water and sanitation, energy and waste management. The systems analysis gives the historical, political and governance context that shape the systems, and explores the risks and vulnerabilities that the city of systems produces. Inadequacies in energy provision, in particular, are shown to undermine the structural transformation of Lagos. ACRC's Lagos research has focused on four domains: safety and security; housing; structural transformation; and neighbourhood and district economic development. The report summarises the key issues and actors for each domain and explores how they are shaped by the political settlement and how they interact with the city of systems. The report also explores the crosscutting issues of climate change, gender and finance. The report and analytical framework identify many avenues for future research and action, highlight some of the most pertinent issues to arise, and make recommendations that emerge from the research.

Keywords: Lagos, Nigeria, urbanism, informality, infrastructure, governance, reforms

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Executive summary

Introduction

This study – commissioned by the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) – explores the complex dynamics of contested political systems and the impact on the rapid urbanisation of Lagos. It draws on ACRC's holistic framework for analysing urban development in Africa, which has three integrated components – politics, systems and development domains.

The study applies this framework by, firstly, examining Lagos's place within the national “broad dispersed” political settlement (Section 2), and the balance of power at city level (Section 3). It then moves on to the political economy of Lagos's urban systems (Section 4), explaining the patterns and challenges regarding basic urban services. Section 5 summarises the four domains analysed in Lagos: safety and security; housing; structural transformation; and neighbourhood and district economic development.

Methodology

Each domain and the city of systems took a tailored methodological approach to the research. These were broadly based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative, desk-based and empirical research. The research for the city of systems took place in two phases, beginning with an extensive literature review of key academic and grey literatures on the various city systems. The findings then informed a concise mapping note of each city system, interrogating the various dynamics at work. The domain research combined desk-based research with several interviews with key stakeholders, questionnaire surveys, as well as a series of stakeholder workshops and focus group discussions with local communities and with groups. For more detail, please see each domain section.

Nigeria's political settlement

Nigeria has experienced relative political stability at the national level since the end of military rule and transition to electoral democracy in 1999. The durability of the political settlement that has sustained the Fourth Republic rests on several factors that are largely internal to political contestation in Nigeria. Firstly, though the military was an overtly significant political player in earlier periods, its role in national politics has lessened (though not entirely ceased) over the last two decades. Secondly, while ethnic and religious mobilisation has remained politically salient, electoral rules that effectively require Nigerian political parties to maintain representation and draw their leadership from across the major ethno-religious groups and geographies have reduced the permanent association of political parties with distinct ethnic, geographic or religious identity groups. These institutional innovations and the “sharing formula” for distributing oil revenues have prevented a strict “winner-takes-all” dynamic from taking

root, instead ensuring that no major regional or religious group is permanently excluded from power at the national level.

Elites participate in politics primarily through interactions with political parties to protect interests, advance their agendas and achieve personal fulfilment or realisation. The inability of political parties to raise funds internally makes them prone to being hijacked by party godfathers, who manipulate the selection of candidates. As such, a noticeable feature of Nigeria's party system is the fact that party leadership across the board remains nominal and subservient to such godfathers. The current president, Bola Tinubu, has long been seen as the godfather of Lagos, selecting each of its governors in the Fourth Republic. This diminishes internal party democracy and political inclusion, making political parties in Nigeria institutionally weak, structurally defective and operationally fragile, thus failing as institutions with the capacity to uphold the tenets of democracy.

City-level power balance

"Lagos" refers to multiple overlapping administrative jurisdictions. There are several longstanding contentious disputes over jurisdictions of land and governance in Lagos between the federal and Lagos State governments. Lagos includes two further pseudo-recognised administrative units, namely traditional councils and community development associations (CDAs). The awarding of customary titles, and creation of new ones, has become a political tool in the last 20 years, and title holders can also hold electable political appointments and other influential roles in government. The governance of Lagos has been a source of conflict between two opposing political forces since the middle of the 20th century, which has shaped Lagos's political landscape.

Tinubu and the governors who succeeded him have, to varying degrees, been united by the ideal of transforming Lagos into "Africa's model megacity and global economic and financial hub" (MEPB, 2013). While earlier versions of southwestern progressivism emphasised welfarism and social mobility, its contemporary instantiation is more frequently articulated within individualised frames of self-reliance and entrepreneurship (Roelofs, 2016); no longer directly aimed at wider social mobility or at urgently ameliorating oppressive social conditions, but rather translated into a "megacity" vision of transforming Lagos into a premier investment destination. APC conceptions of the beautification and modernisation of the city have entailed a slew of highly violent slum clearances, the banning of modes of informal transportation, and support for the development of upper-middle-class and elite housing enclaves and real estate projects, most dramatically reflected in Eko Atlantic, a private district built on 5,000,000 m² of reclaimed ocean land aiming to be the "Dubai of Africa" (Fernelius, 2020).

The neoliberal governance regime at work since 1999 has politically and economically empowered Tinubu's loyalists. This is also currently playing out on the federal stage, where Tinubu is now president. Without representation in mainstream political parties, critical perspectives on the APC's "megacity" vision are largely confined to parts of

academia, the NGO sector and social movements and community-level organisations such as the Federation of Informal Workers (FIWON) and Nigerian Slums/Informal Settlements Federation – reinforcing dynamics of the political settlement.

City of systems

The rate and extent of population growth and urbanisation have vastly outstripped the state's capacity to provide adequate infrastructure or achieve meaningful structural transformation. The city of systems and various domain research showed that people have been coping with the significant deficits in systems and domains through individual actions, community responses and by primarily relying on non-state and private actors for the provision of and access to infrastructure across the systems and domains. The inability of government at all levels to deliver adequate public services and housing is both a defining characteristic of the city's systems and a considerable source of tension between state and local government, and state and federal government, which has historically been a fractious relationship. There is also tension between the state and private service providers and with citizens, leading to frequent acts of contestation. Despite this, state actors remain a strong force and central reference point for governance. This is achieved through the enduring structure of the political system, where political and other elites secure influence and benefits through mutual interests and, at times, collusion, for instance between state planners, police and landowning families in forced evictions (Morka, 2011; Amnesty International, 2013) or the systemic corruption in the electricity sector (Roy et al., 2023). The state exerts its force through threats and shows of violence, in the form of forced evictions of lower-income informal settlements, violent harassment of informal traders and violent and petty harassment of the general public, particularly on public transport.

The state of energy poverty in Lagos affects all domains and is a defining characteristic of life in Lagos. Unpredictable electricity from the grid has led to a reliance on diesel generators and invertors/battery storage for those who can afford it. This places a heavy cost burden on individuals and businesses, limiting their ability to improve their housing and enterprises, and degrades the environment with exhaust and noise pollution. Poor drainage and the lack of centralised sanitation are also pervasive deficits, leading to frequent and extensive flooding (compounded by unregulated construction and increased rainfall, due to climate change) and unsanitary living conditions. These deficits affect all sections and spaces of society, from elites to the lowest earners, however spatial, social and economic inequalities are reinforced by accessibility that is defined on income. For instance, a wealthy household will afford a high-capacity generator, battery storage and invertors, a private borehole for water alongside bottled drinking water, and other infrastructure, such as a private car, access to private healthcare and education, access to finance and household security measures. Wealthy neighbourhoods often have powerful residents' associations (RAs) that will, for instance, coordinate road surfacing and drainage, street security and lobby for neighbourhood interests. CDAs, RAs and landlords' associations are prevalent throughout Lagos, yet their activities and effectiveness vary from association to

association and rely on the time and energy of their members, which can constitute significant personal investment (Lawanson and Oyalowo, 2016).

Informality

The level of informality in Lagos is extensive, providing crucial economic possibilities for low-income and marginalised residents. According to the International Monetary Fund, the informal economy employs approximately three-quarters of the state's 7.5 million labour force. Apart from the economic dimension, patterns of informality exist in the areas of housing, health, food and many other sectors in Lagos. The pervasiveness of informality in Lagos is largely due to stringent bureaucracy, inaccessibility and unaffordability of systems in the formal spaces. While the government seems to tolerate much informal activity, it is frequently targeted for “clean ups” or removal as part of political campaigns and flexing of power.

Actors

Non-state or parastate actors, such as traditional rulers and trade unions, are a forceful part of Lagos's political settlement and straddle formal and informal spaces. Their roles and activities usually outstrip their formally acknowledged mandate. Traditional rulers derive their power from claims to landownership, which is acknowledged in the Land Use Act, and are influential in the provision of informal land and housing, which is mostly tolerated but not a part of formal urban planning (as traditional landowners only have official purview over rural areas). The activities of land grabbers and *omo onile*, both legitimate and illegitimate, are characteristic of Lagos and a cause of much strife. The power and influence of traditional rulers vary significantly, depending on the value of their lands. For instance, the landowning families of Lagos Island and Victoria Island are big political players with robust legal defences, whereas the families of less urbanised parts of Lagos State, such as Epe and parts of Ikorodu, are vulnerable to exploitation by the state and developers. The transport workers union (NURTW) is a forceful political actor, yet the actions of its fee-collecting agents, the *agberos*, are infamous and cause much contention with citizens.

CDA interventions are often at a micro scale, deployed by community mobilisation of resources, and can be of low quality and unsustainable in many instances. Incidentally, the CDAs are also highly politicised and oftentimes their leadership is selected based on political affiliation and ethnicity. They become quite influential during the political seasons in the distribution of patronage and the campaign for preferred candidates of the state's political elite. Wealthy neighbourhoods often have powerful RAs that will, for instance, coordinate road surfacing and drainage and street security and lobby for neighbourhood interests.

The private sector has seen a rapid expansion in recent years, gaining increasing social and political leverage as a result. Domestic investors and foreign firms have increased their activities, in collaboration with the state government via public–private partnerships (PPPs) for infrastructure provision, facilities management and outsourcing

of government services. These range from privatisation of state hospital laboratories, pharmacies and mortuaries to tax collection. This has resulted in increased commercialisation of social services and gradual gentrification of many hitherto low- and middle-income communities. This has not correlated with an increase in the quality and extent of service provision.

Domain summary: Safety and security

There are still high levels of violent crime in Lagos in the form of robbery, assaults, thefts, and so on and there is also an increasing rate of building collapse, fire incidences and floods. The lingering security challenges in the form of armed banditry, kidnapping and armed robbery are a major deterrent to investors. As is usual, safety and security is managed both through state and non-state means. In addition to the various state agencies, non-state and community efforts, such as vigilante groups, have emerged to complement and extend the reach of the police force. A major weakness of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is that it is federally constituted and needs to be devolved to state and local levels to increase its effectiveness. The primary structural drivers of insecurity and safety issues include: visible network of organised youth criminal groups; political elites' undue influence on security agencies, thriving violent secret cult groups, urban identity politics and political affairs (which often pitch different ethnicities, tribes and religion against one another) as well as inadequate emergency preparedness by the city government, who often lack resources and capacity. The relocation of internally displaced people in and around Lagos has caused some tensions, with the creation of slum housing and trust issues with local communities. The main enablers of insecurity in Lagos are: youth unemployment, inequality and worsened socioeconomic and living conditions. Lagos's vast expanse of porous borders, elites' desperate political affairs and patronage of violent youth gangs (cult groups, *agbero*, "area boys", among others) as political enforcers, corruption in the management of safety and security issues, and the absence of a strong state regulatory framework for non-state actors further enable insecurity in Lagos. The threat and fact of police brutality is a significant issue and led to the largest singular youth protest against the police in the history of Nigeria in 2020.

Regarding disasters, Lagos residents are prone to diverse kinds of disasters and emergency incidences, including building collapse, flood, road accidents and fire, the incidences of which are increasing. Women, girls and children and persons with disabilities are most affected by violent crime, conflicts and disaster risks. This is compounded by the fact that most violent crimes in Lagos occur at night, and the victims are often people returning home from work or their businesses. Being a coastal city, Lagos is naturally prone to flooding (Adegun, 2023). Climate change is exacerbating flooding, with intensifying rains. The rise in sea level, of up to 1m, due to global warming, is a severe threat to the city.

Domain summary: Housing

Housing problems in Lagos remain both qualitative and quantitative. Much of the housing stock is poor quality with low adherence to building standards and regulations. This is compounded by the state of Lagos's systems, which leads to a degraded urban environment and often unsanitary conditions. The majority of people live in informal rental housing built by individuals or private developers. They vary widely in quality of conditions. Landlords still demand two years of rent in advance, and yearly following, despite this practice being banned in 2011. Due to high demand, landlords have little incentive to maintain their properties. There is a crisis of affordable middle- and low-income housing from the formal public and private sectors. Construction and registration costs are high, and are passed onto the buyer. Mortgages and housing financing are not available to those on low incomes, either in the formal or informal sectors. There is widely acknowledged corruption in the allocation of state-built housing. Co-operative societies that provide loans for procuring assets such as land, and for developing these lands into housing units, could be key in the solution of affordable housing, and coordination of climate-resilient communities. As a low-lying coastal city with poor drainage and increasing rainfall due to climate change, 18% of Lagos is liable to flooding of increasing severity. Waterfront and coastal communities are at higher risk of forced eviction and flooding.

Domain summary: Structural transformation

Lagos is the commercial hub of Nigeria and powerhouse of the national economy. Like many African cities however, Lagos has experienced rapid population growth and rapid urbanisation without corresponding levels of development of its industrial and manufacturing sectors over the last 50 or more years. As such, while urbanisation has brought about a shift of labour from the agricultural sector, it has led to rising services sector employment, with little effect on manufacturing in Nigeria. There is a significant variation in spatial distribution of business establishments in Lagos, with dominance of services sector in terms of share of establishments and employment. Findings show low productivity across spatial distribution and sectors, with the manufacturing sector having the highest productivity gains. Inadequate infrastructure forms a significant challenge to structural transformation in Lagos, particularly regarding electricity provision, the transportation network, the hostile business environment and the problem of multiple taxation

Domain summary: Neighbourhood and district economic development

In the predominance of the informal economy, household microenterprises (HMEs) such as hairdressing, carpentry, confectionary/food processing and vending are vital to the livelihoods of Lagos. They are predominantly run by women. Access to financial credit is absent and/or grossly low for HMEs in Lagos and few operators of HMEs patronise the regular and formal financial outlets, such as the commercial banks. There is much reliance on daily contribution (*Alajo*). A significant number of HMEs do not have any form of formal business registration. Registering with Corporate Affairs

Commission (CAC) is usually “wishful thinking”. Again, inadequate access to and quality of basic services presents a significant challenge to the operation and growth of HMEs.

Overarching analysis

This section reads across the report to draw out some overarching dynamics, revealing interdependencies between and within domains, shaped by politics and in turn shaping urban development. Climate change, gender and finance are key crosscutting issues.

The political settlement analysis, city of systems and the domain research offer a broad and nuanced approach to the analysis of urban development in Lagos. The most important contribution of the report is adding a political dimension to the analysis. This not only takes into account the different scales of government, but also the pervasive informalities within and outside of (yet still related to) the state. The report clearly demonstrates how political and economic entanglements are resulting in unequal urban outcomes that favour some portions of society above others. These ultimately serve to reinforce the dynamics of the status quo and the narrow concentrated political settlement that excludes the majority of people. The domain research has highlighted the importance of seeing interdependencies among the systems and domains, and has highlighted institutional gaps. The city of systems analysis highlighted energy as a core issue that undermines all the domains. The report also highlighted the strength of social infrastructure in Lagos, despite this not being a focus of the government.

The political economy of Lagos is shaped by godfatherism and wealth distribution through personal networks. Without strong institutions and a strong social contract, wealth accumulation has become a “zero sum game” for all levels of society. Practices of so-called corruption are integral to how politics and business functions in Nigeria and Lagos, at all levels. Although vital to how Lagos functions, these practices compound the status quo and inhibit structural transformation. Public spending becomes hugely inflated, and people continue to lack trust in the efficacy and capacity of the state, further weakening the civic contract.

The inability of government at all levels to deliver adequate public services and housing is both a defining characteristic of the city’s systems and a considerable source of tension between state and local government, and state and federal government. There is also tension between the state and private service providers and with citizens, leading to frequent acts of contestation. Despite this, state actors remain a strong force and central reference point for governance. This is achieved through the enduring structure of the political settlement, where political and other elites secure influence and benefits through godfatherism, mutual interests and at times collusion. Various arms of the state exert force through threats and shows of violence in the form of forced evictions of lower-income informal settlements, violent harassment of informal traders and violent and petty harassment of the general public, particularly on public transport.

Nigeria's reliance on oil wealth significantly affects Lagos through the system of federal allocations, even though Lagos State has sought to insulate itself from a reliance on the allocation, through strengthening its internally generated revenue (IGR). Poor federal–state relations, when they are of differing parties, can stymie development projects. However, the increased collaboration between federal and state governments since both came to be dominated by the APC in 2015 has led to some improvements.

The ability to resolve the problems of Lagos is shaped by several key factors: 1) Across the various systems and domains, it is apparent that the local government system is practically moribund in terms of capacity and resources. 2) There is a significant dichotomy between politics and planning, in terms of short-termism and differing agendas between civil servants and politicians, and between different government agencies. 3) The overriding neoliberal agenda of urban development is at odds with the need for pro-poor planning and the existence of widespread informality. 4) The role of CDAs, RAs and landlords' associations as well as, for instance, vigilantes, demonstrate not only their pervasiveness and efficacy, but also their relationship with and tolerance by the state. Despite the burden put on people by ineffective state governance, they are still largely excluded from the political settlement. 5) Informality drives Lagos, and an ambivalent, unequal approach is taken by the state. 6) The challenges of and deficits in Lagos's infrastructural systems are inhibiting structural transformation.

Implications for future research and policy

The report and analytical framework identifies several avenues for future research and action. It is pertinent to note that while Lagos has been the focus of wide-ranging research, there are significant gaps in qualitative and quantitative data (Lawanson and Dania, forthcoming).

1. The everyday practices that have emerged from the extensive challenges faced by Lagosians, from providing water to accessing rental housing, serve vital functions to which there is often no credible alternative. As such, unless a viable alternative can be provided, the advantages these practices give to people – no matter how small or unideal – should not be put at risk by any proposed urban development. It is necessary for further research to explore the interdependencies of various infrastructure systems at household, community and city scales across socioeconomic classes.
2. Urban reform coalitions should be insulated from the interference of the state, politicking and political hijacking by reducing oversight from Lagos State Government, and by maintaining CDA autonomy. A deep dive into the politics of urban community development is necessary to provide the empirical evidence to action these recommendations in a targeted manner. This can draw insight from ongoing work on the political economy of Lagos markets by Shelby Grosman and others.
3. To ensure effective policy and project delivery, the civil service must be insulated from changes in government. Civil service agencies must also be insulated from politicking, for instance by appointing only qualified people to head technical units. Until this is achieved, urban reforms must recognise and differentiate between the scales of government, taking into account differing

agendas. A research agenda that unpacks these dichotomies and advances a multiscalar approach to governance and statecraft is urgently required.

4. Recent changes that have been introduced to grant local government more autonomy are causing a lot of upheaval. It appears as though the changes have rearranged the situation but retained the underlying problematic structure, whereby the Lagos State government controls incomes flows and hollows out local government. It is vital that civil society and researchers keep an eye on the implementation of the new legislation and its effects. An empirical assessment of the operationalisation of the local government administrative laws is necessary. As local governments in Lagos vary in terms of efficacy, geography and socioeconomic status, a more grounded approach will be required.
5. The civil sector and researchers must keep a close eye on the adoption and enforcement of climate policies. Further, ACRC can work to highlight community-identified priorities, which often differ from recommendations that emerge from a purely technical analysis of an area's needs. Action research will help to integrate indigenous knowledge systems, local practice and technical knowhow into the climate response.
6. The employment of graduates and more training for artisans would have wide-ranging effects, including improving security by reducing the number of unemployed, unskilled and disenfranchised youth. Differentiated and disaggregated data is needed on different youth groups and how they intersect with urban dynamics and vulnerabilities, such as female youth and violence, youth living with disabilities and accessing urban resources, to mention a few.
7. Solar street lighting would be a crucial and effective strategy, and would especially benefit women and children. How safety and security intersect with practically all facets of urban life will be a good research approach. Furthermore, mapping to identify violence hotspots and priority areas may offer an insight into geospatial characteristics and provide an opportunity for better emergency response and crime prevention through environmental design.
8. The enforcement of existing rental reforms would transform the lives of millions of renting residents. Research that unpacks the dynamics and politics of rental housing, housing cooperatives and the localised housing ecosystems, taking into account issues of land tenure, social identities and finance, will be beneficial for existing structures and plans for regeneration and newbuild housing. A longitudinal study of the impacts and limitations of housing programmes is required.
9. The empowerment of housing cooperatives to move beyond land pooling and acquisition to construction and maintenance would have meaningful impacts on the crisis of affordable middle- and low-income housing.
10. Access to appropriate financing for HMEs would allow businesses to grow and contribute to structural transformation. Research is required to understand existing financial structures and how to catalyse appropriate financing for emerging areas. It is also necessary to undertake studies on how to scale informal businesses at various scales from survival to growth enterprises.
11. Improvements in streetlighting and improvements in representation in leadership roles would significantly benefit women in Lagos. It is critical to adopt a gendered lens in all studies, and to proffer recommendations that target women, children and other marginalised groups. Advocacy and action research that seek to improve women's representation in public spaces are also required.

1. Introduction and overview

Lagos is a bustling “megacity” of rich population diversity and economic base, along the West Africa Atlantic Seaboard. It metamorphosised from being a small coastal village of fishermen and farmers to its present status (Uduku et al., 2021; Oyalowo and Faniran, 2022). It is one of the fastest-growing cities globally, with a population of between 18 and 20 million and an annual growth rate of 6%.¹ Lagos ranks as the eighth largest economy in Africa and contributes 15% of Nigeria’s gross domestic product (GDP) (Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2023). Lagos is an economic powerhouse of Nigeria, contributing substantially to the national GDP, from

Figure 1: Map showing the geographic location of Lagos



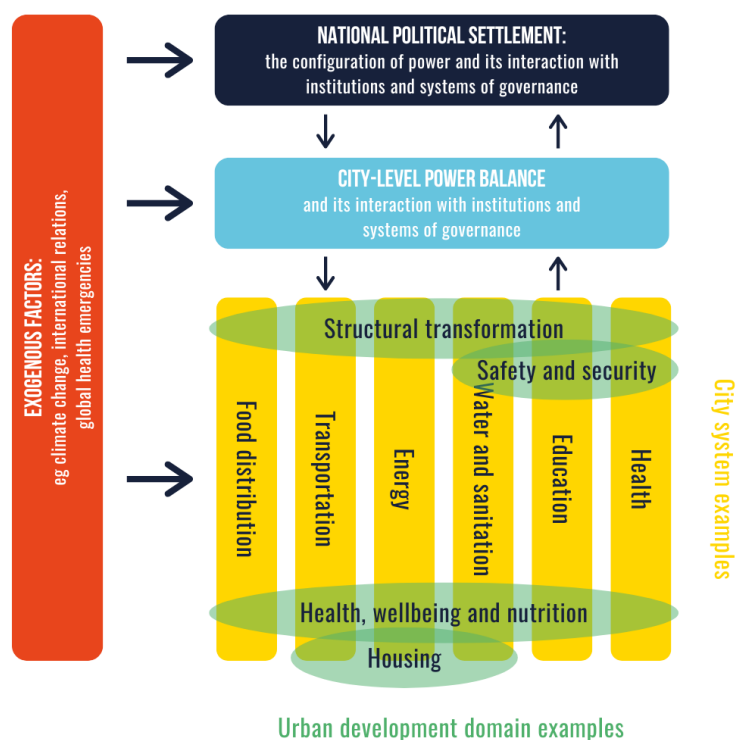
16.5% in 2019 to 23% in 2022 (MEPB, 2024). The absolute size of the economy grew from USD 84 billion in 2019 to USD 124 billion, surpassing the economic dimensions of countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Angola (MEPB, 2024). It has the highest number of microenterprises in the country, with 3,224,324 and 3,329,156 entities in 2013 and 2017, respectively (SMEDAN and NBS, 2013; 2017). Lagos is a strong regional centrality, drawing in people from all over the country and West African region (Sawyer, 2023). It also exerts a global cultural presence in film, fashion, art and music.

This study – commissioned by the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) – explores the complex dynamics of contested political systems and the impact on the rapid urbanisation of Lagos. It draws on the ACRC’s holistic framework for analysing urban development in Africa, which has three integrated components – politics, systems and development domains. The politics component uses “political settlements” theory to model how power is configured at the national and city levels, and then analyses how these configurations of power shape (and are shaped by) urban development processes in the given city. The systems component analyses the functioning of the key systems (composed of physical infrastructure and people organised in various ways) that sustain and/or improve urban life in the city. The domains component looks at some of the distinct fields of discourse, policy and practice that have formed around complex, intersystemic development challenges in the city, and analyses how the actors (political, bureaucratic, professional and popular)

¹ See: www.unep.org/nigeria-0 (accessed 14 April 2025).

engaged in these fields collaborate and/or compete for authority. Figure 2 gives an indication of how these three components come together.

Figure 2: ACRC's conceptual framework



The study applies this framework by, firstly, examining Lagos's place within the national "broad dispersed" political settlement (Section 2), and the balance of power at city level (Section 3). It then moves onto the political economy of Lagos's urban systems (Section 4), explaining the patterns and challenges regarding basic urban services. Section 5 summarises the four domains analysed in Lagos: safety and security; housing; structural transformation and neighbourhood and district economic development.

The report shows that the rate and extent of population growth and urbanisation have vastly outstripped the state's capacity to provide adequate infrastructure or achieve meaningful structural transformation. The city of systems and various domain research show that people have been coping with the significant deficits in systems and domains through individual actions, community responses and by primarily relying on informality and non-state and private actors for the provision of and access to infrastructure across the systems and domains. The report highlights that across the various systems and domains, the local government system is practically moribund in terms of capacity and resources. The state is found to exert strength but be relatively ineffective with regards to urban development. This is significantly related to a profound dichotomy between politics and planning, whereby politicking and short-termism undermine the long-term planning that is needed to address the inadequacies of the systems. The level of economic informality in Lagos is also extensive, providing crucial economic possibilities

for low-income and marginalised residents. The state takes an ambivalent approach to informality, tolerating most but regularly targeting low-income areas and activities, shaped by a neoliberal urban agenda. The political economy of Lagos is characterised by godfatherism and wealth distribution through personal networks. Although vital to how Lagos functions, these practices compound the status quo and inhibit structural transformation. Public spending becomes hugely inflated, and people continue to lack trust in the efficacy and capacity of the state, further weakening the civic contract.

1.1. Methodology

Each domain and the city of systems took a tailored methodological approach to the research. These were broadly based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative, desk-based and empirical research. The research for the city of systems took place in two phases, beginning with an extensive literature review of key academic and grey literatures on the various city systems. The findings then informed a concise mapping note of each city system, interrogating the various dynamics at work. The domain research combined desk-based research with several interviews with key stakeholders, questionnaire surveys, as well as a series of stakeholder workshops and focus group discussions with local communities and with groups. For more detail, please see each domain section.

2. Locating Lagos within the national political settlement and governance structure

To understand urban development and prospects for developmental reform in Lagos, we need to understand who wields power and how they use it. City-level power dynamics do not exist in a vacuum; they are typically influenced by what we call the country's "political settlement". A political settlement is a common understanding among a society's most powerful groups about the basic rules (or institutions) of the political and economic game. Those rules create opportunities or benefits for "insider" groups, often to the exclusion of "outsiders".

Political settlements can be analysed in a variety of ways, but we focus on two main dimensions: power configuration and social foundation. The power configuration describes the relative strength of groups loyal to the leader (collectively referred to as the "leader's bloc") vis-a-vis groups that oppose the leader or are only contingently loyal. Crudely, where the leader's bloc is strong, we say that power is "concentrated". Where, by contrast, the leader's bloc is weak, we say that power is "dispersed". Power concentration, interacting with other variables, shapes the ability of the government to make and implement decisive, consistent urban development policy.

The social foundation describes the breadth and depth of groups that are “insiders” to the settlement.² Where a relatively large proportion of the population are insiders, we describe the settlement as “broad”. Where, conversely, only a relatively small proportion of the population are “insiders”, we describe the settlement as “narrow”. The social foundation, interacting with other variables, will shape the degree to which governing elites are committed to “inclusive” urban development policy.³ The current political settlement of Nigeria can be characterised as “broad dispersed”.⁴ Much political analysis to date has had a focus on the national rather than the subnational scale. In this section, we analyse how this political settlement has historically shaped urban development in Lagos, and how it shapes the city’s prospects for reform.

2.1. Nigeria’s broad and dispersed political settlement

Nigeria has experienced relative political stability at the national level since the end of military rule and transition to electoral democracy in 1999. Since then, the country has held presidential elections every four years – its longest unbroken stretch of elections with peaceful transitions of power in a wider history punctuated by repeated coups and brief periods of alternation between military dictatorship and civilian-led republics. The durability of the political settlement that has sustained the Fourth Republic (1999 – present) has been anchored on both 1) a federal system allowing a broad coalition of ethnoregional and religious elite to retain subnational power in 36 states, and 2) the presence of oil revenues collected by the federal government and disbursed to state governments based on an agreed upon “revenue sharing formula”. Concurrently, a substantial share of the national population – comprised especially of women, young people, minority religious communities and the over 40% of Nigerians who live below the poverty line – has remained “marginal” to the political settlement. Representing the most significant challenge to the settlement, the mosaic of armed groups that have emerged in response to oil-related grievances, jihadism, or ethnonationalist aspirations, continue to face a combination of co-optation and repression. Climate-change-induced conflicts are also on the upswing, such as the farmers–herders disputes in Central Nigeria which are linked directly to the shrinking of Lake Chad.⁵

The durability of the political settlement that has sustained the Fourth Republic rests on several factors that are largely internal to political contestation in Nigeria. Firstly,

² To be an “insider”, a group has to satisfy two criteria: 1) it is potentially powerful enough, acting alone or with others, to make significant trouble for the leadership and/or significantly affect struggles between political blocs; and 2) the leadership chooses to manage this potential threat predominantly by “co-opting” the group, and thereby incorporate it into the settlement, by channelling benefits of some description to it. Groups that either lack the power to affect struggles in this way, or that are predominantly repressed by the leadership, are “outsiders” to the settlement.

³ For further details see Kelsall et al. (2021).

⁴ This is described in the ACRC inception report as a situation where elites are inspired to deliver broadbased social development benefits but struggle to maintain stability and consensus, causing them to fall back on clientelism and populism.

⁵ See: <https://africarenewal.un.org/en/magazine/drying-lake-chad-basin-gives-rise-crisis-lake-chad-basin-gives-rise-crisis> (accessed 14 April 2025).

though the military was an overtly significant political player in earlier periods, its role in national politics has lessened (though not entirely ceased) over the last two decades. The integration of a generation of ambitious former military leaders into the electoral process has played a part in this, by securing the buy-in of the armed forces in Nigeria's current democratic project. Indeed, both the founding president of the Fourth Republic, Olusegun Obasanjo, and Nigeria's immediate past president, Muhammadu Buhari, were retired military generals and former heads of state. Secondly, while ethnic and religious mobilisation has remained politically salient, electoral rules that effectively require Nigerian political parties to maintain representation and draw their leadership from across the major ethnoreligious groups and geographies have reduced the permanent association of political parties with distinct ethnic, geographic or religious identity groups. The move of Nigeria's capital from southwest Lagos to centrally located Abuja in 1983 reflects this need for even representation. Electoral rules also require that a presidential candidate must secure a majority of the vote in at least two-thirds of the states to be elected president. This formal mandate of ethnoregional pluralism, known as "federal character", has also been strengthened by the informal norm of "zoning" practised by Nigeria's two main political parties. Under zoning, key political offices, particularly the presidential and vice-presidential ticket, are expected to alternate after two terms to the regional and religious group (for example, Christian/Muslim, North/South) that has been out of office. In addition, the ability of opposition parties to maintain strongholds in some Nigerian states – and the fact that under Nigeria's "fiscal federalism", each state receives a monthly allocation from federal revenues largely derived from oil proceeds – has meant that the major opposition parties, despite failing to gain power at the centre, are incentivised to go along with, rather than seek to overturn the political status quo. These institutional innovations and the "sharing formula" for distributing oil revenues have prevented a strict "winner-takes-all" dynamic from taking root, instead ensuring that no major regional or religious group is permanently excluded from power at the national level (Bogaards, 2010; Husaini, 2020; Kendhammer, 2010).

While these rules have established a broad political consensus among the national elite, the most profound challenges to the existing political settlement have arisen from various regional and local militia movements organised around historical grievances, religious or ethnonationalist ideology, or opportunism. Such movements have included the variety of militia groups that have emerged in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta since 2003⁶ to challenge the state's exploitation of the region's oil resources and the degradation of its natural environment. In Northern Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has gained traction since 2008, though the underlying reasons are not as distinct as in the Niger Delta.

⁶ While there have been agitations by local communities in the Niger Delta over the negative environmental effects of the oil industry in their areas, the organised militias emerged more recently, significantly from around 2003 to violently push back on oil sector activities by bombing pipelines and in some cases kidnapping oil workers.

Despite the relative stability, Nigeria is still wrestling with the legacy of a protracted period of military government (Nwankpa, 2022).⁷ Characterised by authoritarianism, power centralisation and the suppression of political dissent, Nigeria's military regimes weakened democratic institutions, undermined the rule of law, and exploited ethnic and regional divisions for control, resulting in widespread human rights abuses (Siollun, 2018). In the post-military era, power struggles among ethnic and regional groups and persistent issues of weak institutions have shaped Nigeria's political culture, favouring strong central leadership and limiting power devolution to the regions. Despite some progress post-transition, the legacy of weak institutions, human rights violations and ethnic and regional tensions continues to affect governance and the effectiveness of public administration (Nwankpa, 2022; Campbell and Page, 2018).

Furthermore, Nigeria's political landscape is deeply influenced by the enduring struggle for access to and distribution of the country's oil wealth. Members of the political elite, consisting of politicians and government officials, international and domestic oil corporations, the Nigerian military and security forces, and diverse ethnic and regional groups, all vie for a more significant portion of the oil wealth. This intense competition contributes to corrupt practices within government, bureaucracy and other institutions (Lewis, 2009 Falola, 2021). However, the military legacy and competition for oil wealth affects Nigeria's regions differently and is less prominent in Lagos and the southwestern region.

Despite the shift from military-dominated governance to civilian rule in Nigeria, the fundamental dynamics of power contestation and distribution have seen limited change at the national level (Nwankpa, 2022), though again this affects the regions differently. Specifically, aspects such as violence during elections, the pervasiveness of corruption and the expansion of organised criminal activities continue to shape the political landscape in ways that deviate from democratic norms (LeVan, 2019).

Elites participate in politics primarily through interactions with political parties to protect interests, advance their agendas and achieve personal fulfilment or realisation. It is only with the backing of a political party that individuals can be democratically elected to leadership positions in Nigeria. However, party primaries and conventions often merely serve to affirm a prior elite consensus – the process for selecting candidates is often fraught with controversy, violence and litigation. In fact, the outcomes of party primaries are usually determined by imposition, consensus and compromise (LeVan, 2019). Consensus becomes a problem when it is orchestrated by a party's godfathers, who see themselves as the owners and financiers of the party. The inability of political parties to raise funds internally makes them prone to being hijacked by party godfathers, who manipulate the selection of candidates. As such, a noticeable feature of Nigeria's party system is the fact that party leadership across the board remains nominal and subservient to such godfathers (Albert, 2005; Falola, 2021). The current president, Bola Tinubu, has long been seen as the godfather of Lagos, selecting each of its governors in the Fourth Republic. This diminishes internal party democracy and

⁷ The following analysis of Nigeria's legacy of military rule is taken from Starc Card et al. (2024).

political inclusion, making political parties in Nigeria institutionally weak, structurally defective and operationally fragile, thus failing as institutions with the capacity to uphold the tenets of democracy (Babalola and Abba, 2017; Egwim, 2022).

In addition to these internal dynamics, key external factors have contributed to shaping the political settlement in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Perhaps chief among these is the global price of oil, which Nigeria contributes to shaping through its membership of the Organization of Oil Producing States (OPEC), but which in turn has a profound effect on the capacity of Nigeria's federal government to fund budgetary spending, since oil income accounts for nearly 50% of federal revenue. Nigeria's reliance on oil export means that fluctuations in the global oil price shape the extent to which ruling elites can execute their agendas, either in development terms or in respect to their capacity to quell dissent and placate oppositional forces in society.

2.2. Lagos: History, politics and governance

The area now designated as Lagos State had been inhabited by various fishing people groups since the 15th century. It was set up as a war camp (called "Eko") by the Benin Empire in the 16th century and came under the rulership of Benin Empire descendent Kings (*Oba*) of Lagos until it was bombarded by the British in 1851 and declared a colony in 1861. With the amalgamation of the previously distinct colonial territories of Southern Nigeria and the Northern Nigerian protectorates in 1914, Lagos was declared the colonial capital of Nigeria. It continued to be administered by the central government through the late colonial and early independence periods, until it was declared a state in 1967, with the restructuring of the Nigerian federation into 12 states. In 1983, the seat of national government was moved away from Lagos to Abuja. The move, conceived after Nigeria's civil war, was intended to shift Nigeria's seat of political power away from the southwest, an ostensibly "neutral" geographical location not within the fold of any of Nigeria's major ethnic groups. While this eventually transferred core federal political and administrative institutions to Abuja, Lagos remains the commercial capital of Nigeria and its largest port city. It is also a strong regional centrality.

2.3. Overlapping governance

"Lagos" refers to multiple overlapping administrative jurisdictions. The urban area of Lagos State is referred to as Lagos Metropolis, although its contiguous urban area far exceeds the state boundary into neighbouring Ogun State (Oyalowo, 2022). Lagos State, the smallest state of Nigeria, is coterminous with "Lagos Megacity" (Obono, 2007). There is multiplicity in the level of governance in Lagos State. The level of governance spans the entire state, comprising 20 local government areas (LGAs) and 37 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs). While the LGAs are constitutionally recognised sub-national units headed by elected chairmen, the Lagos State governor in 2003 (Tinubu) created the LCDA as an additional 37 local administrative sub-units, taking the total number of Lagos's local councils to 57. Though governed by elected leadership and funded by the state government, the LCDAs have yet to receive federal

constitutional recognition, and so are not funded through the federal allocation. Instead, Lagos State redistributes the federal allocation and other revenues across all 57 LGAs and LCDAs. This has important consequences for the effectiveness of local government in Lagos (Onifade et al., 2024), as shall be discussed. As in practice, Lagos State is governed through the 57 LGAs and LCDAs, this report will refer to this level of local government as LGA/ LCDA. The structures of LGAs and LCDAs in Lagos are currently under reconsideration once again, in light of the federal government's recent decision to grant full autonomy to local governments.

2.4. Contentious jurisdictions

There are several longstanding contentious disputes over jurisdictions of land and governance in Lagos between the federal and Lagos State governments. From its days as the nation's capital, the federal government retains claims of ownership over some key tracts of land and infrastructure in Lagos. Until the election of President Buhari in 2015, Lagos State and the federal governments had been of different political parties, creating tensions and frequent disputes. As the economic powerhouse and by far the most populated state of Nigeria, federal allocations to Lagos State have always been contentious. Allocations to the states are made on the basis of population. Lagos State claims its population to be near 25 million people; however, the federal government for a long time made allocations based on the last national census of 2006, which put Lagos State's population at 9 million, itself a contested figure at the time.⁸ Census taking is very contentious in Nigeria, as population size and other factors determine some access to federal allocations.

2.5. Pseudo-governance: Traditional councils and CDAs

Lagos includes two further pseudo-recognised administrative units, namely traditional councils and community development associations (CDAs). Any organised community over 20 buildings on a street or in a community can apply for recognition as a CDA, and they vary greatly in strength and scope. There are over 4,000 CDAs in Lagos. Nominally, there is a community development committee at the LGA/ LCDA level that reports to the state government on CDA activities. The state has over 93 traditional rulers, who serve under the Oba of Lagos as custodians of customary subdivisions of their Family's land. The awarding of customary titles, and creation of new ones, has become a political tool in the last 20 years, and titleholders can also hold electable political appointments and other influential roles in government. Constitutionally, the state or local government gives the traditional ruler the staff of office, depending on the class of the title. The local government is also mandated to give the traditional rulers a stipend from 5% of the allocation to them.⁹

⁸ See: www.prb.org/resources/objections-surface-over-nigerian-census-results/ (accessed 8 April 2025). In 2013, a recount in 14 LCDAs was ordered by the census tribunal. See: www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/2006-census-tribunal-declares-lagos-exercise-illegal/ (accessed 8 April 2025).

⁹ See: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202410100218.html> (accessed 8 April 2025).

The traditional structure does not neatly correlate to the LGA/ LCDAs, although there is often a dominant customary Family in an area, for instance the Onitire of Itire LCDA. While the role of the Oba and traditional rulers is primarily symbolic, they do participate in local dispute resolution as well as manage the administration of Family lands, which in reality far exceeds their symbolic role. It is important to note that, unlike all other states in Nigeria, all land in Lagos State was declared as urban after the Land Use Act (LUA) 1978 and so, due to the wording of the LUA, all land is vested under the control of the state governor and none is under the control of local government, and communal land tenure systems do not apply. This has important implications for the formal role of traditional authorities in Lagos State. The presence of traditional landowners in the Land Use Act of 1978 has embedded contradictions over urban land ownership that lead to frequent confusion and disputes. For instance, even though communal land tenure systems are formally recognised only in rural areas, as defined by Nigeria's LUA, consent from a traditional landowner is required for all tenure documents even in the all-urban Lagos State. As such, traditional rulers, particularly prominent landowning Families, in Lagos continue to exercise an influence over land in many of the now urbanised or peri-urban areas of the city and hold political sway.

2.6. Contested party politics

The governance of Lagos has been a source of conflict between two opposing political forces since the middle of the 20th century. As the seat of colonial and then federal government between 1914 and 1991, Lagos was governed by either a coalition of largely northern and eastern political parties during periods of civilian rule, or by northern-led juntas during periods of military dictatorship. On the other hand, by 1954 and throughout the First Republic (1954-1966), the Lagos town council was controlled by the Action Group (AG), led by Obafemi Awolowo. The AG was, at the same time, the dominant party in the predominantly Yoruba Western Region and through most of its history remained the main opposition party in the federal parliament (Fourchard, 2010). In the 1950s, in one of its earliest moments of overt conflict with the central government, the AG used the town council to oppose the colonial state's plans to clear slums in Lagos Island – then the heartland of AG support in Lagos – on public health grounds and in order to create room for larger roads. This angered the government, who claimed that the AG was “playing politics with epidemics”.

The granting and withdrawal of Lagos's status as Nigeria's capital has been another longstanding source of conflict between national and southwestern political forces. In the initial debates over where the capital of Nigeria would be located post-independence, the AG was again pitted against the colonial state and dominant federal coalition parties. The AG demanded that Lagos be incorporated into the Western Region and Nigeria's capital sited elsewhere. However, hesitant to relinquish the growing industrial and port city completely to the AG, the colonial state and dominant parties in the federal parliament ultimately proved triumphant in their assertion that Lagos should remain the capital. The decision during the era of military rule to move the capital to Abuja emerged in the 1970s amid Nigeria's first oil boom, at which point

the proceeds from oil sales already significantly dwarfed the resources generated from the port city that had earlier been coveted by the nationalists (Peil, 1991).

Following Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, Southwestern political networks tracing their genealogy to the AG – but now rebranded as the Alliance for Democracy (AD) – again returned to power in Lagos with the election of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as governor (then president of Nigeria since 2022). And with PDP in power at the federal level under the Olusegun Obasanjo administration, various conflicts were once again to erupt between Lagos and the government at the centre. The most notable among these was Tinubu's clash with Obasanjo over the federal government's opposition to Tinubu's right to create 37 LCDAs in Lagos state in 2003.¹⁰ Tinubu saw this as a way to engage the grassroots in his overhaul of Lagos; however, the federal government strongly objected. This conflict resulted in the federal government's withholding of monthly allocation to all Lagos state local councils in 2004, substantially reducing the level of funds received by the state. Lagos's success in broadening its local tax base and successfully generating revenue internally is often attributed to this denial of federal allocations, which necessitated alternative forms of revenue generation (Cheeseman and de Gramont, 2017; Fourchard, 2010). Another key bone of contention that has arisen between Lagos and the federal government since then includes a long-running dispute over whether Lagos's inland waterways should be managed by the state or federal government. A recent supreme court judgement has decided in favour of the federal government.¹¹

The emergence of the APC in 2013 – with Tinubu as one of its key architects (see “godfatherism” above) – and its victory at the federal level has contributed to lessening the longstanding tensions between Lagos and the federal government, given that the same party now controls both power centres.¹² For instance, under Lagos's current Babajide Sanwo Olu-led administration (2019 to present), the state managed to enter into a corporation agreement with the federal government that will ensure the joint management of Lagos's inland waterways (Vanguard, 2019), although this has recently been superseded by a recent court judgement. Such an agreement is now being sought for highways and the light rail lines (LSMT, 2024). The collaborations between Lagos and the federal government on the financing of infrastructure projects, such as the Lagos–Ibadan expressway and new light rail line, have all been facilitated by lessened tensions between city and national governments. A case in point is the Lagos Megacity Development Commission that was set up by the federal government during the Obasanjo presidency. Led by esteemed urban planning professor, Akin Mabogunje, the Commission was to see to the effective regional development of the Lagos–Ogun state conurbation. Due to political differences (Lagos – AD and Ogun – PDP), the

¹⁰ See: <https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/court-judgement-as-at-10th-December-2004.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2025).

¹¹ See: www.doa-law.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Reflections-on-the-Supreme-Courts-Judgement-in-National-Inland-Waterways-Authority-3-Ors-v.-Lagos-State-Waterways-Authority-5-Ors-delivered-on-5th-January-2024.pdf (accessed 8 April 2025).

¹² Bola Ahmed Tinubu was elected Nigeria's president in May 2023.

Commission did not see the light of day. With the recent political realignment, an MOU was signed to establish a Lagos–Ogun Joint Development Commission in 2021.¹³

This section has looked at the national political settlement of Nigeria, and the politics and governance of Lagos, showing how tensions between the scales of government have a significant influence on urban development. The following section looks further into the city-level power and politics of Lagos, paying particular attention to local government and the role of actors such as the transport union NURTW.

3. City-level power balance and governance

The APC has controlled the executive, the National Assembly and most state governorships since it came to power at the national level in 2015, with the election of Muhammadu Buhari as president. As the de facto leader of the ruling party, President Buhari exercised a high degree of influence over national political and policy developments, even if often in an understated and languid manner.¹⁴ In respect to the exercise of informal power within the president's bloc, analysts regularly speak of Buhari's "kitchen cabinet" or "cabal", referring to a group of close friends and associates who are thought to offer advice or exercise some measure of influence over the president's decisions.¹⁵ The president's former chief of staff, Abba Kyari, and close friend, Isa Funtua, both now deceased, were frequently cited as wielding an inordinate amount of influence in the corridors of the presidential villa, while Buhari's nephew, Mamman Daura, Kaduna state governor, Nasir El-Rufai, and the attorney general of the federation and Minister of Justice, Abubaker Malami, and secretary general of the federation, Boss Mustapha, are all variously named as part of this inner circle.

The APC was formed in 2013 with the successful merger of four previously regionally based opposition parties, in addition to some disaffected members of the then ruling PDP, who defected to the new coalition. The ethnoregional strongholds that make up the APC's support base were evident in the political geography of Buhari's initial victory in 2015 and re-election in 2019, with most of his support coming from northern and southwestern states. These regions also feature the highest number of APC governors and National Assembly members. Beyond officials with formal elective positions, former governors from well-resourced or politically strategic states remain a prominent source of power in the APC. Within these ranks, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the former governor of Lagos (1999-2007), who was also the APC's successful presidential candidate in the 2023 election, is the most influential.

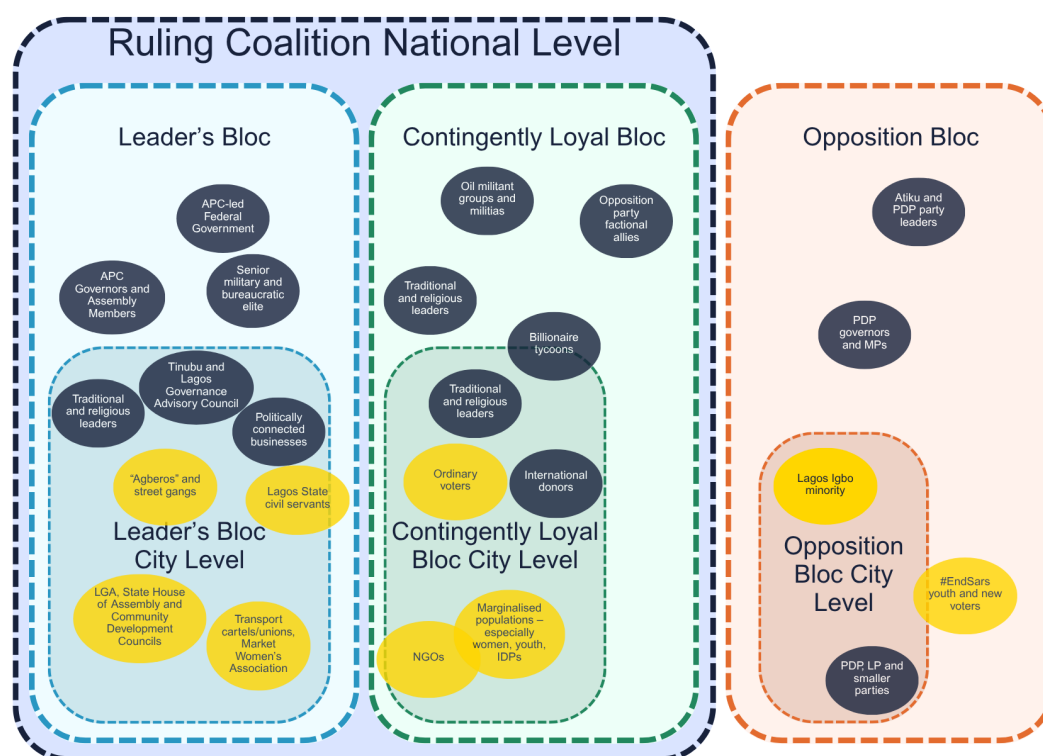
¹³ See: www.nipc.gov.ng/2021/05/26/lagos-ogun-sign-mou-on-joint-development-commission-punch-newspapers/ (accessed 13 June 2025).

¹⁴ President Buhari has acknowledged his stealthy approach to policy and political decisions, claiming that this reflects his having "matured" in his current tenure in office, as compared to the period when he served as a military dictator, which, characterised by a hasty and forceful wielding of presidential power, ended with his removal in military coup. See: <https://newafricanmagazine.com/19751/> (accessed 8 April 2025).

¹⁵ <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2019/12/22/we-dont-have-cabal-its-called-kitchen-cabinet-presidency/> (accessed 8 April 2025).

Leading the opposition bloc (OB), the main opposition party, the PDP, remains powerful, controlling 13 out of 36 governorships and substantial minorities in both houses of the National Assembly (see Figure 3), though it has suffered a series of defections and a loss of national prominence since its historic defeat in 2015. While it has a following in a handful of states in southwest and northern Nigeria, the party's main strongholds lie in the predominantly Christian states in the north-central, southeast and oil-rich south-south. The party's presidential candidate in the 2019 elections, Atiku Abubaker, remains the opposition party's most influential figure, having previously served as vice president and chairman of the national council on privatisation under Obasanjo. Atiku retained the PDP's presidential ticket following an acronymous primary that resulted in the factionalisation of the party and the defection of Atiku's former running mate, Peter Obi, to the then electorally marginal Labour Party (LP).

Figure 3: Main blocs and constitutive groups at national and city levels



Patterns of political and economic governance in Lagos demonstrate various features of the "narrow concentrated" political settlement type, when looking from a political settlement perspective that focuses on the two main dimensions of power configuration and social foundation (see Section 1). The power configuration describes the relative strength of groups loyal to the leader (collectively referred to as the "leader's bloc") vis-a-vis groups that oppose the leader or are only contingently loyal. In Lagos's power configuration the leader's bloc is strong and so power is "concentrated". As we have found that only a relatively small proportion of the population are "insiders" to the settlement, Lagos can be described as having a "narrow" social foundation.

It is important to note that the entire local government system in Lagos State is an appendage to the state government. They are supervised through the State Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs and the budgets are approved by the State House of Assembly. Most of the constitutional mandates have been usurped by state agencies created for that purpose and since the land use charge/tenement rates are consolidated and collected by the states, the LGA/LCDA are effectively incapacitated.¹⁶

The faction of the APC to which Lagos's current governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, belongs has dominated Lagos politics – albeit under different names – since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. While Sanwo-Olu is the de jure head of government in the city – having been elected with 76% of the vote in 2019 – former governor Bola Tinubu is widely seen as the city's major powerbroker. The strong ties between the APC and key social constituent groups, particularly the market women's association (which Tinubu's daughter leads) and road transport workers' unions, were consolidated during Tinubu's time in office. They continue to strengthen the APC's electoral mobilisation, and markets and major motor parks remain key nodes of the APC's grassroots machine. (Fourchard, 2010). The NURTW is a registered national trade union, which functions more like a cartel or "mafia" (Cheeseman and de Gramont, 2017), is allowed to collect daily levies from its members and from other users of public motor parks. All commercial vehicles/buses/tricycles and motorcycles are "members" of NURTW. The levy collection is exorbitant and forcefully collected, and a great source of contention. In return for the autonomy granted the union by the state government, the union chairmen are thought to serve as "providers of thugs recruited amongst union drivers to assist the governor during his electoral campaigns" (Fourchard, 2010; Agbiboa, 2019). Since 2022, the NURTW in Lagos State has metamorphosed into the Lagos State Parks Management Committee, though the operations have not changed. While it is currently an official state agency, this is under dispute.¹⁷

Added to its patronage ties to these social constituencies, the foundation of this faction's longstanding electoral dominance in Lagos rests on its ability to project itself as ascribing to and delivering on a coherent set of aspirations. Tinubu and the governors who succeeded him have, to varying degrees, been united by the ideal of transforming Lagos into "Africa's model megacity and global economic and financial hub" (MEPB 2013). This vision, whose lineage is often traced to the Obafemi Awolowo-led and Fabian-inspired progressivism of the independence era AG party, has undergirded the Lagos governance transition over the past two decades, claiming to progressively transform the city into an example of "effective African governance" (Cheeseman and de Gramont, 2017). However, while earlier versions of southwestern progressivism emphasised welfarism and social mobility, its contemporary instantiation is more frequently articulated within individualised frames of self-reliance and entrepreneurship (Roelofs, 2016); no longer directly aimed at wider social mobility or at

¹⁶ See: <https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/ng-la/2016/ng-la-official-gazette-dated-2016-06-06-no-23.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2025).

¹⁷ See: <https://gazettengr.com/well-appeal-judgement-against-mc-oluomos-park-management-committee-lagos-govt/> (accessed 8 April 2025).

urgently ameliorating oppressive social conditions, but rather translated into a “mega-city” vision of transforming Lagos into a premier investment destination. APC conceptions of the beautification and modernisation of the city have entailed a slew of highly violent slum clearances, the banning of modes of informal transportation, and support for the development of upper-middle-class and elite housing enclaves and real estate projects, most dramatically reflected in Eko Atlantic, a private district built on 5,000,000 m² of reclaimed ocean land aiming to be the “Dubai of Africa” (Fernelius, 2020). While these ideas are most clearly embodied by the APC and Tinubu’s acolytes, they have attained some measure of widespread acceptance, evidenced in the fact that they are not contested by the main opposition party, the PDP, who instead argue that they can more competently deliver the same mandate than the APC (Husaini 2022). The neoliberal governance regime at work since 1999 has politically and economically empowered Tinubu’s loyalists. This is also currently playing out on the federal stage, where Tinubu is now president. Without representation in mainstream political parties, critical perspectives on the APC’s “mega-city” vision are largely confined to parts of academia, the NGO sector and social movements and community-level organisations such as the Federation of Informal Workers (FIWON) and Nigerian Slums/Informal Settlements Federation.

The fabric of everyday life, particularly at the street level, is shaped by the national and city-level political settlement in important ways. Most visibly, Lagos’s long history of conflict with federal authorities and the threat of disinvestment in alternative transportation infrastructure, aside from road expansion in the era of military rule, has contributed to the ubiquity of traffic congestion that has come to be synonymous with Lagos. The political influence of car-owners over other commuters also means that transport infrastructure provision continues to prioritise road construction and expansion over investments in mass transit alternatives, despite the very significant introduction of the BRT system in 2012. However, the increased collaboration between federal and state governments since both came to be dominated by the APC in 2015 has led to some improvements in alternative public transport facilities. The opening of a brand new intercity trainline providing north–south and west–centre connections, the opening of a brand new international airport terminal in Lagos’s previously notorious Murtala Mohammed Airport (both Chinese-funded and built), and the city’s increased experimentation with water transport all point to areas of federal/state collaboration in infrastructure provision.

There have also been attempts to privatise waste management and effectively render redundant thousands of informal waste pickers, street sweepers and waste truck operators. The 2016-17 Cleaner Lagos Initiative was a hastily introduced policy by the then governor of Lagos, which brought about the privatisation of the entire waste value chain (formal and informal) in Lagos, with virtually no consultation from the public or existing actors (Sesan, 2018). This decision led to a complete collapse of the waste management system and had dire political consequences, as many of the truck operators – being local grassroots politicians – were quite vocal in mobilising support

against the then incumbent governor during the party primaries.¹⁸ By the time the new government was inaugurated in 2019, the waste ecosystem was reset to status quo ante, and gradual reforms are being introduced to streamline processes and improve service delivery. There are also contentions in the water sector, though this is largely between the state government – through the Lagos Water Corporation’s – attempt at implementing a full cost recovery model for a largely inefficient water supply system, and civil society mobilising against the adoption of international organisation models of water privatisation.

This section has examined how the distribution of power in Nigeria influences development and the prospects for developmental reform in Lagos. In the following section, we add a more material dimension, analysing the systems by which various actors and agencies attempt to sustain and/or improve urban life. All of these “urban systems” depend on both physical infrastructure and human actors, with people playing a vital part in the provision of and access to services and infrastructure.

4. City of systems

4.1. City of systems overview

The partial dependence of all urban systems on physical infrastructure creates powerful constraints and path dependencies and produces unintended (negative) externalities. We analyse how the externalities of systems (compounded by intersystem interaction¹⁹) and the scale of system failures/fragmentations add to the challenges that residents and enterprises face.

Since systems are also governed and resourced by numerous human actors (formal or informal, public or private actors – but usually a combination of these), their functioning is impacted by the political settlement described above, as well as by ideas deriving from developmental paradigms like modernism and neoliberalism. This means that systems tend to unevenly allocate goods and services, and may be used to extract benefits and secure political advantage.

The main systems operating in Lagos are:

- transportation
- water and sanitation
- waste management
- food distribution
- law and order
- finance and ICT

¹⁸ See: <https://urbanage.lsecities.net/essays/vignette-the-spirit-of-lagos> (accessed 8 April 2025).

¹⁹ Complex problems in African cities often involve multiple city systems that interact with each other; we will capture intersystem interaction in our third concept of “urban development domains”.

- energy
- education
- healthcare.

We examine how they function, how they support or hinder urban development, and how they may be improved. We focus primarily on transportation; water and sanitation; waste management; and energy. Food distribution, law and order, finance and ICT, education and healthcare are also considered.

The methodology deployed for the study was carried out in two phases. The first phase entailed a desk study for the review of key academic and grey literature on the various city systems. This culminated in the development of annotated bibliographies on the existing studies relating to the systems. The study collected data from Lagos State's official documents, National Bureau of Statistics, strategic documents like the Lagos State Development Plan, Lagos Resilience Strategy and Lagos Climate Change. Findings were also drawn from multilateral organisations like the World Bank, UN-Habitat and active local organisations in Lagos and community development associations. The findings from these documents set a foundation to produce a concise mapping note of each city system, interrogating the coverage, ownership and governance, organisation, access, quality, history and record of contestation, relationship with political settlement, connections with other systems, and prevalent risk.

4.2. History and contestation

System functioning in Lagos is characterised by inadequate and/or inefficient coverage, access and quality that puts strain on citizens and relies on the variable capacities of non-state actors and residents themselves. The inability of government at all levels to deliver adequate public services is both a defining characteristic of the city's systems and a considerable source of tension between government itself, with private service providers and with citizens. For instance, waste management falls under the purview of local government; however, it has no instruments or autonomy to ensure the system's functioning. As detailed above, an attempt at introducing a privatised waste management initiative (Cleaner Lagos Initiative) in 2016 resulted in a political crisis and inconsistent service provision until 2018. There are frequent contestations around the privatisation of public services, for instance protests from civil society organisations stalled state government plans to privatise the water supply.

The level of informality in Lagos is extensive, providing crucial economic possibilities for low-income and marginalised residents. According to the International Monetary Fund, the informal economy employs approximately 5.5 million people in Lagos – approximately three-quarters of the state's 7.5 million labour force. Street traders, artisans, vendors, micro businesses, tricycles and commercial motorcycles (okada) operators (until their recent ban in some areas), market traders, commercial buses, among many others, operate informally and visibly all over the city. Apart from the economic dimension, patterns of informality also exist in the areas of housing, health,

food and practically every other sector in Lagos. The popularity of informality in Lagos is largely due to stringent bureaucracy, inaccessibility and unaffordability of systems in the formal spaces. While the government seems to tolerate much informal activity, they are frequently targeted for “clean ups” or removal. These violent incursions are often a precursor for developments led by elites and/ or the private sector, or for aesthetic reasons based on the “Model Megacity” justification. Hostility towards the homes and livelihoods of low-income residents in Lagos is usually a precursor towards the ends of elite capture of space.

The burden of accessing energy and water falls mostly on citizens themselves (Smith, 2022). Lagos is in a state of energy poverty, as Nigeria is yet to deliver adequate energy to its citizens, despite being rich in energy-producing minerals, including petroleum, and the huge financial resources invested in the energy sector annually. Most people rely on petrol-fuelled generators, which are expensive and contribute high levels of pollution to the urban environment. Residents also often resort to alternative sources to meet their water needs. These include private and commercial boreholes, water vendors, surface/hand-dug wells, rainwater and bottled/sachet water. Despite the inconvenience and cost associated with generators and water, these are not often sources of unrest, only daily grievances, perhaps as there are no credible alternatives. Fuel prices, however, are a source of fierce contention. When the fuel subsidy, which makes fuel cheaper, is changed or removed, it usually ignites mass protests across the country and causes Lagos to come to a standstill, with queues for petrol and diesel.

The relationship between police forces and Lagosians is intricate and politically motivated, with a long history of hostility, scepticism and bouts of violence. This dissociation resulted in the EndSARS protest that occurred in October 2020 in Lagos and across the country, which highlighted the conflict between the police and other law enforcement agencies and citizens – especially the youth. There has been evidence of repeated policies and regulations made to stifle the efforts of the private sector, especially in areas of cryptocurrencies, NFTs and social media that create a contentious environment between the state and businesses. An example is the ban on the use of Twitter in Nigeria by the federal government and recent uproar in the country with the naira redesign. Public hospitals are severely impacted by federal government decisions on budget allocation, medical training, enumeration and cost recovery. Strike actions to press home the demand for improved service conditions are common, with citizens bearing the brunt.

4.3. Ownership and governance

The development outcomes of the systems in focus are largely shaped by operative sociopolitical complexities. The political settlement in Lagos comprises of both local and state government, non-state actors, such as traditional rulers and trade unions, as well as the balance between the elite and non-elite groups. The political dynamics in the state over the years have recorded tensions and legal wranglings with the federal government, especially when the state was in political opposition to the federal government (see Section 2). There is now better coordination and negotiation between

the federal and state governments, as the leaderships of both governments now belong to the same political party. Moreover, the political settlement in Lagos has been fairly stable, being that it has been dominated by one political party and one faction within the party since 1999. There remain internal conflicts within the party, which have affected the party's political fortunes, such as the recent 2023 presidential elections in which the Labour Party defeated the ruling APC in Lagos – and it should be noted that the presidential candidate of APC is the political leader of Lagos. Furthermore, there are many instances where the state government has usurped the constitutional role of the local government, resulting in confusion, especially regarding collection of fees and double taxation of citizens.

As indicated in the previous section, most systems rely on the often informal capacity of citizens and non-state actors, in spite of the formal arrangements. In the transport system of the city, the Lagos chapter of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) is a formidable political force, with a strong political relationship with the state's ruling party. Despite the union being proscribed, due to the increase in violence among its units, the erstwhile NURTW chairman was assigned to oversee the operations of the newly established Parks and Garages Management Committee. According to the constitution of Nigeria, management of the motor parks falls under the purview of the local government but this duty was passed to non-state actors comprising of the NURTW members. Its fee-collecting agents, the *agberos*, straddle an informal–formal divide and often use violent behaviour, causing much contention with citizens.

The control and distribution of water and sanitation services are also carried out by the combined efforts of the state and individual approaches. The control of the WASH sector is the responsibility of the state government; however, its policy and programme interventions that are focused on full cost recovery are both ineffective and unaffordable. In reality, citizens rely on other means, such as private soakaway systems for sanitation, and private boreholes or private watersellers for potable water. Communities often ensure the protection of their interests through community development associations (CDAs).

The waste management system in Lagos has transcended several governance structures in a diverse, complex and growing metropolis where logistics and infrastructure deficits spur inefficiencies in service delivery. Such inefficiencies in the centralised agency of the state government tasked with operational municipal solid waste management (MSW) has resulted in the rise of other private sector, formal and informal waste managers, who control and offer their services for a fee to fill the gap of the state government. The opportunities in the circular economy have also given rise to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the recycling sector, though government attempts to regulate the sector through multiple agencies are a potential political threat. The ability of CDAs to restrict community scavengers with carts (informal waste workers) in their neighbourhoods is another aspect of political influence.

The control of energy supply and distribution is fundamentally the responsibility of the federal government. However, since the infusion of privatisation of some components of the energy sector, the private sector has become an integral stakeholder of the sector. These private companies/investors are deeply involved in business politics that will drive economic returns to their investments. The private sector actors are a combination of foreigners and nationals. Despite the privatisation of the sector, energy supply is infamously erratic, hence people's reliance on expensive and polluting generators.

The food distribution system in Lagos is being championed both in the formal and informal spaces of the city. The state government is responsible for providing essential infrastructure in critical areas to ensure food security and sufficiency in the state. Markets are within LGA/LCDA constitutional mandates. The role of the government is usually limited to tax collection through Lagos Internal Revenue Service (LIRS), or regarding market redesign, where they tend to favour PPP models of urban renewal. The influence of market politics cannot be overlooked, as market leaderships and associations, with strong ethnic undertones, serve as safeguards for the traders before the involvement of the government. Market crises are usually resolved through the market leadership – the *Iyaloja* and *Babalaja* – which tend to be traditional titles. Furthermore, market leaders are an important source of political mobilisation during elections. Evidence of the strength of market associations is the uproar against the relocation of the popular Mile 12 market to another location. The influence of non-state actors in the sector is also on the rise, with traditional rulers playing a prominent role.

There are relatively weak institutional structures around law and order and, like other large cities, Lagos attracts crime and violence. The law-and-order system in Lagos State is predominately controlled by the government (police command, special law enforcement agencies, judicial systems), which often face accusations of violence. More efficient, however, at the granular level are private and community initiatives, such as private security companies and traditional security groups, which are unregulated.

The finance and ICT system falls under the exclusive list of the federal government, as indicated in the constitution. This can be damaging because states have a long list of obligations to (and expectations from) citizens but they have only a short list of exercisable powers, rights and available tools to meet these obligations. However, in Lagos, as the finance and ICT sectors are dominant, Lagos state government has leveraged the sector for employment and youth engagement.

4.4. Coverage

The transport system in Lagos is largely dominated by road transportation, and although it is the third highest generator of revenue in the state, there is still a large deficit in the system, and it is fraught with many challenges. It is estimated that there are between 75,000 and 90,000 small buses (*danfo*) in Lagos (Alade et al., 2018), with informal bus parks, garages and bus stops spread across the state. Apart from road

transport, other transport modes are largely underdeveloped, despite their huge potential. Lack of proper integration of water transport with other transport modes has reduced access to this transport mode. Studies identify reasons for the low patronage of water transportation as including poor water infrastructure, weak policy formulation, safety and security issues, exorbitant fares, unavailability and inaccessibility (Ademiluyi et al., 2016). Poor transportation connections alongside incessant traffic congestion, increasing costs, effectively increase the stresses associated with schooling and could reduce school enrolment. The recent opening of the blue line of the light railway (in 2024) is a significant transport achievement and will have far-reaching effects on the movement of people, particularly traders and students.

Lagos requires 3.83 billion litres of water per day of which only 40% is provided by public supply. Reports show that only 10% of the city's residents receive water from the Lagos Water Corporation, due to low investment in the water sector, poor distribution networks, deteriorating infrastructure and weak institutional governance. Residents often resort to alternative sources to meet their water needs. These include private and commercial boreholes, water vendors, surface/hand-dug wells, rainwater and bottled/sachet water.

The dynamics of the food distribution system are complex, due to Lagos's spatial characteristics and its unprecedented level of urbanisation. Urban growth has resulted in the conversion of agricultural land to other uses and thus significantly reduced agricultural activities in the city. Much of the food eaten in Lagos is brought in from other parts of Nigeria and abroad. Currently, local food production in Lagos meets only 10-15% of the local demand, with most of its people engaged in activities outside the agricultural sector (Richemont and Marras, 2019). The findings also revealed the implications on climate change and food waste, which accounts for over 50% of the waste generated in the state. There is no documented policy on composting/eco-waste management in the state.

Lagos is an extremely policed city. There are numerous national and state organisations policing the state. There is a strong gap between the governor, as chief security officer, and the top military and police hierarchy in the state, over whom the governor has no powers, as they are answerable to the president. Though state-led structures, such as Kick Against Indiscipline and Neighbourhood Watch, are reliable at the lower levels, they are dominated by political nuances. Private security and community-led vigilantes are also very important in ensuring law and order across the city.

ICT has become vital in the finance sector with the rise of predatory lending apps that target low-income workers. There are also many apps in the educational and health sector, and a number of beneficial initiatives were launched during the Covid-19 crisis. Since the nationwide lockdown, a digital workforce has grown and more organisations have embraced work-from-home or a hybrid system. Many young people work remotely and resist jobs that are not totally remote or hybrid. The effect of this working pattern on the climate was seen during the lockdown in many countries, with a drastic

reduction in carbon emissions. This may also be the same in Lagos; however, there is a high percentage of day workers, therefore the carbon emission reduction might not be as significant as in other global North countries.

4.5. Access

Access to systems across Lagos is patchy and largely dependent on socioeconomic status, with a wider variety of options available to those with higher income. Access also differs in central and more rural locations. The demand for clean water and sanitation in Lagos is increasing exponentially with population growth. Its nexus in the progress of several of the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be overemphasised. There is gross deficiency in supply from the Lagos Water, leading to self-help approaches, such as drilling of boreholes at the community/individual level and the proliferation of private water providers. In many parts of Lagos State, women and girls are responsible for collecting water and managing household sanitation. Lack of access to clean water sources and adequate sanitation facilities can increase the burden on women and girls and limit their ability to participate in activities such as education and employment.

Lagos generates less than 20% of the food eaten in the city and has to depend on external means to meet the difference. While only 30% of land in Lagos State designated for agricultural use has been utilised, there are an increasing number of state government initiatives to improve food access and distribution as well as a series of backyard or household farming projects. A large share of food in Lagos passes through wholesale markets and is then redistributed within the urban area through retail markets, shops, street sellers and supermarkets – some of the major wholesale markets are Mile 12, Oshodi and Lagos Island. The traditional retail food sector dominates the city's food markets, making it central to food distribution in the metropolitan area. Other markets in neighbourhoods, and roadside farmers markets, are more easily accessible by residents and an important source of affordable fresh produce. There has been an increase in food benevolence and gifting programmes by NGOs, individuals, faith based organisations, and so on, which became more pronounced since the Covid-19 pandemic to cushion the effect of the crisis, especially in residential areas.

There is a gap in access to justice, especially among low-income groups, even though the Lagos state government has instituted agencies such as the Office of the Public Defender, the Office of Civic Engagement, and so on, to bring justice closer to the people.

The FinTech sector in the state is growing but uptake is restricted, for various reasons. By making digital financial services like loans, saving or investing easily accessible to customers, FinTech startups are innovating past traditional institutions, therefore threatening their growth, but easy access to loans, for example, has its risks. Loan apps have capitalised on the inability of poor people to access loans, they make use of these platforms to extort and intrude into the privacy of their clients.

Given the large influx of people into the state, there is increased enrolment in public schools, as well as an increase in the proportion of out-of-school children. The Covid crisis also resulted in high dropout rates, as many were unable to afford the costs associated with returning to school after the lockdown was lifted. While the public school system is more organised and structured, the unregulated private school system accommodates a significant proportion of the student population in Lagos. The underdevelopment of the telecommunications sector affects education, as all levels of institutions lack adequate broadband access to enable the delivery of educational services on technological platforms.

Access to adequate healthcare in Lagos is limited, with extensive reliance on private and traditional medical facilities. As at 2016, the skilled health worker-to-citizens ratio for Lagos was 8:10,000; compared to 23:10,000 recommended by the World Health Organization Standards. This ratio has further diminished, due to the brain drain of medical workers currently being experienced across Nigeria. There are over 2,000 traditional health practitioners (including maternity, surgical, medicinal operators) who are believed to be patronised by up to 70% of the population, especially in the lower-income and rural areas. Some of the residents in the riverine areas and informal communities are vulnerable to waterborne diseases especially, due to their geographic location and the paucity of community WASH facilities. Exposure to perennial traffic, air pollution from cars and generators are urban stressors that negatively affect mental health, yet access to mitigators is limited, costly and scarcely reported.

4.6. Quality

Quality across the systems is very poor. Transport infrastructure in the state is grossly inadequate, compounded by inadequate night-time illumination, lack of security measures like CCTV and security personnel, inadequate road signs and weak enforcement of traffic laws that characterise Lagos roads. Water and sanitation conditions are largely poor, and often lead to health issues and a lower quality of life. Although the waste management system in Lagos is very poor when compared to best international practices, the city has the best waste management system in Nigeria. The inability to successfully achieve domestic waste separation, the key step to achieving material recovery and sustainable waste management, is a major setback. Yet, there are plans to create more dumpsites according to the Lagos state development plan for 2050. Other issues in the system include mismanagement of infrastructures, such as the weighbridge, which hampers the credibility of waste data, poor strategic planning, overstaffing, and inability to create standard engineered sanitary landfill and transfer loading stations to improve turnaround time for PSP (private sector partnership) disposal trucks.

The availability of qualified teachers, classroom infrastructure and water and sanitation provision all challenges the learning environment across all public school levels. The quality of low-cost unregistered private schools is relatively poor, although they continue to proliferate across the city. More generally, private schools at the secondary level are unable to attract and retain highly qualified teachers, leading to higher

demand for places in public schools. Investment in Lagos technical schools by corporate organisations is a positive occurrence. Provision of facilities, equipment, laboratories and renovation of workshops have been areas of corporate social responsibility intervention. This offers a strategy for improving the quality of teaching infrastructure in the lower levels of education.

Healthcare is a policy priority of the Lagos state government. The inadequacy of public healthcare services has led to the strengthening of private healthcare services in the state. In addition, there are over 2,000 traditional health practitioners (including maternity, surgical, medicinal operators) who are patronised by up to an estimated 70% of the population. Primary healthcare centres are not providing the full range of services envisaged for them. Their inability to operate on a 24-hour basis pushes patients to seek (unsafe) healthcare alternatives. Poor housing conditions increase residents' vulnerability to infectious diseases, while patronage of unlicensed healthcare providers is common, as a response to inadequate public healthcare services. The Ilera Eko, a public health insurance scheme that targets low-income areas, was recently launched but has had slow uptake and many teething problems. Poor attitudes of health workers, long waiting times, far-flung service units in secondary hospitals and poor quality of the environment define quality problems in public hospitals. Private-owned hospitals have higher quality environments; however, they were found to be costlier, with attendant risks of low-quality medical services.

4.7. Risks and vulnerabilities

The issues of coverage, access, quality and governance tensions across the systems produce and are compounded by everyday risks and vulnerabilities. For instance, noise pollution from regular humming generators has become an integral part of living for many Nigerians. Needless to say, the impact of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions on the environment and the consequential effect on people's health is large. Inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities, with marginalised communities being the most affected. Poor water and sanitation conditions often lead to health issues and lower quality of life, making individuals and families more likely to leave an area to move to another in search of better living conditions. Access to clean water and sanitation is a critical factor in promoting gender equality, mitigating the impacts of climate change and poverty and supporting the development of young people.

Lagos is faced with constant challenges of crime and violence. There is poor compliance of municipal safety and security, which has invariably placed a heavy burden of law enforcement and security on local communities. The increasing rate of insecurity, due to the activities of bandits and terrorist groups across the nation, has become a major source of concern for citizens. This has also increased the rate of migration of internally displaced people (IDPs) to cities and Lagos is estimated to host the highest number of IDPs in Nigeria. Insecurity in the northeast of Nigeria caused by bandits and terrorists' groups has threatened the food supply and food accessibility in the state.

The food distribution system in Lagos connects strongly to the health sector, with the dwindling living condition of people affecting their nutrient intake, as many people eat just to get physically satisfied rather than to attain a proper nutrient level. This causes stress on their health and makes them more easily susceptible to minor illnesses. Ethnic rivalries in communities and markets sometimes turn violent, as well as the adverse implications of insurgency in Northern Nigeria impeding food access in the South. Examples are reported of migrating herders from Northern states encroaching on farmlands in the Southern parts of Nigeria.

ICT plays a major role in improving safety and security in Lagos and the state government has begun the installation of CCTV cameras across the metropolis. This installation is part of Lagos's move towards becoming a smart city. Though the project is not focused on improving the lives of women and vulnerable groups, it directly benefits these groups. One of the major issues women face in Lagos is the issue of safety, due to poorly lit bus stops and lack of security.

As a low-lying coastal city, and a destination for people displaced by climate events, Lagos is at significant risk from climate change. This issue has only recently become of interest to the Lagos state government and few meaningful initiatives are in place.

5. Domain summaries

We have examined the political settlement and city systems; now, we analyse how these shape some of the development domains in Lagos. A development domain is a distinct field of discourse, policy and practice that has formed around a complex, intersystemic development challenge in a city, in which various actors (political, bureaucratic, professional and popular) collaborate and/or compete for authority. The domains and city of systems research show that most of Lagos's characteristic problems share the same political, social and economic causes. However, differences are produced according to how key actors relate to the political settlement.

Energy is shown as a key barrier to growth, and a problem that undermines all domains, areas and sections of society. The heterogenous nature of Lagos is identified as a key enabler of urban life, as are the proliferation of small organised networks. These form a significant response to the challenges faced by Lagos's residents and seem to work alongside, and sometimes in spite of, the government and formal private sector.

These development challenges usually fall under the remit of specific central and/or local government departments. In most cases, affected residents and civil society groups become involved in addressing them; experts (often constituting an "epistemic community") also get involved; and ruling elites may or may not get involved, depending on the opportunities that these domains offer for asset accumulation, rent extraction and electoral success (through the representation of ideologies, demonstration of state capability or manipulation of voters).

In each development domain, particular ideas, practices and systems interoperate in ways that either sustain or reshape the power configuration in the city and country. If we wish to change the way a domain's problems are framed and addressed, we need to understand its key actors and interoperating ideas, practices and systems. In this section, we generate such an understanding for the following domains in Lagos: safety and security, housing, structural transformation and neighbourhood and district economic development.

The large population of Lagos, and the sprawling nature of its spatial growth, has resulted in an agglomeration of primarily low-income workers residing in largely slum-like conditions and poorly governed public spaces. This, coupled with the high levels of socioeconomic inequality and the very ambitious aspirations of the city to achieve "world class" status requires an in-depth interrogation of the interaction of the domains of housing, safety and security, grassroots economic development and the structural transformation of the city. The future survival and transformation of the city lie at the heart of these issues, hence the need to focus on the domains in question.

5.1. Safety and security

Nigerian urban spaces have emerged as the new frontier for insecurity, with trends in urbanisation shaping the dynamics of criminality in these cities. The deteriorating state of security in recent years has been a source of concern to the government, residents, and the business community. The problems of safety and security in Lagos can be summarised around two major issues: criminal activities and safety threats. Residents perceive there to be high levels of violent crime in Lagos, as well as concerns over the increasing rate of building collapse, building safety issues and flooding. Indeed, more than half of Lagos's population will experience at least one of these. The lingering security challenges are a major deterrent to investors.

The overall design was a cross-sectional survey, while a questionnaire and interview guide were used for data collection. The unit of analysis was the individual, while the units of observation were individual community members and key informants. Individual respondents were selected randomly with a priori decision targeting a sample of 50 respondents (46% of respondents were female in the final sample). Stakeholders and key informants were drawn from the community organisations, CSOs and government departments in the frontline of addressing safety and security, including the police service, community development associations, emergencies management agencies among others. Data were analysed through identification of relevant themes and presented through descriptions and quotations. These were also supported by relevant secondary data on safety and security issues in Lagos.

In addition to the commonplace violent crimes of robbery, assaults, thefts, gender-based violence, child labour, cultism and banditry, there are newly emerging crimes and security challenges like kidnapping, cybercrime, drug dealing, terrorism, ritual killing and travel-related robbery (known as "one-chance" in Lagos). The criminal activities of cult groups and area boys are longstanding problems. The city is also

characterised by breaches of public peace (violent protests), jungle justice (mob attacks) and the incessant unauthorised vehicle checkpoints set up by police and other uniformed agencies to extort money. Most street-level crimes occur at night or dawn when there is darkness, and the victims are often people going to or returning home from their workplaces and businesses. When many of these insecurities occur, women, girls and children and persons with disabilities are especially vulnerable. As a large city, Lagos is a high-risk location for terrorism and while most common in the north of the country, there have been several incidents.

Regarding disasters, Lagos residents are prone to diverse kind of disasters and emergency incidences, including building collapse, flood, road accidents and fire. From the information made available by the Lagos State Emergency Management Authority (LASEMA), Lagos recorded 5,497 cases of emergencies in the last four years. In 2022, there were the highest incidences of road accidents (1,257), followed by fire disasters (175) and building collapses (46).²⁰ The challenges of electricity access and informal methods of energy provision mean that many fire incidences occur as a result of bad electricity connections, poor physical planning, petrol and gas transportation on streets as well as household carelessness with inflammable appliances.²¹

Being a coastal city, Lagos is naturally prone to flooding. Climate change is exacerbating flooding, with intensifying tropical rains. A predicted rise in sea level of up to 1m, due to global warming, is a severe threat to the low-lying city. Flooding causes havoc on the streets of Lagos as roads quickly turn into rivers and drains overflow, flooding streets and homes with contaminated water. Flooding also risks groundwater contamination from sewage and sea water. Human activities such as dumping refuse in canals and large drainage channels exacerbate the effects of flooding.

The causes of Lagos insecurity are divided into primary drivers and the main enablers. The primary drivers are a combination of mutually reinforcing factors that include a visible network of organised youth criminal groups, political elites' undue influence on security agencies, thriving violent secret cult groups, urban identity politics and political affairs which often pitch different ethnicities, tribes and religions against one another. Others include illicit arms trafficking, and proliferation of small arms and drugs, youth population influx (mass immigration) from conflict-affected areas in Nigeria and the West of Africa, as well as inadequate emergency preparedness by the city government, who often lack resources and capacity.

The main enablers of insecurity in Lagos are: youth unemployment, inequality and worsened socioeconomic and living conditions, Lagos's vast expanse of porous borders, elites' desperate political affairs and patronage of violent youth gangs as political enforcers, corruption in the management of safety and security issues, and the absence of a strong state regulatory framework for non-state actors further enable insecurity in Lagos. Other enablers include: a monolithic police force system, police

²⁰ See: www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/576440-lagos-records-1682-emergency-incidents-in-2022-official.html (accessed 13 June 2025).

²¹ Interview with residents on the streets, September 2022.

corruption/dishonesty and political influence, high rate of school dropouts/out-of-school children, and poor urban planning and design, for example, an increasing rate of uncompleted and abandoned properties, a lack of and/or non-functioning of streetlights in the night and early hours of the day.

The overall design of the domain report was a cross-sectional survey, while a questionnaire and interview guide were used for data collection. The unit of analysis was the individual, while the units of observation were individual community members and key informants. Individual respondents were selected randomly with a priori decision targeting a sample of 50 respondents (46% of respondents were female in the final sample). Stakeholders and key informants were drawn from the community organisations, CSOs, government departments in the frontline of addressing safety and security, including the police service, community development associations, emergencies management agencies. Data were analysed through identification of relevant themes and presented through descriptions and quotations. These were also supported by relevant secondary data on safety and security issues in Lagos.

5.1.1. *Actors*

People have been coping with safety and security through individual actions, community responses and state provisions of security services. There are a number of state security agencies, such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Lagos State Emergencies and Management Agency (LASEMA),²² and also non-state security outfits, such as vigilante groups, community self-help and private security providers. In the last five years, there has been new safety and security infrastructure, including the overhauling of Lagos State Security Trust Fund, mass deployment of CCTV, community policing, Light-up Lagos, Police Rapid Respond Squared (RRS), establishment of the Law Enforcement Training Institute (LETI), and the Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC), among others. Nonetheless, within this infrastructure, state and non-state agencies are overstretched because of the mishandled urbanisation and many accompanying insecurity issues. In fact, the majority of people on the streets were of the view that the current state of security has not changed significantly in the past five years and many considered it to have got worse over the last five years. Findings show bias in the political drive for safety and security interventions as elite spaces are better provisioned.

²² Other state actors being coordinated by the federal government and working collaboratively with NPF are the Nigerian army (Lagos division), Department of State Security Service (DSSS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the Nigerian Prison Service (NPS)/the Nigerian Correctional Service and Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS). All these agencies and departments operate their office and functions in collaboration with relevant state stakeholders like the Lagos State Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs, Lagos State Community Development Association Advisory Council (LSCDAC) and the Lagos State House of Assembly (LSHA), the Lagos State Judiciary, the presidency, the governor of Lagos State, national security advisory (NSA) bodies, and local authorities/governments.

There are a number of state actors specifically related to safety and disaster risk management.²³ The Lagos State Building Control Agency (LABSCA) and the State Physical Planning Permit Authority (LASPPPA) are the key agencies regarding building and physical development. The Lagos chapter of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and LASEMA conduct a range of disaster management services, from prevention and preparedness, to mitigation, recovery and relief. However, some stakeholders derided the emergency response as “neither coordinated nor prompt enough and this has resulted in large-scale destruction and suffering of the affected people”.²⁴ Other relevant agencies²⁵ have been somewhat effective but not without shortcomings of bribery, corruption and abuse of authorities. There have been many cases of extortion levelled by road users against these agencies.

There are widespread non-state actors in Lagos organised by citizens and community and their traditional rulers (Obas, Chiefs and Baale) to protect lives and properties in the neighbourhood. These range from small bands of volunteers in city neighbourhoods to large structures acknowledged by state governments. This comprises local militia groups, vigilante groups, community guards, neighbourhood watches, private security companies and other related informal armed groups.²⁶ These different groups are primarily to augment the formal security structure and improve safety and security of residents, especially in neighbourhoods where the formal (NPF) presence is not strong. These actors collaborate with the NPF in gathering, collating and sharing information as well as intelligence for the purpose of ensuring safety in Lagos. The state-run Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Agency (LSNA) also collaborates with the NPF, and works to improve the relationship between the police and the community and maintaining peace. Residents and CDAs are particularly active in organising -level security measures. Some CDAs in Lagos maintain weekly security rosters, with residents coming out with weapons, including cutlasses, knives and, sometimes, locally fabricated guns to defend themselves at night. They also conduct street-to-street patrols in some places.

State and non-state agencies were identified as both actors and contributors to the city’s insecurity issues. Respondents identified the collusion of some members of the state police with politicians, elites and certain trade unions as one of the avenues for violent crime. There are many unregulated actors in Lagos whose activities are more illicit and undermine the safety and security in Lagos, such as cult groups, ethnic militia, separationists/agitators, *omo onile* (land grabbers), violent crime gangs, “area boys”, some members of the NURTW, and commercial motorcycle riders (“Okada”).

²³ The Lagos State Safety Commission (LSC) is the responsible body for the coordination of all state government ministries, agencies, parastatals relating to the safety of lives and property at all levels.

²⁴ Stakeholders’ engagement, October 2022.

²⁵ For example, Federal Fire Service (FFS) alongside Lagos State Fire and Rescue Services (LSFRS), and the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and a similar Lagos state agency (Lagos State Traffic Management Authority [LASMA]).

²⁶ Examples include the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC) and the Oodua Liberation Movement (OLM), which are a pan Yoruba non-state security group.

The proliferation of these violent gangs and their easy access to small arms threatens the fragile stability of polarised communities and promotes violent crimes in Lagos. Some elites, and political influencers were also indicted because of their increasing patronage of the “area boys” and their leaders as political enforcers, particularly around elections. In Lagos, election violent conflicts or crime are common. Political criminals smashed and destroyed ballot boxes, bought votes out in the open, and security forces and gangs engaged in voter intimidation and terrorisation. Because of its political value and strength in Nigeria, there is always anxiety around likely political violence in Lagos, due to elections-related issues within and between political power blocs in the country.

The police, including taskforces such as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and the Lagos state government environmental compliance task force – Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI) – are also considered a security threat by citizens. Many people, especially youth, are accosted on a daily basis by armed police officers, who demand bribes and commit human rights abuses against them as a means of extorting money.²⁷ Furthermore, NPF commonly round up random citizens in public places, including mass arrests at restaurants, markets and bus stops. Such abuses of power led to the #EndSARS protests in 2020, which was the largest single youth protest against the police in the history of Nigeria, and resulted in a violent crackdown from the state. State actors continue to perpetrate violent forced evictions against residents of informal housing. More than 300,000 Lagosians are homeless, mostly due to state-ordered evictions, demolitions, poverty and lack of space (Kellog, 2022).

5.2. Housing

A systems approach was taken to housing, recognising the interlinkages in the critical components of the housing development value (policy and regulation, land acquisition, finance, construction and management). Housing is not understood as a single habitable unit, but as part of a system making up a decent, safe, well-functioning, environmentally friendly, social and economically responsive neighbourhood. Three main problems are identified and focused on: the qualitative deficiencies or inadequate housing and neighbourhood facilities, quantitative challenges or lack of new affordable housing, and climate change impacts.

The housing domain report relied on qualitative techniques, including in-depth Interviews with real estate developers, built environment professionals, government actors, civil society and media specialising in housing coverage. We also relied on previous literature on housing history, planning, government provision and governance in Lagos. An actor mapping exercise involving a multidisciplinary team of housing researchers from history, law, real estate, mass communication and policy was carried out, establishing the dire position of rental housing and the vulnerability of single women and youths to discriminatory practices in housing accessibility. In addition, three focus group discussions with cooperative societies, informal housing developers

²⁷ See: www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/19/nigeria-year-no-justice-endsars-crackdown (accessed 9 April 2025).

and residents of informal community were carried out. Site visits to two low-income communities facilitated physical observations of housing conditions and construction. Three validation meetings were held with government agencies, civil society and economic actors in attendance. In addition, presentations were made to the ACRC housing domain group and to the Lagos ACRC advisory committee.

Constitutionally, the Lagos state government is the key driver in all developmental matters. Through the Land Use Act of 1976, the governor also has the legal power to acquire lands, issue and revoke certificates of occupancy on land, and to regulate in all ramifications, the entire housing value chain. There are nine state agencies responsible for housing in the state, but the Ministry of Housing is the anchor for these. Elected political actors are very powerful and hold onto power through their capacity to influence the distribution of resources, basic facilities and infrastructure to specific areas of influence. In this way, sites for mass housing projects might be allocated to areas with political loyalty, evidenced through the number of votes for the ruling party, and completed public housing may be allocated to reward political allies.

Traditional land-owning families are popularly known as *omo onile*. Their claims to root title are ambiguously acknowledged in the Land Use Act, creating much room for interpretation and contestation (Akinyele, 2009). They operate in the informal land market but supply land to all categories of real estate developers. Ayodele (2017) and Oyalowo (2020) note the disruptive behaviour of these actors in land, housing and real estate markets. This includes multiple sales of land, illegal building levies at each stage of construction, and invasion of land already sold but not developed on time (typically within a year). The Lagos state government outlawed *omo onile* activities in 2016.²⁸ Nevertheless, they continue to be very strong players in land assembly in Lagos. They maintain power by passing the generational ownership and physical possession of land that is in their favour and by virtue of the Land Use Act that places rights of possession in them. They also use aggressive force to grab lands and can be very violent in these processes.

Corporate real estate developers are for-profit housing producers affiliated with the Real Estate Development Association of Nigeria (Agunbiade et al., 2013; Oyalowo, 2018). Corporate real estate developers operate with both equity and debt financing to provide serviced land and completed homes, usually for sale. They are potentially powerful in the housing sector, being the supposed suppliers of new, affordable housing in the city, mobilising both their own funds and funds from the financial sector to pay for these developments. Their investment decision determines what type of housing is put on the market, the construction type, the costs of the housing and, thus, who can afford to own a new house. They offer competitive products, such as land sales on incremental payment, off-plan sales, speculative land sales in the peri-urban areas of the city. They also join in as private sector development partners in

²⁸ See: www.vanguardngr.com/2016/06/lagos-outlaws-omo-onile-sets-5-man-task-force (accessed 13 June 2025).

government-led housing projects or similar PPP arrangements. Developers are sometimes known to be linked to corrupt practices (Oyalowo et al., 2024).

As property owners who control access to rental housing, landlords are quite powerful actors. Despite the recent Lagos Tenancy Law (2011) prohibiting the common practice of landlords of demanding a two-year advance rental payment from new tenants and thereafter, yearly payments in advance, this continues to be common. Landlords prefer to work with informal renting agents or to carry out maintenance and management issues themselves, particularly where they are living in the subject building. Their lack of expertise could account for the generally poor physical outlook and maintenance condition of older rental housing in Lagos.

Microfinance, commercial and mortgage banks are powerful in releasing or withholding funds for housing development in various forms. The products on offer are determined by them, though costs of funds are determined by the macroeconomic policy. Corporate real estate developers would enter into ventures with the financial institutions to access debt financing for housing projects. However, they can enter into partnerships to promote affordable housing, provided the promoters are able to meet their terms. They have offered such roles for several big-time projects involving government, such as the Eko Atlantic project.²⁹ In many cases, some of these powerful actors (government actors, corporate real estate developers and financial sector) come together to actualise high-end housing projects, such as the Eko Atlantic project, or public housing projects, such as the Lagos HOMS (Home Ownership Mortgage Scheme) project. However, there has been some resistance to actions such as evictions and demolitions amongst non-government actors.

Private sector organisations such as microfinance banks are active economic actors that specifically provide banking services for low-income people and also provide loans for enhancing businesses and financial visibility for their customers. In addition, faith organisations are actively involved in economic support for housing purposes, although beneficiaries are limited to members of the group. Co-operative societies, straddling both formal and informal sectors, support access to financial products for their members. They provide loans for procuring assets such as land, and for developing these lands into housing units. Cooperative societies also provide access to loans for entrepreneurial endeavours and alleviate economic hardship for their members.

Civil society groups, such as the Nigerian Federation of Slum and Informal Settlements, the Heinrich Boll Foundation, Justice for Empowerment Initiative (JEI) and Spaces for Change, are active in protecting the housing rights of vulnerable groups such as slum dwellers against displacement and forceful evictions. Indirectly they protect such groups from the removal of existing houses, even if this is low-quality housing. The Heinrich Boll Foundation is particularly invested in promoting citizen awareness and supporting resilience action planning. The Nigerian Federation of Slum and Informal Settlements housing rights activists are also involved in organising

²⁹ See: www.ekoatlantic.com (accessed 9 April 2025).

members in saving schemes that can support their housing aspirations as well. They carry out data profiling to ensure that members' needs are documented in response to any incidences such as evictions that might further impoverish their members. In addition, there are residents' groups that have an interest in improved housing and neighbourhood facilities in their areas of jurisdiction (for example, community development associations, residents' associations and landlord associations). Academic research centres, such as the Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development at the University of Lagos, provide research and capacity building to support reforms for community groups and housing sector actors.

Housing and neighbourhood facilities in most areas suffer inadequacies, such as lack of water, sanitation, storm drainage, waste management and electricity. In areas such as Mushin, Agege and Oworonshoki, there are also housing unit inadequacies, such as physical degradation in the form of broken windows, leaking roofs, haphazard commercial extensions, decrepit external painting and incomplete building. Much housing is characterised by overcrowded living conditions, lack of indoor toilets, bathing and cooking facilities, noisy generators and fractious neighbour relations. On a neighbourhood scale, this leads to a decrepit environment, and can be justification for categorising these spaces, some of which stand on secured tenures, as substandard housing or even slums, depending on the continuum of need. The buildings are owned by individuals or families and are usually rented, or partially rented out, mixed used housing. These areas of Lagos are typically characterised by high crime rates, youth unemployment and high rates of teenage pregnancy and increasingly high rental costs relative to the living conditions. Importantly, their high-density locations make them attractive as commercial spaces for household, micro to small-scale businesses, while also hosting traditional open markets. This increases the demand for these residential areas, as they also (inadvertently) serve as mixed uses for shops and warehouses. All of this adds pressure to transportation, waste management and drainage services, worsening the condition of these areas through traffic, mountains of refuse and blocked drainage due to indiscriminate dumping. These substandard areas accommodate 75% of Lagos residents according to the Lagos state government, and are mostly informal housing (Oyalowo, 2022).

There is a limited supply of affordable new housing. The Lagos newbuild housing sector is bifurcated between producers in the formal sector and those in the informal sector. The share of formal housing production in Lagos is low, at 25%, compared to the informal at 75%. Macroeconomic conditions including high interest rates, cost of land, high costs of construction materials, titling and permits have been a strong factor in the affordability of new housing. The tedious process of land assembly mostly involving informal land-owning families is a significant factor limiting land availability and increasing time and costs. Newbuilds in the formal sector are produced by registered real estate developers and government agencies, and most are not affordable. Developers recoup costs in their sales prices, pricing out low-income earners in both formal and informal employment. Current mortgage rates are a further exclusionary factor. Government public estates are also formal housing but anecdotal

evidence suggests that allocation of complete units mostly tends towards political patronage and clientelism.

The Lagos HOMS scheme implemented by governor Fashola illustrates many issues with public housing provision. Initially, under Fashola, the scheme was to be made available to civil servants through balloting. The next governor, Ambode, ignored this provision, and ultimately the current governor, Sanwo Olu, cancelled it, as he saw no economic sense in it. This means that to access homes in the scheme, civil servants would have to get a mortgage, even though their salaries are not sufficient to apply. Further, the homes in Lagos HOMS scheme did not even reach the market but were allocated to commissioners and other favoured people. It is said that of 1,000 homes, 200 reached the small section of the public to whom the scheme is relevant. In this way, a scheme designed to benefit salaried civil servants bypassed them completely.

Informal newbuild construction is supplied by individual property owners, which then passes onto family members through inheritance. Informal newbuild is found all over the city, from the inner-city neighbourhoods to peri-urban areas and continues to be major source of rental and communal accommodation for residents. In recent times, incremental construction has been popular and far-reaching. Informal newbuilds continue to expand Lagos at its peripheries with a supply of owner-occupied, rental and mixed-use housing. The rental market responds to the overall scarcity with indiscriminate rent setting and increases by both formal and informal suppliers are not justified by any increase in housing quality and services.

The vulnerability of Lagos residents to climate change impacts – for instance 18% of its land being prone to regular flooding – is not being taken into account in new construction, limiting the creation of resilient housing areas. This combines with poor disaster-risk-reducing infrastructure in existing neighbourhoods, increasing the residents' vulnerability to flooding. Forced evictions have previously been carried out by government on the rationale that these areas are not safe from flooding and this has increased poverty through loss of housing and livelihoods.

5.3. Structural transformation

Lagos is the commercial hub of Nigeria and powerhouse of the national economy. Like many African cities, however, Lagos has experienced rapid population growth and rapid urbanisation without corresponding levels of development of its industrial and manufacturing sectors over the last 50 or more years. While urbanisation has brought about a shift of labour from the agricultural sector, it has led to rising services sector employment with little effect on manufacturing in Nigeria. Urbanisation has also boosted development of the informal sector and economic activities in Lagos are dominated by trading and commerce mainly by MSMEs, the majority of which are in the informal sector. While economic and commercial activities continue to boom in Lagos, the majority of working people are engaged in low-productive informal activities, and un- and underemployment have continued to rise, to 41.7% in 2020. In this way, the significant increase in services activities has contributed to economic growth without

translating into a reduction in unemployment and poverty or an improvement in welfare. Consequently, the movement of labour away from agriculture and increasing urbanisation have neither yielded industrial growth nor increased the share of manufacturing employment. This has made effective structural transformation elusive in the country (Okereka, 2015; World Bank, 2020).

The data used for the study is derived from secondary and primary sources. The quantitative analysis is based on secondary data obtained from membership database of Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) General Household Survey (GHS) panel dataset for 2010/2011, 2012/2013, 2015/2016, and the National Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2018/2019. Information for Lagos households is extracted from the GHS panel set and the NLSS. The qualitative analysis is based on primary data obtained through key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with relevant economic stakeholders in Lagos spread across government, organised private sector (OPS), business enterprises, media, academia and informal sector group.

Lagos plays a significant role in the national economy and that of sub-Saharan Africa. It is the economic, financial and commercial centre of Nigeria. According to BudgiT (2018) and Lagos State Ministry of Agriculture (2022), the state accounts for around 27% and 50% of national GDP and non-oil GDP, respectively. It also contributes more than 80% and 50% of the national foreign trade and national port incomes. According to the Lagos Bureau of Statistics, the state's GDP rose from an estimated value of USD 91.04 billion in 2010 to USD 145.14 billion in 2016 and about USD 157.73 billion in 2018. Hence, the state is ranked fourth among African cities, behind Johannesburg, Cape Town and Cairo.

Lagos has the highest internally generated revenue (IGR) and the highest IGR per capita in Nigeria. The latter stood at N 29,373 in 2020 and has been able to rise with the state's growing rate of population increase. IGR and statutory allocation account for about 78% and 22% of Lagos State's total revenue, respectively (BudgiT, 2021). This suggests that the state relies heavily on tax revenue to finance its spending relative to other states in the country. The structure of the state's economy serves as an advantage for the state to mobilise domestic resources, and not to rely on the federal allocation. The state's revenue also includes market taxes and levies, hotel occupancy and restaurant consumption tax, direct assessment, road tax and pay as you earn (PAYE). The state's relatively strong financial structure gives it the ability to prioritise huge investments in capital projects relative to recurrent expenditure. Yet, despite having the strongest economy in the country, Lagos State still faces many challenges, such as low availability of public revenue after operating expenditure and loan repayment, and a high debt burden relative to revenue (BudgiT, 2021).

Lagos is the commercial hub of Nigeria. Its ports and airport and road network serve as a gateway for economic activities and businesses, providing access to imported raw materials and goods and services. This accounts for the citing of the headquarters of many local, national and international business organisations in the city. An analysis of

the distribution of the economic activity of formal businesses in Lagos shows that 189 (12.1%) are involved in industrial and manufacturing activities, 183 (11.7%) are into professional practices (legal, management consultancy, accounting and auditing, human resource services, research, and so on) and 29 (1.9%) are into real estate. Commerce and trading, transportation, general merchandising other forms of services-oriented economic activities have the highest concentration of business enterprises 270 (17.3%), while power and energy has the least number of enterprises at ten (0.6%). The state is host to several headquarters of banks, government departments, manufacturing industries, a growing film and music industry and a thriving fishing industry. The last two decades have seen some of the educated diaspora returning to Nigeria, with Lagos as a favoured destination. This is alongside an improved environment for international business and investment since 1999 and increased political and economic stability. Lagos State is the most attractive state to foreign investment in Nigeria, accounting for 87% of total capital importation in the country in 2021 (NBS, 2022).

While the formal sector is significant for the economy of Lagos, about 65% of the Lagos State working population are in the informal sector (BudgiT, 2018), accounting for 30% of the economic activities of the state (Olusanya and Faniran, 2024). Economic activities in the informal sector include retail trade, transport services, food production, repair services, financial services, household and other personal services, and small-scale industries. It is characterised by low wages and absence of social safety nets (International Labour Organization, 2017). Over the years, the informal sector has been the sponge that absorbs the unemployed or underemployed in Lagos, providing several opportunities to people, especially migrants who thronged into Lagos for an improved livelihood source and better living standards. Lagos is characterised by a large youth population that has the potential for human capital development, which so far has not been exploited.

The organised private sector is an important driver of economic activities in Lagos and is made up of formal business firms,³⁰ that is: registered and operating withing the coverage of official market regulations – both labour and product markets. Besides the organised sector, there are the business membership organisations – such as the Association of Small Business Organisation of Nigeria (ASBON) and the Association of Micro Enterprises of Nigeria (AMEN) – the informal business associations – such as the different market associations (rice sellers, motor spare part dealers, and so on) – and artisanal associations (vulcanisers, auto mechanic technicians, and so on). There are then the government and public sector and the political class, comprising of the politicians and the ruling elites. CDAs are non-governmental agents that represent the

³⁰ There are five major groups that make up the organised private sector: Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN), Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA); Nigeria Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA); Nigeria Association of Small-Scale Industries (NASSI); and Nigeria Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME).

community residents and their interests, and civil society is also another collective of non-state actors.

The burgeoning population and expanding levels of economic activity in Lagos have continued to put pressure on government finances in terms of infrastructure provision and other services. Consequently, government expenditure has witnessed a rapid increase over the years and Lagos remains a leading state in terms of spending, accounting for 17.3% and 13.8% of total capital and operating expenses, of all the states in the country. This implies that infrastructural development in the state is relatively high compared to other states. Nevertheless, Lagos's financing structure is characterised by poor transparency, which is evident in the poor quality of public services and infrastructure development (BudgiT, 2018). In comparison to the relatively huge revenue generated by the state, the situation of public schools and hospitals remains very poor.

The state of Lagos's systems forms a significant constraint on economic growth and structural transformation. A major development challenge to structural transformation in Lagos is inadequate electricity/power supply. As Lagos is the commercial nerve, housing the bulk of the nation's industries, the need for constant and steady power supply in the city cannot be over emphasised. As a result, one would have expected that the city should be enjoying a better electricity supply than any other cities or part of the country. However, this is far from the reality, as most companies in Lagos struggle to keep their business running and alive, at huge costs, due to insufficient power supply. The technical inefficiencies and systemic corruption in the electricity sector are widely acknowledged, and have led to continuing poor maintenance of the network and ineffective and unpopular privatisation efforts (Roy et al., 2023). As of 2017, electricity generation for Lagos was 2,000MW, as against the 10,000MW needed. Consequently, both businesses and residents rely more on self-generated power, either using diesel or petrol power generators. Industries also frequently face insufficient gas supply. Apart from leading to the high cost of doing business and the subsequent frequent increase in prices of goods and services, this has hampered the growth of economic activities and the pace of structural transformation.

The poor state of Lagos's roads, both the roads themselves and congestion, inhibits the movement of goods and the facilitation of business and economic activities. Socioeconomic activities can only thrive in a conducive and peaceful atmosphere. Therefore, the security of lives and properties occupies a paramount space in the national agenda, such that it is entrenched in the national constitution as a major duty of government. Communication is another ingredient vital to structural transformation. There has been great improvement in communication in Lagos, with the vast development in information communication and technology (ICT). The communication system is dominated by the private sector, with MTN, AIRTEL and Global Communication (GLO) being the dominant industry players.

There are increasing attempts to formalise sectors such as transportation, market upgrading, waste management and public water supply through centralisation and

public–private partnerships. These attempts are contentious and disruptive to the associated low-income livelihoods. Often the new corporate players lack nuanced knowledge of how to operate effectively in local communities. The politics in the waste management sector, for example, resulted in the collapse of the Cleaner Lagos Initiative and the investments by the Visionscape corporation. The agreements entered into for the provision of services are often vague and inadvertently lead to the redundancy of informal actors who provide a much-needed service, no matter how micro in scale.

Another challenge to economic and business activities is the hostile and unfriendly business environment in terms of the high cost of living, disruption to economic activities usually caused by touts, the road transport union members *agberos*, and *omo oniles* – land grabbers, that is town-boys, who often extort businesses. The political settlement of Lagos becomes highly visible in the actions and activities of members of politically influential groups, such as the union or traditional landowners. They shape contestation and cause contention. The activities of different touts make the business environment in Lagos highly volatile and unpredictable. This set of people can cause disruptions to economic activities and unrest at any time, without notice. In most cases, once there is any form of unrest or protests in any part of Lagos, they are usually hijacked by hoodlums and touts, and these disruptions always cause businesses to shut down. While the standard of living for elites is relatively high in Lagos, the costs of living are high and consistently rising, with high inflation for food and everyday items (NBS, 2022). Many businesses that require infrastructure outlay at the street scale also have to pay the area boys protection fees to ensure their equipment are not vandalised. These include public advertising agencies and many of the internet service providers and telecommunication companies, who have to install masts across the city

The issue of multiple taxation is a burdensome yoke on business organisations. Aside from the company and personnel income taxes, there are various forms of taxes and levies, such as property, advertisement, land use taxes and premises taxes that are imposed on business organisations by both Lagos State government and LGAs. The issue of multiple taxation is further complicated for businesses in Lagos by the existence of various forms of illegal charges and fees by touts, who often disguise themselves as collecting such fees on behalf of LGAs or LCDAs. Informal workers are especially impacted, as markets are shut down by the state ministry due to non-compliance of some traders, while in the case of local everyday levies, collection agents often resort to violent means to ensure prompt payment.

5.4. Neighbourhood and district economic development

The NDED report for Lagos focused on the role of household microenterprises (HMEs), examining them in the context of their value chains, market activities, economic and political barriers experienced where HMEs buy, produce and sell, and how they relate with other enterprises within Lagos. According to the Lagos State Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, in 2022, over 40% of the working population are unemployed and/or underemployed (MEPB 2024). In Lagos, about 65% of the working population

are employed in the informal sector – whether in precarious survivalist occupations or in more stable growth enterprises. Many end up in HME businesses owned and/or operated in and from residential spaces by individuals, and other family members (Lateh et al., 2017). Usually, an HME starts as a one-person enterprise and could involve up to nine persons as it grows (SMEDAN and NBS, 2013; Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2024). HMEs exist within a small business ecosystem otherwise referred to as micro- or nano businesses (Olubiyi, 2022; SMEDAN, 2021). They often lack sophisticated business strategies and face limits and challenges to growth and expansion.

Many of the challenges confronting the informal sector generally, and HMEs in Lagos specifically, have remained unsolved over the years, despite the strength of Lagos's booming entrepreneurship, where 85% of residents operate, with the largest shares in microenterprises (Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget, 2024). The idea of building Lagos into Africa's model city has resulted in the neglect of and hostility towards the informal sector, in spite of the value it adds to the Lagos economy. Several indications of the Lagos State Development Plan 2052 show that government will not hesitate in taking stringent steps to achieve the vision of Africa's Model Mega City through support for the private sector, focusing on formalising businesses and/or making the informal sector redundant and illegal, where deemed necessary.

A multi-method research approach was used for the study into NDED, involving desk review, fieldwork and stakeholders' workshops. Information was collected from a broad range of respondents, including HME operators, officials of government, non-governmental, civil society and business/institutional support organisations. HME operators were selected in three different locations in Lagos: 1) a low-income neighbourhood near the city centre (Yaba-Ojuelegba); 2) a low-income neighbourhood closer to the city periphery (Ikorodu); and 3) a commercial district accessible from a range of residential areas (Lagos Island). For wider contextual and systemic issues impacting HMEs, relevant stakeholders were sampled in organisations across Lagos. To provide feedback and further understanding, stakeholder workshops were held. Information collected through these approaches allowed the triangulation of findings from desk review, interviews and experience of HME operators and other relevant stakeholders in Lagos.

5.4.1. HME operator characteristics

HMEs include small-scale manufacturing, service and trade sectors. They range from soapmaking and blockmaking in the manufacturing sector, to artisan services and petty trading, respectively. The study found that women accounted for the majority of HME operators, above 90% of respondents in Ojuelegba. HMEs are often dominated by women (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, 2001; Kitching and Woldie, 2004; Onyebueke and Geyer, 2011; Tundui and Tundui, 2012). They participated in activities such as hairdressing and cosmetology, tailoring, petty and wholesale trading, and food processing, among other less physically demanding

economic activities.³¹ Men were in more labour-intensive activities, such as carpentry, blockmaking, automobile mechanic, and laundry and dry cleaning. Most people were between 20 and 35 years old, with very few elderly people.

The majority of the HME operators were born in Lagos. Although, they were from different origins across the country, they can be classified as third and fourth generation migrants – from other ethnic groups in Nigeria, such as Ijebu, Egba, Ilorin, Oyo, Igbo, Ijaw and Itsekiri.³² The highest educational qualification of 75% of HME operators sampled was secondary school. This suggests that no specialised educational qualifications were required for entry into household microenterprise, although there are a few skilled trades, such as tailoring, hairdressing, cosmetology and beauty therapist. Informal education through apprenticeships is the most common pathway. Lagos State vocation training schools offer three, six or 12 months of training; however, this free training is usually accessed through political party affiliations.

5.4.2. *Running an HME*

The primary reason for working at/from home is one of scale. Moving your business to the market is considered a sign of economic progression that not all can afford. Many of the businesses are survivalists and there is no serious distinction between business money and family survival funds. Women are also only able to balance their gender roles with income-making activities if they operate close to their homes.

The businesses are taxed both formally and informally, as they all have to join a credit group and trade association. Officially, they pay levies to the local governments and obtain trade permits, while they pay periodic fees to the trade association, and are usually banned from operating if both official and unofficial levies are not paid. Further, the majority of HMEs sampled were tenants, often paying rent a year up front, alongside other fees and payments to property agents.

HME activities were also conducted on streets, in markets and kiosks, makeshift tents, under umbrellas, at clients' premises and other outdoor locations. Irrespective of where HME activities took place, it is imperative to note that operators pay property owners and/or public entities for the use of space. This is despite being unregistered and informal.

Conducting their business in residential areas, HMEs suffer from the same challenges as all residents, with overcrowded houses, shared facilities, erratic power supply and poor infrastructure. Some HME operators were found to contribute money for the maintenance of neighbourhood security and general development, including the maintenance of road and drainage in the three locations.

³¹ There are no adequate data on the distribution of operators in each of the identified HMEs activities in the selected area, and generally for Lagos.

³² These are different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups, although three generic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are often mentioned (Gandonu, 1978). Individuals and families from the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria have found a place of abode and business in Lagos.

The main customers of HMEs are workers and residents in the local communities. Some of the manufacturing-level activity services higher-order businesses, especially if the quality of their products is good enough. What is more common, however, is for formal sector contractors to engage their services. For example, a contractor who has a job to upgrade a local primary school may engage carpenters in the community to repair broken desks and/or supply new ones if not many are required.

HME business environment

There are many challenges to growing and expanding HMEs. Survivalist enterprises are usually rarely able to scale up their businesses as they are unable to mobilise sufficient resources to expand. In a few cases, they are able to expand their offerings – for example, a grinding machine operator starting to sell pepper and other cooking ingredients, so that people can patronise at their convenience. Manufacturing businesses are better able to scale up and transition from survivalist to growth enterprises, especially if they are able to service clients outside their immediate communities.

Sociocultural problems, such as lack of social security, high family responsibility, reduced access to credit, lack of opportunities to access financial resources, and women's low level of education and training, account for the dominance of women in household enterprises. HMEs experience the challenges applicable to many other informal sector activities, such as scaling up their businesses, expanding their market reach and accessing appropriate technology. More recently, the effects of climate change, with incessant rainfall, coastal surges and flooding; the Covid-19 pandemic and consequential lockdown; and federal government policy on the redesign of Naira notes and the attendant cash crunch, have all posed serious threats to HMEs.

Government actors have struggled over time to build effective state institutions for efficient public service delivery, instead falling back on the exchange of goods and services for political support, and appealing to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are being ignored by opposition leaders or the current political system. Citizens including HMEs have therefore had to rely on the exchange of goods and services for political support, a quid pro quo either implicit or explicit.

5.4.3. *Relevant actors*

The main engagements that HMEs have with government are: 1) a benevolence approach, in which relevant ministries pay tokenist attention to small businesses from time to time; 2) local politicians donate equipment to support HMEs during campaign and “empowerment” periods; 3) a hostility approach by government agencies sent to enforce public space rules, such as Kick Against Indiscipline, Lagos State CBD officials and LASTMA, who demolish stalls and seize goods; and 4) local governments who see the HMEs as a revenue pot and are diligent in extracting funds through levies and fines. Ironically, those who receive benevolent support are nevertheless at risk of the destruction of their livelihoods by the actions of enforcement agents.

The Federation of Informal Workers of Nigeria (FIWON) is a national network of organisations and community groups of informal, self-employed working people. It is the Nigerian affiliate of the International Network of Street Vendors and Informal Workers' Organisations (StreetNet International). It also collaborates actively with the Women in the Informal Economy, Globalising and Organising (WIEGO). FIWON's overarching goal is to advance the working and living standards of workers in the informal sectors of Nigerian economy. By working to strengthen the organisations of informal workers, building their capacity for representation and advocacy, vast numbers of excluded citizens are empowered to become active participants in the development of Nigerian democracy, deepening it and expanding the space for democratic participation, through FIWON activities. In Lagos, FIWON is involved in civic, trade union and leadership education; hence, FIWON conducts training for informal workers who lack awareness of their rights, and trains leaders and activists of informal workers to hone their skills for better representation. FIWON has also been involved in the campaign against eviction of informal workers from their workplaces and markets in Lagos.

Trade/business unions, associations and groups present and demand the rights and privileges of their members. Informal workers' organisations also lobby their way into the corridors of power to facilitate effective representation and recognition. Most of the respondents were aware of the existence of their trade association; however, not all were members of the association. Community development associations are another actor in the NDED domain. They allocate spaces for community waste recycling businesses run by women's groups or small businesses.

Daily thrift collectors are one of the local and age-long means of banking/saving that shapes the activities of HMEs in Lagos. In the typical low-income residential neighbourhood setting, these collectors are referred to as *Alajo*.³³ A majority of the HME operators earned income on a daily basis, making saving difficult. Consequently, many have taken to saving their income with *Alajo*. This involves an individual HME agreeing to save a specified amount of money with a thrift collector on a daily or weekly basis for an agreed period of time, usually one month; and at the end of the saving period, the thrift collector returns the total amount saved, less a fee, which is usually the equivalent amount of one day's deposit.

Other groups of actors were described as blockers, delayers and the indifferent. For instance, commercial banks, microfinance banks and industrial banks were described as indifferent, having low interest and low power in HMEs in Lagos. These actors claim to provide loans to small businesses but HMEs are always unable to access these loans because they do not have the required documentation.

Neighbourhood gatekeepers and transport gatekeepers were identified as potential blockers and delayers, as they impede the daily operations of HMEs in Lagos. Neighbourhood gatekeepers include the area boys, touts and criminal gangs that

³³ The term "*Alajo*" is used to refer to the person who collects the daily thrift.

disrupt the peace of the neighbourhoods. Some of the individuals are sometimes engaged in neighbourhoods for collection of “fees”. They extort money from other individuals in the neighbourhood, including the HME operators. Their activities are more pronounced in low-income neighbourhoods and where there is not strong commitment to the maintenance of peace, law and order. They constitute a serious threat to the sustenance of HMEs. Transport gatekeepers operate in motor parks and bus stops by extorting money from commuters, particularly those who carry goods – such as HME operators who access the goods they sell or their raw materials from bigger markets. These two groups are not directly involved in HME activities; however, their operations have a far-reaching (negative) effect on economic prosperity and poverty reduction.

6. Overarching analysis

The report has shown that the rate and extent of population growth and urbanisation has vastly outstripped the state’s capacity to provide adequate infrastructure or achieve meaningful structural transformation. The city of systems and various domain research shows that people have been coping with the significant deficits in systems and domains through individual actions, community responses and by primarily relying on informality and non-state and private actors for the provision of and access to infrastructure across the systems and domains. The report highlights that across the various systems and domains, the local government system is practically moribund in terms of capacity and resources. The state is found to exert strength but to be relatively ineffective in regards to urban development. This is significantly related to a profound dichotomy between politics and planning, whereby politicking and short-termism undermine the long-term planning that is needed to address the inadequacies of the systems. The level of economic informality in Lagos is also extensive, providing crucial economic possibilities for low-income and marginalised residents. The state takes an ambivalent approach to informality, tolerating most but regularly targeting low-income areas and activities, shaped by a neoliberal urban agenda. The political economy of Lagos is characterised by godfatherism and wealth distribution through personal networks. Although vital to how Lagos functions, these practices compound the status quo and inhibit structural transformation. Public spending becomes hugely inflated, and people continue to lack trust in the efficacy and capacity of the state, further weakening the civic contract.

This section reads across the report to draw out some overarching dynamics, revealing interdependencies between and within domains, shaped by politics and in turn shaping urban development.

6.1. Political economy of development

6.1.1. *Godfatherism and wealth distribution through personal networks*

As the political settlement analysis shows, the formal mandate of ethnoregional pluralism known as “federal character” and the informal norm of “zoning” practised by

Nigeria's two main political parties and the "sharing formula" for distributing oil revenues have prevented a strict "winner-takes-all" dynamic from taking root, instead ensuring that no major regional or religious group is permanently excluded from power at the national level (Bogaards, 2010; Husaini, 2020; Kendhammer, 2010). However, in economic terms, there remains a strong "winner-takes-all" dynamic. Without strong institutions and a strong social contract, wealth accumulation has become a "zero sum game" for all levels of society, where there is no formal social safety net and little reliable recourse to formal justice. Personal networks are the predominant avenue for wealth distribution in Nigeria, and as such are vital for social mobility and to understand the political economy of Lagos. Holding public office and any position of power or powerbrokering have become coveted ways to accumulate wealth and distribute wealth along personal networks. As institutions are not considered to serve elite interests (as they might in the north/western world) they are circumnavigated by such "informal" means, in turn reinforcing their weakness (Goodfellow, 2019).

Practices of so-called corruption are integral to how politics and business functions in Nigeria and Lagos, at all levels. The ability to "play the game" is required, in order to navigate any role with power. Indeed, the functioning of Lagos grinds to a halt where someone has not been willing to play the game, as is widely known about Lagos's former Governor Ambode, who lasted only one term. Although vital to how Lagos functions, these practices compound the status quo and inhibit structural transformation. Public spending becomes hugely inflated, and people continue to lack trust in the efficacy and capacity of the state, further weakening the civic contract. Where corruption is expected and accepted, people look to connections and godfathers for avenues of social mobility, rather than contributing to the formal economy. In the zero sum game, positions of wealth accumulation and distribution are closely guarded, contributing to the narrow-concentrated political settlement.

The political settlement analysis further highlighted the importance of Lagos's godfather and wider practices of powerbrokers/godfathers. The strength of the godfather role diminishes internal party democracy and political inclusion, making political parties in Nigeria institutionally weak, structurally defective and operationally fragile, thus weakening their institutional capacity to uphold the tenets of democracy (Babalola and Abba, 2017; Egwim, 2022).

6.1.2. *A strong, ineffective state*

The inability of government at all levels to deliver adequate public services and housing is both a defining characteristic of the city's systems and a considerable source of tension between state and local government, and state and federal government. There is also tension between the state and private service providers and with citizens, leading to frequent acts of contestation. Despite this, state actors remain a strong force and central reference point for governance. This is achieved through the enduring structure of the political settlement, where political and other elites secure influence and benefits through godfatherism, mutual interests and, at times, collusion – for instance between state planners, police and landowning families in forced evictions

(Morka 2011; Amnesty International 2013) or the systemic corruption in the electricity sector (Roy et al. 2023). Various arms of the state exert force through threats and shows of violence in the form of forced evictions of lower-income informal settlements, violent harassment of informal traders and violent and petty harassment of the general public, particularly on public transport.

6.1.3. *Lagos and national politics*

Nigeria's reliance on oil wealth significantly affects Lagos through the system of federal allocations. Even though Lagos State has sought to insulate itself from a reliance on the allocation, through strengthening its IGR, residents still feel the often painful fluctuations of Nigeria's oil-reliant economy, for instance with the devaluation of the Naira and chaotic ForEx rates.

Poor federal–state relations, when they are of differing parties, can stymie development projects. However, the increased collaboration between federal and state governments since both came to be dominated by the APC in 2015 has led to some improvements. For instance, the stalled efforts in effective regional development of the Lagos-Ogun state conurbation has been restarted with the establishment of the Lagos-Ogun Joint Development Commission in 2021.³⁴

6.2. Power, politics and solving problems

6.2.1. *Effectively defunct local government*

Across the various systems and domains, it is apparent that the local government system is practically moribund in terms of capacity and resources. Despite ostensibly receiving a lot of money from the federal allocation, this has been filtered through Lagos State Government, in order to share it among all 57 LGA/ LCDAs. Regulations curtail local government to a mere unit of Lagos State's Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs. Competent workers at the local government level usually rise up to the state government, further reducing capacity. This lack of funding, power and the lack of technical capacity of many of its officers has resulted in poor service delivery at the local level. This has inadvertently resulted in the usurpation of local government constitutional mandates by the state government, which has often sought to privatise its delivery, for example with waste management. CDAs also fulfil parts of the role of local government, forming a reform coalition of sorts to ensure that infrastructure and social services are extended to community members.

6.2.2. *Dichotomy between politics and planning*

The framework of analysis emphasised the differentiations between scales of government, revealing a dichotomy between politics and planning. While civil servants have the technical knowhow, they have little actual decisionmaking power. And

³⁴ See: www.nipc.gov.ng/2021/05/26/lagos-ogun-sign-mou-on-joint-development-commission-punch-newspapers/ (accessed 13 June 2025).

government agencies are often headed, and decisions made, by politicians without the relevant skills. In respect to the city of systems, the differing approaches to what and how to implement policies within and between political heads and civil servants were revealed as a significant barrier to progress and saw problems arise. Civil servants tend to be more in touch with the needs and realities of the public, while politicians prioritise the business case. For instance, regarding water provision, civil servants recognise commercial vendors and the value in upskilling them, but politicians have focused on international funding and full-cost recovery models to address the issue. This leads to inappropriate and unsustainable policies. Further, short-termism, that is further circumscribed by political cycles, tends to guide urban development rather than long-term coordinated planning. A senior member of the Urban Renewal Agency said that masterplans do not carry the political kudos of ribbon-cutting a new road. Further, researchers tend to engage with technocrats rather than the real powerbrokers, so recommendations from reports often do not get followed up on, as they do not align with political expediency.

6.2.3. Urban development is guided by neoliberal agenda

Further to the dichotomy between politics and planning, there is an evident gap between the economic development plan and reality, demonstrating the need for social-spatial contextualisation, such as this report provides. Tinubu and the governors who succeeded him have, to varying degrees, been united by the ideal of transforming Lagos into “Africa’s model megacity and global economic and financial hub” (MEPB, 2013). While earlier versions of southwestern progressivism emphasised welfarism and social mobility, its contemporary instantiation is more frequently articulated within individualised frames of self-reliance and entrepreneurship (Roelofs, 2016); no longer directly aimed at wider social mobility or at urgently ameliorating oppressive social conditions, but rather translated into a “megacity” vision of transforming Lagos into a premier investment destination. APC conceptions of the beautification and modernisation of the city have entailed a slew of highly violent slum clearances, the banning of modes of informal transportation, and support for the development of upper-middle-class and elite housing enclaves and real estate projects, most dramatically reflected in the private district of Eko Atlantic. There is a lot of clientelism, and urban reforms are seen as an opportunity to tax people. For instance, the development planning process has become prohibitively expensive. Further, proceeds that should go to local government, such as from the land use charge, instead are payable to the state government, compounding the hollowing out of local government.

While there remains a rhetoric of people-centred governance, for instance with the establishment of an office for the SDGs, the state government takes at best a sporadic benevolence approach to vulnerable groups, rather than implementing structural changes and catalytic developments. As above, some civil servants are more sensitised to these needs; however, they have no power of implementation and different arms of government often work at crossed purposes. For instance, while the Ministry of Waterfront Development works to eradicate informal waterfront communities

such as Owuro and Makoko, LASURA works to implement informal settlement upgrading in these communities.

The neoliberal governance regime at work since 1999 has politically and economically empowered Tinubu's loyalists. This is also currently playing out on the federal stage, where Tinubu is now president. Without representation in mainstream political parties, critical perspectives on the APC's "megacity" vision are largely confined to parts of academia, the NGO sector and social movements and community-level organisations such as the Federation of Informal Workers (FIWON) and Nigerian Slums/Informal Settlements Federation, reinforcing dynamics of the political settlement.

6.2.4. Role of non-state actors reveals power dynamics and exclusionary nature of political settlement

The rate and extent of population growth and urbanisation has vastly outstripped the state's capacity to provide adequate infrastructure or achieve meaningful structural transformation. The city of systems and various domain research showed that people have been coping with the significant deficits in systems and domains through individual actions, community responses and by primarily relying on non-state and private actors for the provision of and access to infrastructure across the systems and domains.

The role of CDAs, residents' associations and landlords' associations, as well as, for instance, vigilantes, demonstrates not only their pervasiveness and efficacy, but also their relationship with and tolerance by the state. However, there is an absence of a strong state regulatory framework for non-state actors. Vigilantes, for instance, work with the NPF, and CDAs are registered organisations, but there is little government oversight. The private sector also forms a vital role in service provision.

This tacit settlement, whereby various non-state actors work to provide access to essential services, has resulted in "good enough" strategies that, while far from ideal, constitute the best option for most residents. It must be noted that while Lagosians want and deserve better, any attempt at improvement risks destabilising the fragile balance and essential gains achieved through these strategies. This was clearly demonstrated by the attempted privatisation of waste management that ignored the strategies in place, resulting in the mass unemployment of waste pickers and collapse of the waste management system. Some attempts at improvements that could have beneficial effects for a broad base, such as rental reforms, do not take hold against an established system with powerful actors such as landlords. Some, if not most, attempts at improvements are shaped primarily for elite gain and expose the limited engagement of the grassroots in decisionmaking.

Despite the burden put on people by ineffective state governance, they are still largely excluded from the political settlement. People are highly active and organised, yet this does not equate to powerful bargaining, or strong and reliable representation, perhaps because much of people's activity and organising is informal. Despite the state tolerating widespread informality, they are not compelled to directly engage with

informality. Indeed, this would often go counter to their official stance and narrative on informal activities. Some organised segments among working class and lower income groups – notably public sector unions and some informal economic organisations such as the Market Women’s Association – exercise a measure of political influence through their capacity to mobilise electoral support. However, this has largely failed to translate into policy influence in the form of substantial redistribution, as the leaders of the organisation play a specific role in the clientelist political settlement, working towards elite rather than popular interests.

Acts of contestation and resistance reveal the passion and organisation of the people in Lagos. (The pervasiveness of informality itself could also be seen as an act of resistance, albeit a normalised one.) The limited extent of redress achieved through acts of contestation and resistance, however, reveals the stranglehold of powerful elites. Despite certain transformations and gains, for instance, regarding transportation and the introduction of BRT buses, the status quo of NURTW and the overall poor service provision continues. Likewise with acts of protest, for instance EndSARS or around forced evictions, where the state (including police and military) responds with force, and harassment of youth on public transport and forced evictions which continue almost with impunity, certainly without justice for those affected.

6.2.5. Informality drives Lagos, it is tolerated and targeted

The level of informality in Lagos is extensive, providing crucial economic possibilities for low-income and marginalised residents. According to the International Monetary Fund, the informal economy employs approximately three-quarters of the state’s 7.5 million labour force. Apart from the economic dimension, patterns of informality exist in the areas of housing, health, food and many other sectors in Lagos. The pervasiveness of informality in Lagos is largely due to stringent bureaucracy, inaccessibility, inefficacy and unaffordability of systems in the formal spaces. While the government seems to tolerate much informal activity, certain kinds are frequently targeted for “clean ups” or removal as part of political campaigns and flexing of power. Informality in middle- and high-income areas is much more tolerated than in low-income areas. For instance, when informal sandfilling is flagged as an environmental problem in Banana Island and Parkview (elite areas), the issue is resolved through stakeholder meetings with LSG and local residents’ associations. However, informal sandfilling in slum areas is met with seven-day eviction notices. The government also demonstrates tolerance by “turning a blind eye” to unregulated service provision. For instance, commercial watersellers are meant to get a licence to sell, and you are also meant to have a licence for a borehole, yet this is commonly overlooked, as there is no alternative means of regulated water provision.

6.2.6. Factors inhibiting structural transformation

The challenges of and deficits in Lagos’s infrastructural systems are inhibiting structural transformation. Access to and provision of electricity is identified as the key challenge for residents and businesses across all income levels and in both the formal and

informal sectors. Inadequate infrastructure is multidimensional and co-reinforcing – for instance, gaps in electricity affect water provision, due to the reliance on water pumps in private boreholes, or poor transportation is exacerbated by frequent flooding. Poor infrastructure limits the growth of businesses and social mobility. It also affects the health of residents by adding significant stress, and the degraded urban environment causes health issues and lowered life expectancies.

The study has highlighted the threat that safety and security issues portend for all other city systems and domain activities. Across the systems and domains studies, safety and security issues have been overwhelming. From poor access to justice, to militarisation of the streets, rise of local gangs and gatekeepers, the city is constantly at risk of state-supported or other forms of violence. Public safety considerations are also neglected as infrastructure such as streetlights and emergency services (fire and ambulance) are sadly lacking. These are exacerbated by the high level of public distrust towards the police and other law enforcement agencies. While there are structural drivers of insecurity, such as porous borders, unchecked migration and youth unemployment, socioeconomic inequality manifests spatially and reinforces some of the tensions that exist between wealthy and underserved communities. The wider security issues are still a deterrent for international investors and business.

6.2.7. Housing as an intersection of dynamics

Housing reveals the intersection of several factors that shape urban development. The lack of a developed manufacturing sector leads to high costs for building materials. This leads to corner cutting and shoddy construction quality, enabled by the poor enforcement of building regulations. Many other factors lead to poor and unsafe building quality, such as the lack of training, apprenticeships and education of construction workers, and the prevalence of bribing to circumvent regulations. Poor and uncoordinated urban design and planning leads to flooding, overcrowding and subsidence. This is exacerbated by the prevalence of informal housing, leading to entire unplanned neighbourhoods. The prevalence of informal housing and tenure has reinforced the evolving role and importance of customary authorities in Lagos. The crisis of affordable middle- and low-income housing from the formal public and private sectors results from a number of interrelated factors: construction and registration costs are high, which are passed on to the buyer; mortgages and housing financing are not available to those on low incomes, either in the formal or informal sectors; and there is widely acknowledged corruption in the allocation of state-built housing. The prevalence of area boys as a safety and security issue is driving up rents in gated communities, which are targeted by the gangs.

6.3. Relevance of ACRC's key crosscutting issues, including gender, climate change and finance

6.3.1. *Climate change*

Climate change is leading to the increased risk and severity of flooding in Lagos, which is its most pertinent climate-related challenge. Its low topography and coastal position make it particularly vulnerable to flooding from rainfall, sea level rise and coastal surges (Ekoh and Teron, 2023). A global sea level rise of 1-3m would be catastrophic for Lagos. Flooding stresses already frail infrastructure, and poor adherence to planning and urban design regulations contributes to the increased risk and severity of flooding. There is a further risk of groundwater, already at risk from contamination from unregulated sanitation methods, becoming contaminated by saltwater. Further, the lack of planning enforcement alongside rapid urbanisation is leading to ecological devastation, for instance along the Lekki-Epe peninsula (Lawanson and Agunbiade, 2018; Lukacs, 2014). The construction of Eko Atlantic has been roundly criticised for increasing coastal erosion up the Lekki coastline and deepening channels around Lagos Island, potentially undermining the stability of the waterfronts (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Nigeria, 2014).

Unlike many vulnerable cities, elite and high-income areas in Lagos (for instance Lekki, Ikoyi) are as much at risk from flooding as are lower-income areas (Ekoh and Teron, 2023). Higher-income residents are, however, able to ameliorate the effects of climate change individually, or through residents' associations. The reports highlight that women are most affected by climate change (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Nigeria, 2022) and effects impact on communities, especially waterfront slum communities that are also vulnerable to the threat of eviction. While there is an economic opportunity for climate adaptation and mitigation being explored by the government through green infrastructure finance and search for foreign direct investments, much of the actual effective climate response is done through small-scale community and civil society action (Boston et al., 2024).

6.3.2. *Gender*

Women were found to be very active in many sectors, though critically underrepresented in leadership roles. They are very active in organising at the grassroots of the political sector, and powerful in these roles; however, there are few women higher up in leadership roles. Even when there are such roles, this does not translate into political participation for women – for instance, the *Iyalaja* (female market head) was not found to represent the interests of women market sellers, who form a large body (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Nigeria, 2022). Women are often not consulted in political processes, for instance in market redevelopments, resulting in low political participation above the grassroots and little trust in government representing their interests.

Women are very active in community and economic organising – for instance, in savings groups. HMEs are mostly headed by women, though again women are underrepresented in the formal business sector, at least partly due to understandings of gender roles. Women are often household heads; however, there are relatively few female homeowners, and they are limited to renting. Single women face significant discrimination in accessing housing. Further, women are underrepresented in CDA leadership, which is confined to homeowners and male household heads (Oyalowo 2020). Women and girls often face a disproportionate load of household duties, such as buying and cooking food, and organising water for the home. Women face multiple vulnerabilities in Lagos, especially women with low incomes. They face gender discrimination daily, and are more at risk of petty and certain kinds of violent crime, particularly on public transport; at night, streets are not considered safe for women. Overall, women are disproportionately more impacted by economic challenges and despite their mobilising powers, are often unable to climb out of poverty, due to structural inequities.

6.3.3. *Finance*

The state government has established a complex fiscal structure, which includes federal allocations, local government budgetary allocations and a robust tax collection system. The fiscal sustainability of Lagos State relies on its IGR, constituting 78% of the budget. IGR grew 20% from 2021 to 2022 (BudgiT, 2023). With this, it is hoping to implement its development plan and has achieved significant initiatives, like the red and blue line of the light rail. Despite this, the quality of infrastructure and systems is low, as detailed in the city of systems report and section. The commercialisation of social services through public–private partnerships has had negligible improvements in service delivery. Further, the low transparency of Lagos State’s finances contributes to the poor quality of service and infrastructure provision (BudgiT, 2018). The overhead costs of running the governor of Lagos’s office is infamously higher than that allocated to the office of the President of Nigeria, at N 6bn and N 1.3bn, respectively, in 2017 (BudgiT, 2018).

Despite the strong economic performance of Lagos, structural transformation remains elusive in Lagos State. Most people are still employed in low-income MSMEs in the informal sector, which are difficult to grow and for people to expand out of. Fluctuations in inflation and exchange rates, exacerbated by the volatility after the exchange rate unification in 2023, have a significant impact on households and businesses, who have less money to spend and poverty is increasing (MEPB, 2024). The volatility in capital importation after Covid poses real “challenges to Lagos’s aspirations economic vibrancy, inclusivity and sustainability” (MEPB, 2024: viii).

6.4. Implications for the conceptual framework

The political settlement analysis, city of systems and the domain research offer a broad and nuanced approach to the analysis of urban development in Lagos. The most important contribution of the report is adding a political dimension to the analysis. This

takes into account not only the different scales of government, but also the pervasive informalities within and outside of (yet still related to) the state. The report clearly demonstrates how political and economic entanglements are resulting in unequal urban outcomes that favour some portions of society above others. These ultimately serve to reinforce the dynamics of the status quo and the narrow-concentrated political settlement that excludes the majority of people. The domain research has highlighted the importance of seeing interdependencies among the systems and domains, and has highlighted institutional gaps. The city of systems analysis highlighted energy as a core issue that undermines all the domains. The report also highlighted the strength of social infrastructure in Lagos, despite this not being a focus of the government.

7. Implications for future research and policy

The report and analytical framework identify many avenues for future research and action. This final section identifies some of the most pertinent issues to arise and makes recommendations that emerge from the research. It is pertinent to note that while Lagos has been the focus on wide-ranging research, there are significant gaps in qualitative and quantitative data (Lawanson and Dania, forthcoming).

7.1. Infrastructure: Existing solutions/practices (pro-poor development)

The overarching issue of inadequate access to and quality of services, particularly energy, cuts across all domains, systems, areas and classes of Lagos. A continued broad, nuanced and multidimensional approach is needed towards alternative solutions that take into account existing practices in a sustainable and pro-poor way. The civil service reforms recommended below are vital for the implementation of any alternative solutions. These will be accompanied by relevant studies that produce further evidence on how to accomplish the required urban transformation.

The everyday practices that have emerged from the extensive challenges faced by Lagosians, from providing water to accessing rental housing, serve vital functions to which there is often no credible alternative. Unless a viable alternative can be provided, the advantages these practices give to people – no matter how small or unideal – should not be put at risk by any proposed urban development. This is particularly pertinent for low-income urban residents, whose lives and livelihoods depend on these practices, and are often in fine balance. For instance, the privatisation of waste management inadvertently put at risk the livelihoods of waste pickers, landfill workers and other informal workers on the waste value chain. This is particularly pertinent for slum clearance when no rehousing is available, which just serves to displace people, displace slum housing to elsewhere and increase homelessness, with all the related effects on health and education. With gentrification consequent to many occurrences of slum clearance, it is necessary to explore the interdependencies of various infrastructure systems at household, community and city scales across socioeconomic classes.

7.2. Urban reform coalitions

CDAs, residents' associations and landlords' associations play a vital role in the urban life of Lagos. However, their impact is scarcely researched. Currently only CDAs are recognised by the government, and other associations, including faith groups, should gain official recognition as legitimate bodies in order to strengthen their existing roles.

Urban reform coalitions should be insulated from the interference of the state, politicking and political hijacking by reducing oversight from Lagos State Government, and by maintaining CDA autonomy. CDAs are currently inhibited from making more comprehensive demands, as Lagos State currently shapes CDA structures and elections to ensure friendly CDA leaderships. This also affects the trust of its members.

Further, while the state largely tolerates the activities of non-state actors, friction arises when an organisation's activities step on the toes of the LGA/ LCDA, for instance when a community road-surfacing scheme clashes with a government scheme with allocated funds. The community's efforts are then stalled or wasted. The strengthening of LGA/LCDAs and better communication and coordination with CDAs would increase overall effectiveness.

Despite being highly organised and effective and with large memberships, groups such as CDAs, RAs and market associations do not represent the needs of their members well at the highest levels. Better political representation of the needs and interests of members is needed. One recommendation would be to insulate organisations from politicking and political hijacking, and empower members to demand more from leaders. Further, there is a need to empower women and educate men to increase the number of women in leadership roles. A deep dive into the politics of urban community development is necessary to provide the empirical evidence to action these recommendations in a targeted manner.

During the housing domain validation exercises, a group consisting of professional bodies in the built environment, real estate agents, various government agencies and housing cooperatives expressed a wish to keep working with each other towards realistic solutions. ACRC should continue to convene such exercises and support community groups to build urban reform coalitions alongside professional groups, and action research and co-production can be a veritable pathway.

7.3. Civil service reforms

The civic contract, that is, the people's trust in the government's ability to deliver projects, has strengthened in the Fourth Republic but is still relatively weak and fractious. To strengthen the civic contract, more transparency in government is needed.

To ensure effective policy and project delivery, the civil service must be insulated from changes in government. Civil service agencies must also be insulated from politicking, for instance by appointing only qualified people to head technical units. Until this is achieved, urban reforms must recognise and differentiate between the scales of government, taking into account differing agendas. A research agenda that unpacks

these dichotomies and advances a multi-scalar approach to governance and statecraft is urgently required.

7.4. Local government reforms

Recent changes that have been introduced to grant local government more autonomy are causing a lot of upheaval. It appears as though the changes have rearranged the situation but retained the underlying problematic structure, whereby the Lagos State Government controls income flows and hollows out local government. It is vital that civil society and researchers keep an eye on the implementation of the new legislation and its effects and perhaps deliver a longitudinal insight into local government reforms and impacts in Lagos and beyond. An empirical assessment of the operationalisation of the local government administrative laws is necessary. As local governments in Lagos vary in terms of efficacy, geography and socioeconomic status, a more grounded approach will be required.

7.5. Climate

The civil sector and researchers must keep a close eye on the adoption and enforcement of climate policies. Further, ACRC can work to highlight community-identified priorities, which often differ from recommendations that emerge from a purely technical analysis of an area's needs. In this way, opportunities for mitigation and adaption can be expanded by learning from and listening to indigenous knowledge about their environment. For instance, in Ajegunle Ikorodu community, they know when and how to act appropriately when flooding occurs. Rather than addressing the flooding itself, which they feel able to cope with, the community identified the rebuilding of their school as their priority, as this has caused many interrelated issues, such as juvenile delinquency and out-of-school children being harmed on dangerous roads. Action research will help to integrate indigenous knowledge systems, local practice and technical knowhow into the climate response.

7.6. Youth

The youth are the dominant demography, and the urban youth bulge in Lagos requires targeted action. Employment of graduates and more training for artisans would have wide-ranging effects, including improving security, by reducing the number of unemployed, unskilled and disenfranchised young people. The development of the digital sector, and an improved attitude to informal activities (see above) would have significant related effects. There is a lot of policy attention on the youth, though much of it is based on estimates and assumptions pointing to the need for empirical studies. Differentiated and disaggregated data is needed with different youth groups and how they intersect with urban dynamics and vulnerabilities, such as female youth and violence, youth living with disabilities and accessing urban resources, to mention a few.

7.7. Security

The solar streetlighting action research project would be a crucial and effective strategy, and would especially benefit women and children in local communities. How safety and security intersect with practically all facets of urban life will be a good research approach. Furthermore, mapping to identify violence hotspots and priority areas may offer an insight into geospatial characteristics and provide an opportunity for better emergency response and crime prevention through environmental design.

7.8. Housing

The enforcement of existing rental reforms would transform the lives of millions of renting residents who would no longer have to pay a year or two years' rent up front. The empowerment of housing cooperatives to move beyond land pooling and acquisition to construction and maintenance would have meaningful impacts on the crisis of affordable middle- and low-income housing. Research that unpacks the dynamics and politics of rental housing, housing cooperatives and the localised housing ecosystem, taking into account issues of land tenure, social identities and finance, will be beneficial for existing structures and plans for regeneration and newbuild housing. A longitudinal study of the impacts and limitations of such housing programmes as the Lagos Sites and Services/New Towns Development Authority and LagosHOMS will be important to determine future sustainable and affordable pathways to decent housing for Lagosians.

7.9. Neighbourhood and district economic development

The informal economy is a significant contributor to the GDP of Lagos, and barriers to efficiently harnessing the intrinsic value ought to be dismantled. Access to appropriate financing for HMEs would allow businesses to grow and contribute to structural transformation. Also see above on supporting existing practices; there should be no punitive measures, such as taskforces that target workers in the informal sector. Research is required to understand existing financial structures and how to catalyse appropriate financing for emerging areas. It is also necessary to undertake studies on how to scale informal businesses at various scales from survival to growth enterprises.

7.10. Gender

Across all the sectors discussed in this report, women are disproportionately negatively affected by gaps in city systems, as well as individual vulnerabilities, such as poverty and physical disability. As such, it is critical to adopt a gendered lens in all studies, and to proffer recommendations that target women, children and other marginalised groups. Advocacy and action research that seeks to improve women's representation in public spaces is also required.

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